Meryl Altman

Beauvoir in Time

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Beauvoir in Time

By

Meryl Altman

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•••

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> Since there is no obvious end to the textual network explored by the genealogical project…a genealogist's work is never done…[L]ike the

> housewife, the genealogist stops her work for fairly pragmatic reasons: the floor is clean enough; it is time to start cooking instead; it is too late and one is too tired to continue… (30)

Permission to begin; permission to go on; permission to stop, at least for now. Thank you.

INTRODUCTION

Before We Said "We"

> Have you ever noticed, people can't speak about Simone de Beauvoir without giving dates and mentioning ages?
>
> It's because she was always obsessed with real time.
>
> GENEVIÈVE BRISAC[1]

> In teaching Beauvoir, the task is to help students read her historically without dismissing her as "dated."
>
> DEBORAH NELSON[2]

> In rapidly changing societies all generations are transitional.
>
> WINI BREINES[3]

In the US, in Great Britain and Australia, in France itself, *The Second Sex* mattered enormously at the outset of second-wave feminism. In memoir after memoir from the 1960s and 1970s, we read that this one book changed women's lives: led them to withdraw their energies from the male-dominated left and invent consciousness-raising, to leave their husbands and abandon what Adrienne Rich called "the old way of marriage,"[4] to see their culture, their families, their own bodies in new and challenging ways. Many of us who teach women's studies today acknowledge this by assigning the book, or at least some carefully selected parts of it. Kate Millett: "Betty [Friedan] wasn't the mother of us all. Simone de Beauvoir was." *Our Bodies, Ourselves*: "*The Second Sex* was the

---

1 "On ne peut pas parler de Simone de Beauvoir sans donner des dates, sans citer des âges, l'avez-vous remarqué? C'est qu'elle fut toujours obsédée du temps réel" (Brisac, "Beauvoir 'en temps réel': une écriture de l'instantané," 58). Except where noted, all translations are my own.

2 Midwest Faculty Seminar on Simone de Beauvoir, University of Chicago, November 21–23, 1996.

3 Breines, *Young, White, and Miserable: Growing Up Female in the Fifties*, 24.

4 Rich, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Revision," 43. For accounts of the effects *The Second Sex* had on the marriages of two otherwise very different women, see Angie Pegg in Penny Forster and Imogen Sutton, *Daughters of de Beauvoir*, 53–65, and Marge Piercy, *Sleeping With Cats: A Memoir*, 118.

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first book many of us read that made us aware we were oppressed as females." Michèle Le Dœuff: "*The Second Sex* was the movement before the movement."[5]

But which *Second Sex* were they reading? For years I owned two editions of H.M. Parshley's English version. One was a large-format work of serious philosophy, undecorated except for some tasteful stripes, intended to be read at a library table: this is the text that functioned in my undergraduate Feminist Theory seminar to signify that women's studies was a scholarly rigorous undertaking, not some flaky fad.[6] The other copy is a drugstore paperback. Its cover shows a crouching naked lady emerging from a vague and lurid yellowish haze. Blurbs emphasize its daring and titillating content, marking and marketing it as a Book About Sex:

> [T]he most penetrating, frank, and intimate book ever written about Woman.... [A] Frenchwoman, who never loses sight of the needs and desires of both sexes, has used her artistry and erudition to explore woman in each of her many dimensions. Her ... highly original and stimulating conclusions have produced a book that overwhelmed reviewers....[7]

This change in presentation, from scandalous trash to ponderous tome, was a tribute to scholars and activists who worked to get Beauvoir taken seriously as a philosopher and thinker. And it is also a tribute to feminist advances, in and out of the academy, more generally: an intellectual woman, writing about women, is no longer exotic, risqué, miraculous, faintly terrifying. We tend now to see that early edition as a sexist misunderstanding, a joke in rather bad taste. But paradoxically, it was the earlier, trashier, version that inspired second-wave feminists. The yellow one, the "dirty" one, was the one they read.[8]

Readers from that time often mention *The Second Sex* alongside other books—Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*, Mary McCarthy's *The Group*, especially Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*—novels which sold very widely in the early 1960s, and which share a paradoxical transitional status. These books kicked something loose for large numbers of women readers who were, or were about to become, feminists. All relied on newly frank (and painful) discussions of sexuality and emotional attachment; each also tended to foreground Politics with a capital P (in particular, the Cold War); but the personal and the political plots were split, opposed, not yet part of the same analysis, the same conversation. None of the novels can fairly be described as feminist. As Anna Wulf, the central character of *The Golden Notebook*, might say, I wouldn't write that now. (In fact, Lessing and McCarthy both explicitly and angrily disavowed any connection with the feminist movement when it re-emerged and attempted to claim them.) These novels speak from the social and psychological place that was Beauvoir's when she wrote, in the introduction to *The Second Sex*, "women do not say 'we.'"[9]

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[5] Boston Women's Health Collective, *Our Bodies, Ourselves: A Book By and For Women,* 60; Michèle Le Dœuff, *Hipparchia's Choice: An Essay Concerning Women, Philosophy, etc.*, 57. See also now Miriam David, *Feminism, Gender and Universities: Politics, Passion, and Pedagogies*, 103, 106, 111, 112, 116, 128, 130, 132, and 141.

[6] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Parshley (1989).

[7] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Parshley (1965).

[8] The French, obviously, were reading it in French. But as Judith Coffin shows in a very interesting article, "Beauvoir, Kinsey, and Mid-Century Sex," even in France *The Second Sex* was often read and reviewed alongside Kinsey's contemporaneous work, and was understood similarly to be a work dealing primarily with sexual matters.

Soon, women *would* say "we," would recognize that even the most intimate pain of living as a woman under patriarchy was, in Adrienne Rich's phrase, "shared, unnecessary, and political."[10] Those who came of age politically in the 1970s would draw on existentialist language and energy to mobilize for reproductive freedom, equal pay, sexual self-determination, and a thousand other things. Beauvoir herself would move beyond the hope she expressed at the end of *The Second Sex* and participate in direct collective action, to the point where she insisted on being pictured on the cover of *L'arc* only as one member of her group: already a visible and committed woman of the left, she became a force for feminism.[11]

But not long after this the problem of not saying "we" was replaced by an awareness of the dangers of saying "we" too quickly, as in, "what do you mean *we*, white woman?" And in the United States, at least, *The Second Sex* soon became a target, accused of a myopic lack of inclusivity that was said to characterize the "second wave." In 1988, Elizabeth Spelman's highly influential *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* took an attack on Beauvoir as its starting point, drawing and quartering her for precisely the assertion she had been unwilling, or unable, to make.

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[9] "Les femmes … ne disent pas 'nous'" (Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe* [hereinafter *DS*], 1:19). All references are to the French edition. As a general rule, I will refer to Beauvoir's works under their French titles, not least because the English titles by which they are known are often approximations. The exception is *The Second Sex*, which in the interests of consistency will be called throughout by its English title. (So much of my discussion deals with its reception by Anglophone readers that either way would have been awkward, and this way seemed less fussy.)

[10] Rich, "Translations," in *Diving Into the Wreck*, 41.

[11] Annie Sugier and Kahina Benziane, "Nos chemins se sont croisés," 329.

So the reception of *The Second Sex* has been caught between two paradoxes. First, how could a mass movement have been started by a book which barely sketches the possibility of collective action? And then, what are we to do with a book that does not speak of differences between women in the ways identity politics came to demand, but that nonetheless appears to have spoken *to* women of color around the world, from Lorraine Hansberry to Sara Ahmed, in a powerful way?

The relation between "I" and "we"—epistemological, ethical, political, practical—has proved one of feminist theory's stubbornest knots. For sound and healthy reasons, both pronouns often feel uncomfortable in our mouths, often sound poisoned in our ears. Yet for strong and healthy reasons, I/we continue to use and need them. This isn't (just) an academic issue. Whenever I hear (or say) a sentence like "am I a feminist?" "am I still a feminist if?" "is feminism still about me?" "is feminism about me yet?" "is there a group I can join?" even, "isn't there anything we can do about [whatever awful thing has happened that day]?" the same problem is being posed. Because I'm still hoping the answer to all those questions is "yes," for me and my students among others, I want to bracket the forms this issue has taken for the last three decades or so, and go back behind and before "we" (and I) got into such a mess.

Even as we pursue the project of exegesis and analysis of Beauvoir as a brilliant and multifaceted theoretical thinker, a major philosopher of the twentieth century, I think we should pay attention to what women saw in the yellowish, and yellowing, version, the one they hid in their laundry baskets alongside *The Golden Notebook*.[12] Taking her philosophical arguments seriously requires us to read them alongside the (then) more popular and (now) more suspect discourses with which readers sometimes confused them, and from which they often grew: "trashy" sex manuals, bad novels with romance plots, outmoded psychoanalytic and sexological authorities, "human rights" talk, and—last but not least—existentialism. I think those first readers saw something more recent theorists, especially philosophers, have missed, or dismissed, or been embarrassed to mention: an energetic, passionate critique of the sorry state of most women's sexual and romantic lives, and an argument that women's oppression could be, should be, taken just as seriously as other ongoing struggles for liberation. The biggest mistake we can make as readers, I think, is to try and purge Beauvoir and other postwar women writers of the marks of such prefeminist or even antifeminist discourses that were in her temporal neighborhood, things she said that "we wouldn't say now."[13] Instead, mapping their search among the languages available to them can help us find our way in ours.

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[12] See for instance Elayne Rapping, *The Culture of Recovery: Making Sense of the Self-Help Movement in Women's Lives*, 4.

In what follows, I've concentrated on three recurring aspects of Simone de Beauvoir's thought—bad sex, lesbians, and "race and class"—which have in recent years been considered embarrassingly "of her era," and which remain underdiscussed despite the current renaissance of serious scholarship on Beauvoir.[14] Looking carefully at the parts of *The Second Sex* many readers skim or skip, and also at her other essays and autobiographical works, I provide a set of intensive, interdisciplinary readings that locate her writing in her own time and place, neither to accuse nor to excuse, but to clarify: to understand what she was doing *then*, hoping to show how she is still "good to think with" *now*. My aim is not to defend at all costs everything Beauvoir ever said or did, but to enable readers to agree or disagree with her in a non-anachronistic way by seeing what larger conversation her texts were part of, what key terms have changed their meaning, whom she was arguing with, what she could or could not have known. This requires a method that will strike some readers as digressive, involving long excursions into (for instance) the arcana of early psychoanalysis and the politics of decolonization. But I am ultimately less interested in where her ideas came from than in where they went and might still go.

• • •

This is a very good time to be working on Simone de Beauvoir. For one thing, after decades of lobbying by scholars dissatisfied with Parshley's unsignalled cuts and distortions, I can now finally add a third English version to the two copies of *The Second Sex* on my shelf.[15] The new translation—imperfect, but complete—joins the ongoing efforts of the University of Illinois Press's

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[13] Indeed, the parts of the book that speak most powerfully to students today are not always the parts that we foreground in trying to push them to think about it as theory—which is why students who are assigned to read only the introduction, or only excerpts from it, are in my view missing out.

[14] There are certainly other aspects equally worthy of similar excavation: in particular, her take on "the data of biology."

[15] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier. Perhaps my work will be especially helpful for Anglophone readers who encountered Beauvoir first, or only, in Parshley's translation: the Beauvoir I discuss here may not be the "Beauvoir" such readers know. For explanation of why a new translation was sorely needed, see Margaret Simons, "The Silencing of Simone de Beauvoir: Guess What's Missing from *The Second Sex*," and Toril Moi, "While We Wait: The English Translation of *The Second Sex*." The new version has not been uncontroversial: see Moi, "The Adulteress Wife,"

Beauvoir Series to make all of what Beauvoir actually said available to Anglophone scholars, students, and general readers. Another good sign is the proliferation of conferences in the United States and across Europe, plus many new anthologies that take her seriously as a thinker and a feminist theorist and also as a writer of fiction and autobiography.[16] Googling the new translation on Amazon shortly after it appeared, I found the number one comment came from a male undergraduate, who gave it five stars, explaining: "It did what was necessary to my head." It seems safe to point to a broad, interdisciplinary community of both academic and general readers for whom *The Second Sex* is far from a dead letter.

One could not always assume this. Activists and polemicist feminists of the 1970s frequently built on and borrowed from Beauvoir, albeit selectively and often without attribution (as writers as different as Kate Millett and Christine Delphy have since acknowledged).[17] But Beauvoir's reputation was particularly ill-served, both in France and the United States, by feminist theorists in the 1980s, who while continuing to appropriate her insights, also used her as a kind of transference fetish—idealized icon and/or punching bag—rather than responding to what she actually wrote. Pioneering correctives to this view were provided in France by the feminist philosopher Michèle Le Dœuff in 1989 and in the United States by Margaret Simons, through her own essays (collected in 1999)[18] and her work as an anthologist, editor of the Beauvoir Series, and general inspiration. Further excellent work by the late Eva Lundgren-Gothlin, Karen Vintges, Sonia Kruks, Toril Moi, and others has now cleared the ground of sexist dismissals, and of Beauvoir's own evasion of the title "philosopher," and has done a great deal to rescue her work from the contradictory sets of misreadings that have dogged it: assertions for example that *The Second Sex* is both too essentialist, and insufficiently attentive to important differences

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and Nancy Bauer in *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*. My own more positive view appeared in the *Women's Review of Books*.

[16] See Margaret Simons, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Simone de Beauvoir*; Elizabeth Fallaize, ed., *Beauvoir: A Critical Reader*; Christine Delphy and Sylvie Chaperon, ed., *Le Cinquantenaire du deuxième Sexe*; Claudia Card, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Simone de Beauvoir*; Emily Grosholz, *The Legacy of Simone de Beauvoir*; Simons, ed., *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir*; Lori Jo Marso and Patricia Moynagh, ed., *Beauvoir's Political Thinking: Critical Essays*; Thomas Staudter, ed., *Beauvoir cent ans après sa naissance: contributions interdisciplinaires de cinq continents*; Kristeva et al., eds., *(Re)découvrir l'œuvre de Simone de Beauvoir*. Of these, the Chaperon and Kristeva volumes are particularly massive, international, and varied. See also now Nancy Bauer and Laura Hengehold, ed., *Blackwell's Companion to Simone de Beauvoir*.

[17] Forster and Sutton, *Daughters of de Beauvoir*, 22–23.

[18] Simons, *Beauvoir and* The Second Sex: *Feminism, Race, and the Origins of Existentialism*.

between women and men, too connected to or too disconnected from "the body," too French or not "French" enough, and so forth. I'm enormously grateful for the detailed, lucid work of an international group of women who have taken up the task of understanding Beauvoir's intellectual work as a whole and its relationship to wider traditions of philosophic thought.[19]

Thanks to these scholars, I can assume Beauvoir was a serious, careful, original thinker, motivated by deep and clear feminist commitments, and move on from there. In particular, it is no longer necessary to defend Beauvoir against the idea that she was simply Sartre's over-devoted acolyte, her work ruined by the influence of an apolitical, sexist, outdated philosophical system, her feminism vitiated by a life as his devoted slave (or as a kind of grass widow).[20] The question, "should *The Second Sex* 'count' as original philosophy?" has been sufficiently answered in the affirmative that it has also been helpfully reopened: yes, she was a philosopher, but what *sort* of philosophy is this, and what else was she also doing? Nancy Bauer's characterization of Beauvoir's philosophic method is suggestive: "For her, the test of whether a philosopher's work is worthy of appropriation is not whether it is susceptible to correction but whether it provides one with a philosophical *idiom*, a set of terms and concepts that open up a way to do one's own philosophical work."[21] I follow Bauer in proposing that we read Beauvoir herself in precisely that way, but with the addition that not all the idioms she "appropriated" are philosophical—the book's

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[19] See especially Eva Lundgren-Gothlin, *Sex and Existence: Simone de Beauvoir's* The Second Sex; Karen Vintges, *Philosophy as Passion: The Thinking of Simone de Beauvoir*; Ursula Tidd, *Simone de Beauvoir: Gender and Testimony*; Toril Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman* and *What Is a Woman? And Other Essays*; Nancy Bauer, *Simone de Beauvoir, Philosophy, & Feminism*; Sara Heinämaa, *Toward a Phenomenology of Sexual Difference: Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir*; Sonia Kruks, *Retrieving Experience: Subjectivity and Recognition in Feminist Politics* and *Simone de Beauvoir and the Politics of Ambiguity*. Lori Marso, *Politics with Beauvoir: Freedom in the Encounter*, is a welcome addition to this group, although it was published too recently to fully inform my study.

[20] This last idea particularly informed Deirdre Bair's 1991 biography. (The phrase "grass widow" is Karen Vintges's summary of Bair's view.) Now available are a range of other interpretations, including that her ideas were radically different from his, and better, but that she never explicitly signaled this (Le Dœuff); that she invented "Sartrean" existentialism, and he stole it (Fullbrook and Fullbrook); that she influenced his turn to the social after the war, although he never quite credited her properly (Kruks); that other philosophers (Merleau-Ponty, Hegel) were actually more important influences on her work than Sartre was (Heinämaa). All these views seem to me plausible and interesting; it is not my project here to choose among them, and I will be discussing Sartre only in so far as a contrast with his position clarifies Beauvoir's.

[21] Bauer, *Simone de Beauvoir, Philosophy, & Feminism,* 83.

"mixed diction" is to my mind one of its strengths. In a way, what I want is to recover the true and fruitful weirdness of her work.

Twenty-five years ago, I began asking students to read the whole of *The Second Sex*, in part because of its historical importance, but also because it seemed refreshingly free of that era's paralyzing impasses (the question of feminine language, "difference" vs "equality," difficulties with the category "woman" and "women," etc.) and more directly connected to the students' lived realities, to the questions they were asking themselves about sex, work, and life. My hope was that taking another look at Beauvoir could provide what scholars of American literature sometimes refer to as a "usable past." That view has been confirmed by several prominent scholars, who have seen in Beauvoir's concept of woman's "situation" a healthy alternative to what Judith Butler called in 1990 "the circular ruins of contemporary debate."[22] Literary theorist Toril Moi argues that Beauvoir avoided the "iatrogenic" problems of later feminist "theoreticism," because she offered neither a feminism of equality nor a feminism of difference but a feminism of freedom; was neither wholly determinist nor wholly voluntarist with respect to "the body"; and took no interest whatever in the problematic distinction between sex and gender: she managed without it. Moi shows that in order to use her *for* our time, we need to first remember that she is not *of* our time:

> Because contemporary English-language critics have read Beauvoir's 1949 essay through the lens of the 1960s sex/gender distinction, they have failed to see that her essay provides exactly the kind of non-essentialist, concrete, historical and social understanding of the body that so many contemporary feminists are looking for.... If many feminist critiques of Beauvoir strike me as fundamentally flawed ... it is not so much because they misread Beauvoir's position on difference (though some do), as because they utterly fail to grasp that Beauvoir's political project is radically different from their own.[23]

Sonia Kruks makes a related, convincing claim that existentialist and phenomenological approaches, including Beauvoir's, can bring back what was lost in subsequent "postmodern" and post-structuralist theory: crucial concepts of freedom and shared subjectivity. Kruks, Vintges and others also observe that advocates of post-structuralism have overstated their claim of dramatic rupture with everything that came before.[24]

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[22] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 8. Butler's own uptake of Beauvoir is rather more labyrinthine, as I'll discuss briefly below.

[23] Moi, *What is a Woman?*, 5, 184.

These analyses confirm my view that Beauvoir not only served as a repressed source for feminist arguments of the 1970s and beyond, but can serve as a good resource for feminism today. For instance, her failure to anticipate and subscribe to the "identity politics" of the 1980s no longer looks like such a terrible mistake; and the lack of a clear demarcation between biologically given "sex" and socially constructed "gender" is no longer cause for derision or condescension to those of us who have been convinced (by such scholars as Anne Fausto Sterling and Judith Butler, as well as by several decades of changes to the life-world of the sex-gender system) that what we used to call "sex" is also inextricable from social processes. Moreover, Beauvoir's attention to the *impediments* to solidarity between groups of women is very much to the point. The intervening mist appears to be clearing.

And yet there is still work to do. As a general reader of feminist/gender/sexuality/cultural theory, I find it irritating that so many people—including many feminists—still cite and credit Foucault, or Bourdieu, or Lacan, or Judith Butler, for key and groundbreaking ideas (such as the social construction of gender) where they could, should, cite Beauvoir. When I tell people what I'm working on, I still encounter puzzled expressions: "but Beauvoir didn't have anything to say about race, so what is there to discuss?" On the other hand, those who do appreciate Beauvoir have sometimes over-emphasized her kinship with later writers, and later strands of feminist theory or philosophy, to the point of distortion.

I worry particularly about attempts to "rescue" Beauvoir by emphasizing her positive statements about "being with others," bringing her closer to the mainstream "ethic of care" strand within American feminist philosophy, which seems to me very much at odds with what is most challenging and provocative in Beauvoir's own thought.[25] Similarly, attempts to show commonalities between Beauvoir and Irigaray, and/or between Beauvoir and Kristeva, ignore real and basic disagreement about embodiment, psychoanalysis, maternity, and heteronormativity.[26] Beauvoir lived long enough to have embraced these newer developments if she had agreed with them, which, as she said pretty clearly, she did not.[27] As Le Dœuff observes, it is tempting to read Beauvoir selectively, in pieces; but as she also observes, it is a mistake.[28] Christine Delphy pointed out, in opening the Cinquantenaire celebration: "Simone de Beauvoir was a philosopher, not an interactive videogame. You have to read the book."[29]

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[24] For similar arguments that the insistence on a sharp break between existentialist and "post-structuralist" French thought is not borne out by careful reading of a considerably more complex intellectual history, see Didier Eribon, *Réflexions sur la question gay*. Foucault and Sartre now appear to have agreed about quite a few things (which may explain why they signed so many of the same manifestos). Perhaps Beauvoir and Butler will appear to feminists in the twenty-second century, not as succeeding and oppositional "phases" of theory, but as overlapping interlocutors.

[25] See in particular Debra Bergoffen, *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Gendered Phenomenologies, Erotic Generosities*, and my discussion in chapter 1 below.

Meanwhile, what Bronwyn Winter forthrightly calls "idées bizarres"[30] continue to appear, even in scholarly journals. Too much writing about Beauvoir still focuses on details of biography, in ways that range from hagiographic to passive-aggressive.[31] Most disappointingly, the introduction to the American edition of the new translation reproduces all the old biographical clichés, mentions the work's key ideas only to casually dismiss them as old-fashioned, and concludes by suggesting that the book might nonetheless be valuable to a new generation of readers as a "personal meditation." Perhaps in the same spirit, the cover of this version shows neither a naked woman nor a dull abstract design, but a photograph of Beauvoir herself, gazing dreamily into the distance. The general impression is that *Beauvoir* is still very interesting, although Beauvoir's *ideas* are not.[32] This unfortunate view was made even more glaring during the Paris centenary colloquium of 2008, when a *naked* photograph of Beauvoir appeared on the cover of the *Nouvel Observateur*, igniting a controversy that threatened to eclipse the serious work of the conference.[33]

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[26] A particularly curious case of apparent rapprochement is Julia Kristeva's recent enthusiasm for Beauvoir—for instance, she figured prominently among the organizers of the Beauvoir centenary colloquium in Paris—while continuing to maintain her own quasi-mystical ideas about maternity and sexual duality, which would have been anathema to Beauvoir. See for example Kristeva, "Beauvoir in China," and "Beauvoir aux risques de la liberté."

[27] See for example her interview with Alice Jardine, published in *Signs* in 1979.

[28] *Hipparchia's Choice*, 55–57.

[29] "Simone de Beauvoir, c'était un philosophe; ce n'est pas un interactive videogame. Il faut lire le livre" (Introductory remarks, "Colloque internationale: Cinquantenaire du *deuxième sexe*," Paris, January 1999).

[30] Bronwyn Winter, "L'essentialisation de l'altérité et l'invisibilisation de l'oppression: l'histoire bizarre mais vraie de la déformation d'un concept," 78.

[31] Reference to Beauvoir's biography and autobiography will also play a role in my own analyses; what seems crucial to avoid is, not biography as such, but a triumphalist sense that biography determines ideas, that ideas have no life of their own; and also the temptation to second-guessing ("Beauvoir must have felt, though she never said") to which work on women writers has been particularly prone.

I cannot here take account of all the post-Bair Beauvoir biographies, except to marvel that there are so very many of them, going over substantially similar ground. Hazel Rowley's 2005 *Tête-à-tête: Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre* was in some respects an advance over Bair, whose book was riddled with factual errors and has been superseded by publications of private documents; but Rowley's failure to document sources for much of her information means it cannot really be used by scholars. Kate Kirkpatrick's *Becoming Beauvoir*, while aimed at a general readership, does an admirable job of taking Beauvoir's ideas seriously. There is still no substitute for working directly with Beauvoir's autobiographical texts, notebooks, and letters, which is what I have done.

Summing up the state of "Beauvoir studies" at the end of those meetings, Sylvie Chaperon saw a promising amount of attention to Beauvoir's texts, but less engagement with Beauvoir's feminist contentions than she would have liked; she also noted an absence of historical, sociological, and anthropological perspectives. Twelve years later, this still seems accurate to me. I would add that serious scholars still too often tend to approach Beauvoir from one or another narrowly disciplinary perspective. In particular, there continues to be a split between a more philosophical way of appropriating Beauvoir's conceptual legacy, and a more traditionally "lit crit" way of reading her texts. This was not a split she herself made—nor were/are these the only two options. Properly understanding Beauvoir requires, I believe, a fully interdisciplinary approach and a lack of embarrassment about crossing boundaries between high and low culture, philosophy and literature, literature and trash. The peculiar effectiveness of her texts (especially *The Second Sex*) in creating an "imagined community" of women and feminists has a lot to do with her lack of respect for disciplinary decorum and her successful negotiations between the intellectual and the popular, between the objective voice of the scholar and the voice which calls on us to identify as readers with a wide and contradictory array of subject positions, powerfully illustrated through literary, sexological, and anecdotal examples.

Sympathetic, intelligent commentaries on *The Second Sex* are still crucial because that text opposes, to the non-philosophical reader, a million opacities and resistances. One can only keep hold of part of it at a time. In its very opacities and resistances, though, lie its survival, its ability to engender a wide variety of fructifying and divergent feminist discourses, to always give us something new. But reading Beauvoir "in pieces" is unusually unhelpful and misleading, not just because of the continental habit of the long ironic paraphrase (a habit she shares with, for instance, Foucault and Kierkegaard), but also because *The Second Sex* is, among other things, a catalog, an anthology of the worst that has been said and thought about women over some twenty-five centuries. Similarly, reading her in paraphrase, or summary, misses her texture, her ambiguity, and her multivocality, the proliferation of the concrete, contradictory, and diverse. Her characteristic attitude toward authority was to test it against her experience, take what she could use, discard the rest of it (often without engaging in controversy over what something "really means"), and then move on.[34] This basic inaugural gesture of feminist theory—"that sounds very smart, but something doesn't feel right to me"—which was partly enabled by the disciplinary arrogance of the French philosophical tradition of which she had been such a successful student, but which she also partly invented and made new, may have been her greatest contribution to feminist modes of thinking, and thus to women's and gender studies.

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[32] The British edition had a simple cover and a really excellent, clear historical introduction from veteran socialist feminist Sheila Rowbotham … but there's a e-book on Amazon.co.uk (apparently a bootleg of excerpts, pretending to be complete) that features a headless naked sweating woman with her hand in her crotch …

[33] Agnès Logeart and Aude Lancelin, "Simone, la scandaleuse." The true scandal was not simply that they published this photograph by Art Shay, which had already appeared in Hazel Rowley's book, but that they had silently photoshopped it to make Beauvoir look thinner: thus not only continuing the long tradition of replacing women's *thought* with women's *bodies*, but updating it to enforce today's anorectic and somatophobic version.

In understanding her work, I have tried to adopt a similarly open-ended method, with no intellectual tool or tradition ruled out a priori as inappropriate or "not my field," no aspect of the question set aside as "beyond the scope of this inquiry," and no policing of disciplinary boundaries. But I do not see my work as a simple commentary. I agree with Genevieve Lloyd's remark, apropos of Michèle Le Dœuff's work, that doing the history of philosophy is also doing philosophy,[35] and I agree also with Christine Delphy that "the history of feminist movements is not just the record of a struggle, it is a terrain of struggle in itself."[36]

Volume 2 of *The Second Sex* opens with an important paragraph that has one foot in the past and another in the future.

> The women of today are well on their way to overthrowing the myth of femininity; they are starting to affirm their independence in concrete ways; but they do not easily succeed in living as full human beings. Raised by women in a world of women, their usual destiny is marriage, which still subordinates them practically to the man; male prestige is hardly vanishing, it still rests on a solid economic and social foundation. So we

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[34] One of her characteristic moves was to turn a prescriptive or "necessary" account into a descriptive, historically contingent one.

[35] Genevieve Lloyd, "Le Dœuff and History of Philosophy."

[36] "Christine Delphy a dit, il y a bien des années, qu'écrire l'histoire du mouvement féministe n'était pas seulement documenter une lutte, mais c'était 'un terrain de lutte en soi'" (Winter, "L'essentialisation de l'altérité," 96, quoting Delphy, "Libération des femmes an dix," 9).

> must study woman's traditional destiny carefully. How is a woman apprenticed to her condition, how does she feel it, in what world does she find herself trapped, what escapes are permitted to her: that is what I shall try to describe. Only then can we understand what problems are faced by women who, burdened by the past they have inherited, are doing their best to forge a new future.[37]

The end of this paragraph announces what would come to be called "social construction,"[38] articulated just a page later in the most famous sentence Beauvoir ever wrote—"On ne naît pas femme: on le devient" (One is not born but becomes a woman). Also crucial is her simultaneous emphasis on both the "common background" women share and on "each woman's singular existence," the double focus (or, if you like, the dialectic) that animates her entire project. What I want to underscore now, though, is that she opens this second volume, "The Lived Experience of Women," by locating writer and reader together in an instant of *time* that she describes as transitional, ambiguous, or split, a "today" which contains in itself both a "yesterday" and a "tomorrow."

Should we see this as marking a *particular* post-war moment, an "in-between," which is now historical, dated, past? We could then still hear the text making a good argument for its own continuing relevance: if in 1948 it was true that, even though things were changing, it was important to study how they had traditionally been, because the past is/was sedimented in the (then) present, it would be no less worthwhile in 2020 to read a book about how things had been even earlier, in a time that in 1948 could already be labelled as "back in the day." But "back in the day" turns out to be a moveable feast; her "today" is our "yesterday," and our "today" is not quite the "tomorrow" she was hoping for.

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[37] "Les femmes d'aujourd'hui sont en train de détrôner le mythe de la féminité; elles commencent à affirmer concrètement leur indépendance; mais ce n'est pas sans peine qu'elles réussissent à vivre intégralement leur condition d'être humain. Élevées par des femmes, au sein d'un monde féminin, leur destinée normale est le mariage qui les subordonne encore pratiquement à l'homme; le prestige viril est bien loin de s'être effacé; il repose encore sur de solides bases économiques et sociales. Il est donc nécessaire d'étudier avec soin le destin traditionnel de la femme. Comment la femme fait-elle l'apprentissage de sa condition, comment l'éprouve-t-elle, dans quel univers se trouve-t-elle enfermée, quelles évasions lui sont permises, voilà ce que je chercherai à décrire. Alors seulement nous pourrons comprendre quels problèmes se posent aux femmes qui, héritant d'un lourd passé, s'efforcent de forger un avenir nouveau" (*Le deuxième sexe*, 2:9).

[38] Here she continues: "When I use the words 'woman' or 'feminine' obviously I am not referring to any archetype or any unchangeable essence; after most of my claims the reader should infer 'in the current state of education and social custom.' The point is not to set forth some eternal Truths, but to describe the common background from which every singular woman's existence takes off." [Quand j'emploie les mots "femme" ou "féminin" je ne me réfère évidemment à aucun archétype, à aucune immuable essence; après la plupart de mes affirmations il faut sous-entendre "dans l'état actuel de l'éducation et des mœurs." Il ne s'agit pas ici d'énoncer des vérités éternelles mais de décrire le fond commun sur lequel s'enlève toute existence féminine singulière.]

Where am I, where are "we," in this picture? What she is saying seems, on the face of it, simply true: things for women now, at least/especially for women who have had my kind of "luck," are better than ever before. I've been able to make concrete my independence from the myth of femininity (I earn my living, I have never needed to marry). And yet there are still people who have trouble treating women as human beings (including some members of the US government), women in the aggregate still don't make the same money men make, and one still meets quite a few women who see emulating the myth of femininity as their best deal, practically and psychologically … and some of them may well be right. One almost wants to say with Faulkner, "the past is not dead, it is not even past." (Or to say with Lessing's Julia, "What's the use of us being free when *they* aren't?")[39] We're so much better off than women "back in the day." And yet …. That other women in other years have read this passage and said what I just said merely reinforces the vertigo:[40] are we stuck in a time warp, or (to steal Kurt Vonnegut's phrase) "unstuck in time," free-falling? If we are, as Breines says, "in transition," where are we going? Will we (or someone) ever get there?

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[39] Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*, 404.

[40] For instance, Michèle Le Dœuff in 1989 (*Hipparchia's Choice*, 3–6): more than a quarter of a century ago…

CHAPTER 1

Unhappy Bodies: The Frigid Woman in *The Second Sex*

> How does a pile of rags the machinist wiped his hands on
> feel in its cupboard, hour after hour?
> Each day during the heat-wave
> they took the temperature of the haymow.
> I huddled fugitive
> In the warm sweet simmer of the hay
> muttering: *Come.*
>
> ADRIENNE RICH[1]

We may find it irritating that *The Second Sex* was once marketed like a semi-dirty book, with a naked woman crouching on the cover, or we may find it merely funny; but the characterization of it as *a book about sex* is not exactly wrong. Readers who have studied only excerpts may find this a surprising claim. Many women's studies classes tend to assign just the introduction, for sound reasons: feminist theory since the 1960s could be described without huge exaggeration as a series of commentaries on that introduction, even when subsequent theorists have been only hazily aware of what Beauvoir's text actually says. But even in Parshley's truncated version, the book is 724 pages long, and the opening theoretical moves that have been subject to such intense exegesis are supported and deepened by a very wide range of empirical evidence, concrete and detailed analysis, and phenomenological exploration of women's experiences under patriarchy, including the private (or as the jacket copy puts it, "intimate") experience of the female body and how it feels, from the inside out.

Still, anyone who purchased *The Second Sex* hoping for a dreamy afternoon in the company of the woman pictured on the cover was in for a disappointment, because the sex in *The Second Sex* is mostly *bad* sex. As a monumental catalogue of female sexual discontent, it is far from anomalous in Beauvoir's œuvre. The first manuscript she ever completed and offered to a publisher, a short "novel in stories" that was later renamed *Quand prime le spirituel*, was an unsentimental, demystifying exploration of young women's sexual frustration,

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[1] Rich, "The Phenomenology of Anger," 165.

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with a firm stance against the suffocating chastities of a Catholic milieu;[2] *L'invitée*, *Le sang des autres*, and most especially *Les mandarins* offered unsentimental fictional accounts of sexual dissatisfaction and its ravages; her late literary works, *La femme rompue* and *Les belles images*, deal candidly with what might be called the sexual silencing of the French wife; she returned to the question in her last autobiographical volume, *La cérémonie des adieux*. Commentators have often focused on themes of masochism and jealousy, but a broader discussion of sexual dysphoria in Beauvoir's fiction would have to include the difficulties young people have discovering and expressing their sexuality; the problems women have interacting with comparatively undersexed men; the unsatisfactory nature of planned, deliberate sex. Her novels draw on both French and American modernist techniques to describe sex from a woman's point of view in a dispassionately concrete way that remains startling, even today.

> "Tell me what you feel?" he said. "Tell me." I remained mute. Inside me, I sensed a presence without really feeling it, as you sense a dentist's steel tool against a swollen gum. "Do you like it? I want you to like it." His voice sounded vexed, demanded an accounting. "You don't? That's all right—the night is long." ... I unclenched my teeth....[3]

The Second Sex, too, importantly relies on fictional narrative to explore questions of women's sexual unpleasure, quoting at length from writers as disparate as Dorothy Parker, Colette, and Mauriac for accounts of women's lived sexual experience and, in the sections on "myth in five authors"—an inaugural moment for feminist literary criticism—demonstrating the willful male domination that underlies descriptions of the sex act in such apparently different writers as the ultra-Catholic Claudel and the would-be modernist iconoclast D.H. Lawrence.

But Beauvoir also makes serious use of scientific, expert "findings" about female sexuality, and frequently refers to something called "frigidity," a concept that second-wave feminism would take great pains to discredit. Her discussion leans heavily on the rather bizarre work of early psychoanalyst and sexologist Wilhelm Stekel, which has fallen into disfavor. So "frigidity" seems a good place to begin my exploration of what in this text is "dated" and what may still be of use. But although this chapter will look at what seems to be an anomalous, or even weird area in her work, something she did that "we wouldn't do now," my attempt to figure out what she was doing starts from the assumption that she *knew* what she was doing, that her choices were not accidents, that her text is coherent and marshals evidence toward a unified argument. I think that if readers, from the earliest reviewers to today, have not always found such coherence, it is often because they were missing information that would help them understand the context, or unduly swayed by later political commitments of their own, or possibly both. (Whether we agree with the overall argument, or find the examples and analysis convincing, is another matter.)

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[2] Written between 1935 and 1937, the novel, originally called *Primauté du spirituel*, was refused by publishers and only appeared in 1979.

[3] "'Dis-moi ce que tu sens? dis-le-moi.' Je restai muette. Je devinais une présence en moi, sans vraiment la sentir, comme on s'étonne de l'acier du dentiste dans une gencive engourdie. 'As-tu du plaisir? Je veux que tu aies du plaisir.' Sa voix s'irritait, elle exigeait des comptes: 'Tu n'en as pas? ça ne fait rien: la nuit est longue'" (*Les mandarins,* 1:118–21). For fuller discussion, see Altman, "Before We Said 'We' (and after): Bad Sex and Personal Politics in Doris Lessing and Simone de Beauvoir."

But when I say *The Second Sex* is, indeed, a book about "sex," what do I mean by "sex"? There's been so much subsequent work done on the proper parameters of that term: where "sex" stops and "gender" begins, which constructs the other, how to think sexual difference beyond the man/woman binary, and so on. This is far from irrelevant to the study of Beauvoir, or rather, what Beauvoir wrote is not irrelevant to it, particularly since she can be invoked on many sides of many debates. Most obviously, while the term "gender" was not available to her, what would later be called "social construction" theory certainly traces back to her foundational claim that "one is not born a woman, one becomes a woman."[4] And there's more to explore: the chapter on biology, which has often seemed quite strange, deserves to be revisited in the light of post-binary, perhaps even post-human, ways of thinking about sex and gender, especially since much of the relevant material was missing or garbled in the old translation.[5]

But none of that is what I'm going to talk about here. When I say "sex" in what follows, I mean roughly, what people do in bed, and how they feel and think about that. When I say "sexuality," I mean the whole complex of emotions and ideas a person brings to that activity, based more or less on what they've learned from their culture. And when I say "bad sex," I mean quite literally what happens when people engage in that activity and it doesn't go well, it isn't satisfying to one or both of them, in ways that may have both causes and consequences that stretch beyond that actual bed on that particular day. Flat-footed as this may sound, my contention is that Beauvoir throughout her œuvre was profoundly interested in sex, and in bad sex, understood in just this way, and that (both as readers of Beauvoir and as feminists) we should be, too.

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[4] "On ne naît pas femme: on le devient." The translation of this famous sentence remains controversial. Parshley had "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman"; the new translators have been criticized for dropping his indefinite article. In my own view, the French authorizes a number of plausible and correct approaches, and what people do is a matter of how they interpret Beauvoir's overall intention, rather than how expert their French may be. See Altman, "The Grand Rectification." But see Moi, "The Adulteress Wife," for a different view. The issue is exhaustively investigated in the 2017 anthology, "*On ne naît pas femme, on le devient: The Life of a Sentence*," edited by Bonnie Mann and Martina Ferrari.

[5] For relevant passages and discussion, see Altman, "Beauvoir, Hegel, War"; Elizabeth Fallaize, "A Saraband of Imagery"; Judith Butler, "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*."

A fancier way to say this is that Beauvoir was interested in giving women full human subjectivity; that this importantly included sexual subjectivity; and that times when sex goes badly have a potential for unusual lucidity about what female sexual subjectivity is, and also what it could be.

Philosopher Sandra Bartky once observed that "[a]norexia nervosa, which has now assumed epidemic proportions, is to women of the late twentieth century what hysteria was to women of an earlier day: the crystallization in a pathological form of a widespread cultural obsession."[6] Historically locatable between the hysteric and the anorexic, both of whom Beauvoir also discusses, the "frigid" woman, and the sexually miserable woman more generally, fulfills some of the same function in her work: as a hypostatized, overexaggerated, larger-than-life figure for the situation of women in her time, for the "normal female" (that monster) as society constructs her and then demonizes her. Such figures, and the moral panics that grow up around them, have been reclaimed by feminists in two (opposite) ways: as evidence of the damage culture does to women, and, more controversially perhaps, as figures for resistance, pointing to a possible way out.[7]

Of course the "frigid woman" can't be that for us now. But the search for a usable feminist past has led me to notice how feminism as we know it was born from a discourse of women's dissatisfaction with their situation that importantly included labelling and cataloguing, naming, sexual dissatisfaction.[8]

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[6] Bartky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*, 66.

[7] For reclamation of the figure of the hysterical woman, see for example Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *La jeune née*. For an argument that parallels mine, see Suzanne Cataldi's excellent "Sexuality Situated: Beauvoir on Frigidity." Cataldi writes: "Rather than viewing [frigidity] as an instance of female passivity or an organic incapacity, [Beauvoir] constructs it as a symbolic use that women may make of their bodies.... If ... we view frigidity as a means or method of resistance, or a harm that women suffer in a culturally oppressive or sexist environment, we will be more apt to notice the agency behind the passivity and the assumptions implicit in labeling a woman 'frigid'" (70). See also Raquelle K. Bostow, "Frigidity According to Beauvoir: *Le deuxième sexe* as a Precursor to Second Wave French Feminism."

[8] See Altman, "Beyond Trashiness: The Sexual Language of 70s Feminist Fiction," and Alix Kates Shulman, "Sex and Power: Sexual Bases of Radical Feminism."

Often articulated in popular novels rather than as "feminist theory," this discourse overlapped problematically with discourses that were not feminist, some that came to be seen as anti-feminist. This is hardly unusual. Feminism has always had, and has today, a complex and uneasy relationship with other culturally available discourses on gender and sexuality: biological discourses; religious ones (particularly in the nineteenth century, when some, though not all, activists for suffrage drew on arguments that women were morally superior to men); discourses about the "new woman" or "free woman" in the 1880s, the 1920s, the "sexual revolution" of the 1960s; psychoanalytic approaches; love stories… Today it seems particularly difficult to disentangle feminism from various inspirational and therapeutic discourses we see in popular self-help texts and social formations. For instance, the "recovery movement" (of which Alcoholics Anonymous is the best-known example) shares much of its "method" with early feminist consciousness-raising (truth-telling, safe space, going around the room), but moves participants toward a collective acknowledgment of their *powerlessness* rather than a resolve to take collective action for social change.[9] We're also seeing a revaluing of (retreat to) the domestic sphere (crafts, do-it-yourself, local food, attachment parenting, etc.) which seems to have a simultaneously symbiotic and antagonistic relationship to feminism, and the marshalling of a feminist (or "postfeminist") rhetoric of "self-empowerment" (and "health") around the never-ending pursuit of the impossibly perfect body. None of this can be dismissed as naïve: as Alison Winch observes about "body talk," "critique and complicity are simultaneous."[10] Perhaps it will help to remember that earlier generations of feminists had discourse trouble also, and to look at how they worked within it, worked with it, and "worked" it.

1 A Passion for Frigidity?

In *La force de l'âge* (*The Prime of Life*), the second volume of Beauvoir's autobiography, one sentence jumps out from a long section where Beauvoir carefully records what she and Sartre were reading and studying, what films and music they enjoyed, etc., in the mid-1930s, before they wrote the books that would make them famous: "We became passionate about Stekel's *The Frigid Woman*, because he was proposing a psychoanalysis which rejected the notion of the unconscious."[11]

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[9] See Elayne Rapping, *The Culture of Recovery: Making Sense of the Self-Help Movement in Women's Lives*, and Wendy Kaminer, *I'm Dysfunctional, You're Dysfunctional: The Recovery Movement and Other Self-Help Fashions*.

[10] See Emily Matchar, *Homeward Bound: Why Women Are Embracing the New Domesticity*; Alison Winch, *Girlfriends and Postfeminist Sisterhood*. The phrase I quote comes from a talk Winch gave at Oxford in 2014. Her work is particularly concerned with the way women's bodies, and women's "correct" participation in neo-liberal (over)consumption, are policed by other women deploying the affects of "sisterhood," a process she has named "the gynaeopticon."

Four things (at least) seem odd about this sentence today. Just on the surface, the conjunction of "frigid" and "passionate" feels paradoxical, even a bit louche: one could almost translate, "we fell in love with the frigid woman"... Second, we think of "the unconscious" as the foundational concept of psychoanalysis, as Freud's great contribution to modern thought, as what distinguishes psychoanalysis from other methods of therapeutic intervention and other forms of intellectual investigation (such as biology or analytic philosophy). So isn't the idea of a psychoanalysis without the unconscious theoretically incoherent?

Third, "frigidity" is a word seldom heard nowadays, and certainly not from feminists. It sounds like an accusation, or a confession, of terrible, intimate failure, like a strange relic of a bygone era when bad shrinks made good women stay in terrible marriages, now happily banished along with iron maiden girdles and "sure, she's Phi Beta Kappa, but can she type?" It sounds like something you'd hear as you got out of the car at the end of a very bad date—but the car in question is an old gold Chevy with tailfins. Where men's sexual problems are still very much with us (just try to watch a football game without hearing about them), women's difficulties with pleasure seem to have gone underground, and "frigidity" as such has disappeared. In more popular media, specifically sexual problems women have are talked about using other words: for instance, they may be framed as problems of "miscommunication."[12] Meanwhile, chemical and surgical "remedies" are marketed for something called

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[11] "Nous nous passionnâmes pour *La femme frigide* de Stekel parce qu'il proposait une psychanalyse qui rejetait la notion d'inconscient" (*La force de l'âge* [hereinafter *FA*], 328). The year is 1936.

When quoting from Beauvoir, I have translated the title of Stekel's book as *The Frigid Woman*, which reflects the title of the French translation she read (*La femme frigide*), (and incidentally gives a more accurate sense of the book's contents than the original German title, *Die Geschlechtskälte der Frau*). French quotations from Stekel in *Le deuxième sexe* are given here exactly as Beauvoir gives them there, and translated by me from her quotation. My own readings of his work use the title of the English-language edition, *Frigidity in Woman*.

[12] See Lisa Bland and Rusty Barrett, "'Stick your (adj.) (noun) in my (adj. noun)!': Teaching Women to Talk Dirty" for discussion of 1990s sexual self-help books. For general discussion of "miscommunication" see Deborah Cameron, *Verbal Hygiene*.

"female sexual dysfunction." So it's not that everyone is happy in bed! But the frigid woman as a monstrous personality type seems to be gone.[13]

The banishing of "frigidity" as a weapon to be used against women was an explicitly-framed demand of 1970s feminism.[14] In the United States, the *locus*

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[13] When I first began working on what became this chapter, I wrote rather blithely that "while in the 1950s a woman diagnosed with this 'disorder' could be hospitalized and given shock treatments against her will, now you can't even get insurance coverage for it, because the *DSM* (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*) doesn't list it." Many years on from that "now," the situation looks murkier: it would require a whole new paper to sort through the proliferation of diagnoses currently available, not to say marketed, to women who don't find the kind of sex they are having to be one hundred percent satisfying. Increasingly this is conceived of as an organic, or semiorganic, "dysfunction" or "disorder" (the machine has broken down, but we can fix it). A partial survey: The *DSM-IV* (1994) included "hypoactive sexual disorder" and "sexual aversion disorder" (gender-neutral), and also "female orgasmic disorder (FOD, formerly inhibited female orgasm)," about which it explained, "[w]omen exhibit wide variability in the type or intensity of stimulation that triggers orgasm. The diagnosis of FOD should be based on the clinician's judgment that the woman's orgasmic capacity is less than would be reasonable for her age, sexual experience, and the amount of sexual stimulation she receives. The disturbance must cause marked distress or interpersonal difficulty.... No association has been found between specific patterns of personality traits or psychopathology and orgasmic dysfunction in females" (505–6). They distinguished this from female sexual arousal disorder, dyspareunia, and vaginismus. The *DSM-5* (2013) lists ten possibilities, of which three (female orgasmic disorder, female sexual interest/arousal disorder, and genito-pelvic pain/penetration disorder) would seem to apply to women only.

The *DSM* itself, however, is currently in disrepute, not least because of its ties to Big Pharma. See Robin Rosenberg, "Abnormal is the New Normal: Why Will Half of the U.S. Population Have a Diagnosable Mental Disorder?" Activists who identify as asexuals have also called the *DSM-5* into question, by analogy to successful challenges raised over time by those who wanted to remove "homosexuality" and "transsexuality" from the list of pathologies and disorders. Meanwhile, scientists admit a lack of consensus about the taxonomies of female unpleasure. See R. Rosen et al., "The Female Sexual Function Index (FSFI): A Multidimensional Report Instrument for the Assessment of Female Sexual Function." The authors note that their research was supported by Zonagen Inc. and Bayer AG. But lack of consensus has not prevented the explosive development of an industry dedicated to uncovering and expensively treating it, as Liz Canner's film *Orgasm Inc.* documents in distressing detail. See also Carole Tavris, *The Mismeasure of Woman*, and Leonore Tiefer, *Sex is Not a Natural Act and Other Essays* and "Female Sexual Dysfunction: A Case of Disease Mongering and Activist Resistance." (It may be worth mentioning that the idea of surgical "remedies" to make possible vaginal orgasm dates back to Freud's student and patron Marie Bonaparte, and is not new.)

"Erectile dysfunction" and "low T" are also a shift from the vocabulary of "impotence," and perhaps it is a good sign if we no longer expect a man to be *powerful* and a woman to be simply *warm*. Concerns remain.

[14] See Jane Gerhard, "Revisiting 'The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm': The Female Orgasm in American Sexual Thought and Second Wave Feminism"; Beatrix Campbell, "A Feminist

classicus for this point is Anne Koedt's "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm" (1968); older readers may also recall a poster from British Women's Liberation (where *did* I put that?) which reads (emphasis added):

> because women's work is never done and is underpaid or unpaid or boring or repetitious and we're the first to get the sack and what we look like is more important than what we do and if we get raped it's our fault and if we get bashed we must have provoked it and if we raise our voices we're nagging *and if we enjoy sex we're nymphos and if we don't we're frigid* and if we love women it's because we can't get a man and if we ask our doctor too many questions we're neurotic and/or pushy and if we expect community care for our children we're selfish and if we stand up for our rights we're aggressive and unfeminine and if we don't we're typical weak females and if we get married we're out to trap a man and if we don't we're unnatural and because we still can't get adequate safe contraceptives but men can walk on the moon and if we can't cope or don't want a pregnancy we're made to feel guilty about abortion *and for these and lots of other reasons we are part of the women's liberation movement.*[15]

A depressing amount of this is still relevant, but at least one feminist demand seems to have succeeded: when teaching *The Second Sex* or *The Golden Notebook*, I often find myself having to explain what the unfamiliar word "frigidity" even meant. This is not at all to say that the current state of sexual discourse may not be equally bad for women; but at least the ground for debate has shifted.

Fourth and finally, the very presence of Stekel's name in Beauvoir's report becomes bizarre, once one knows who he was. Fortunately, few do, so I'll need to introduce him at some length: but without at all meaning to suggest that his work is a rich, untapped vein for feminist theory. *Au contraire.*

2 Who Was Wilhelm Stekel?

Wilhelm Stekel (1868–1940) was a minor member of Freud's circle in Vienna, an "early adopter" and avid propagandist. We think of psychoanalysis as Freud,

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Sexual Politics: Now You See It, Now You Don't"; Carole Vance, "Introduction," *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality.*

[15] Joyce Stevens, "Because We're Women." First published as a broadsheet for International Women's Day, Sydney, 1975.

Jung, and Adler, but at the very beginning of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society it was actually Freud, Adler, and Stekel. In his rather florid *Autobiography*, Stekel says, "I was the apostle of Freud who was my Christ!" but Freud seems soon to have cast him instead as Judas: he was tossed out of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society for siding at crucial moments with Adler and against Victor Tausk, but also because, even when one corrects for the customary *ad hominem* rancor of that group's internal politics, he appears to have been a repulsive individual. Jung called him "a nuisance to psychoanalysis": Freud himself referred to Stekel as "morally insane," "an imbecile [*schwachsinnig*]."[16] Even the colleague who edited and introduced his posthumously published autobiography calls attention to "his unresolved narcissism, his overcompensated feelings of inadequacy."[17] Others accused him of distortions, plagiarism, fabricating his case records, and general "dirty-mindedness." Stekel was a nuisance because the unfriendly caricature of Freudians drawn by narrow-minded social conservatives was, in his case, uncomfortably close to the truth.

Beauvoir may or may not have known this, and it needn't matter. But Stekel's published work, including this hugely popular and influential book, displays the same instability and untrustworthiness that make him figure in the history of psychoanalysis as a butt and a buffoon. His statements about women veer wildly from the progressive to the hidebound and back again. Two apparent principles of selection emerge in his case histories: to include as much titillating material as he can, and second, to show the doctor (himself) in the most heroic manner possible, in contrast to his female patients who (to borrow Lacan's phrase) "don't know what they are saying." His tone brings him closer to Dr. David Reuben's cheerily heterosexist *Any Woman Can* than to a serious work of philosophy and politics.[18] Both Paul Roazen and Toril Moi have called his books "pornographic,"[19] and while this is a word I use only with trepidation, here it seems appropriate to name a *literary* genre which features repetition, redundancy, and excessive detail in sexual scenes, while the narrative or theoretical presentation which strings them together and "justifies" their inclusion comes to seem a flimsy, perfunctory pretext.[20] "Melodramatic" also seems apt. Even within the contested genre of sexology, vulnerable since its inception to charges of sensationalism, exploitation, and self-interest, this fellow stands out as a questionable figure, and not unfairly so.[21]

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[16] Jaap Bos and Leendert Groenendijk, "The Art of Imitation: Wilhelm Stekel's Lehrjahre"; Paul Roazen, *Freud and His Followers*; Peter Gay, *Freud: A Life for Our Time*; Vincent Brome, *Freud and His Early Circle;* Ernest Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud.*

[17] *The Autobiography of Wilhelm Stekel: Or, the Life Story of a Pioneering Psychoanalyst*, 13.

[18] See Altman, "Everything They Always Wanted You to Know: The Ideology of Popular Sex Literature."

[19] Moi, *Making of an Intellectual Woman.* While I cannot agree with some of Moi's more psychoanalytically-based readings, I've found her overall approach both provocative and sensible. Her (brief) discussion of Stekel occurs on pages 200 and 283–84.

Frigidity in Woman is dominated by voluminous quotations from case materials, which in a certain way give voice to "women" speaking openly about their sexual experiences. But these stories are framed by a profound distrust of what Stekel calls the "prevaricating woman," making his book a direct ancestor of *The Sexually Adequate Female* (1953) by Frank S. Caprio, M.D. Caprio's unimaginably awful bestseller is really about the sexually *in*adequate, or as he puts it "sexually incompetent," woman and what she must do to improve herself and save her marriage. He actually goes one step further than Stekel: since for him, the only orgasm that counts is vaginal orgasm, he feels able to speak for example of "the frigid nymphomaniac." Frigidity, says Caprio, causes infidelity, alcoholism, and worst of all, divorce. His is the book Anne Koedt will take as her target, the book Norman Mailer will turn to in *The Prisoner of Sex* (1971) to authorize his assertion that whatever feminists may say, he *knows* he has given "his" woman an earth-shattering orgasm. Caprio's other claim to fame is *Female Homosexuality* (1954), authoritative for many years, and singled out by Jonathan Katz for its homophobic, destructive insistence on "heterosexual adjustment."[22] Both books are written firmly under the influence of Stekel.

And yet, when Beauvoir said she and Sartre had been "passionate" about *Frigidity in Woman* she was not exaggerating: both took it seriously in formulating (rather differently) the philosophical problem of the body, and so did Maurice Merleau-Ponty.[23] My overarching question is *why*, or (to put it more plainly) how *could* she? But first I must show *how*.

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[20] See Stephen Marcus, *The Other Victorians*, for the classic discussion.

[21] I'm using "sexology" rather inclusively here (following Sylvie Chaperon's example in *Les origines de la sexologie, 1850–1900*) to cover any form of writing about sexuality that makes a strong claim to scientific authority, whether medical, quasi-medical, or extra-medical. In *Frigidity: An Intellectual History*, Peter Cryle and Alison Moore trace the interpenetration of middlebrow novels and medical popularizations in France more broadly, and earlier, back to the late nineteenth-century "roman de mœurs": see 6, 108, and 120–21, and chapter 5, "The Wedding Night" (132–60).

[22] See Jonathan Ned Katz, *Gay/Lesbian Almanac* and *Gay American History* for much interesting material on both Stekel and Caprio. For instance, Katz found that a number of Caprio's "cases" were lifted from *True Confessions* magazine, another plagiarized from Krafft-Ebing.

[23] See Cataldi, "Sexuality Situated," 75–79, and Le Dœuff, *Hipparchia's Choice*, 62–72 and 113–16, for good discussions of how Beauvoir's concept of frigidity differs from Sartre's. Cataldi and Le Dœuff both mention Stekel as a source Beauvoir and Sartre use very

3 Stekel (and Freud) in *The Second Sex*

Stekel's name appears in *The Second Sex* sixty-three times. Nine times, Beauvoir quotes or paraphrases a view he holds in order to agree with it; once (the only instance from volume 1) she partly agrees and partly disagrees; two are passing references. The vast majority (fifty-one) are drawn from the descriptive case studies in *Frigidity in Woman*. Of these cases, eleven are quoted or cited briefly (a sentence or two), thirty-two take at least an indented paragraph, four take up at least half a page in the Gallimard Folio edition, and four are longer than a page. For purposes of comparison, Sartre's name appears ten times, and her longest quotation from him is two sentences long. Obviously I'm not arguing that Stekel is a greater influence on Beauvoir than Sartre, just that there's enough here to make it surprising that Stekel isn't more discussed in the secondary literature.

However, readers who've worked, or worked mainly, from H.M. Parshley's English translation can be pardoned for wondering whether I'm over-reacting. Of Beauvoir's case citations, Parshley entirely omits five; he makes minor cuts in seven of her quotations; but his most usual procedure is to substitute a tame paraphrase of his own, usually a sentence or two. He does this with two of the four huge quotations, and with all four of the quotations that are between half a page and a page in length. (He also does this for two of Stekel's statements

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differently, to the point where, as Le Dœuff notes, "one wonders if [Beauvoir] and Sartre had read the same book" (65); but neither Cataldi nor Le Dœuff historicizes "frigidity," as I am attempting to do here.

The independence of Beauvoir's thought from Sartre's, on this and very many crucial points, has now been sufficiently demonstrated that I feel no need to dwell on it (or him) here: those interested should consult Le Dœuff's book, Simons, *Beauvoir and* The Second Sex, and Christine Daigle and Jacob Golumb, *Beauvoir and Sartre: The Riddle of Influence*, for a rich range of interpretations. Whether one wants to grant Beauvoir intellectual priority and ownership of ideas Sartre then "stole," or see joint development of ideas, or continue to distinguish Beauvoir's ideas as *better* than Sartre's, it is clearly no longer possible to blame what's "wrong" (or, for that matter, what's right) with *The Second Sex* on Beauvoir's submissiveness to her boyfriend's view.

Merleau-Ponty's use of Stekel is also beyond the scope of this inquiry, but a summary by Dorothea Olkowski is not reassuring: "Merleau-Ponty seems to have little or nothing to say about sexual difference. Sexuality, he asserts, must lie in relations and attitudes and not in biology, in anatomical or physiological conditions. Yet he speaks of frigidity in exclusively feminine terms as always a refusal—of orgasm, of femininity, of sexuality—that, in turn, is a rejection of the sexual partner and 'his' destiny, as if femininity were in service to 'his' destiny. There is certainly no mention of 'her' destiny, nor of the interval in which she acts…. What is missing in Merleau-Ponty's account is the woman's own affective temporality…" (Olkowski, "The End of Phenomenology: Bergson's Interval in Irigaray," 83).

she cites in agreement.) If you look to Parshley's version for direct quotation of Stekel's own words, you'll find only three brief ones, three somewhat longer ones, and one huge one. Stekel's name, and his basic point, are still there, usually. What gets lost is his rather colorful *voice*, and the stylistic earmarks of the case history genre: "Miss M.G., 19 years old, was suddenly afflicted with a severe delirium.... Mrs. L.M., thirty-eight, tells me she is completely without feeling [*insensible*] with her husband.... Mrs. B.Z. was forty years old, had three children and had been married when she began...."[24] Margaret Simons's classic 1983 article, "The Silencing of Simone de Beauvoir: Guess What's Missing from *The Second Sex*," noted that Parshley cut down the chapter on "The Married Woman" by almost half, and slashing at Stekel, who figures prominently there, was part of how Parshley did it.[25]

However, philological beancounting may show not that Stekel was a great and overlooked *theoretical* influence, but just the opposite. Beauvoir's most serious influences and agreements tend to dissolve into her own argument and are marked infrequently, unobtrusively, or sometimes not explicitly signaled at all (Sonia Kruks has showed this for Merleau-Ponty, Eva Lundgren-Gothlin for Hegel and Marx).[26] By contrast, the names of Stekel and other sexological "authorities" seem to bead off like oil on water. Beauvoir's use of all sorts of authorities, sources, and influences should be understood as the opposite of slavish, and as somewhat different from the sort of "scholarly" marking of debts and disagreements to which Anglo-American academics are accustomed; so her "use" of Stekel could be compared to the way she silently "unhooks herself" (as Michèle Le Dœuff puts it) from Sartre, or as Toril Moi says, "swerves."[27] And there are broad implications for what *kind* of an argument we take her to be making in *The Second Sex.* What kinds of truth claims is she making, and what sort of purchase are they meant to have on the real world? Genre is not a purely academic quibble, or a pragmatic question about which shelf a work belongs on in the library or bookstore; genre matters because it signals a relationship, an implicit contract, between writer and reader. So how *The Second Sex* uses the generic conventions of sexological case history signals how it was meant to be read, and can help us see how women (and men) did read it before it became a work of Theory and a college text.

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[24] "Mlle. M.G. ..., âgée de dix-neuf ans fut subitement atteinte d'un délire aigu" (*Le deuxième sexe* [hereinafter *DS*] 2:169). "Mme. L.M..., trente-huit ans, mariée, me dit être complètement insensible auprès de son mari" (*DS* 2:418). "Mme. B.Z... avait quarante ans, trois enfants et derrière elle vingt ans de vie conjugale quand elle commença à penser" (*DS* 2:461).

[25] See also Toril Moi, "While We Wait: The English Translation of *The Second Sex*," and Elizabeth Fallaize, "The Housewife's Destiny: Translating Simone de Beauvoir's 'The Married Woman.'"

[26] Sonia Kruks, *Situation and Human Existence: Freedom, Subjectivity and Society*; Eva Lundgren-Gothlin, *Sex & Existence: Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex*. Similar arguments can be made for other philosophers: see e.g. Emily Ann Parker, "Strange Freedom in Beauvoir and Nietzsche."

[27] Michèle Le Doeuff, *Hipparchia's Choice*, 107; Toril Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman*, 143. See Nancy Bauer, *Beauvoir, Philosophy, & Feminism* for a different, but quite compelling, formulation: Bauer describes Beauvoir as inventing an entirely new style of philosophical "appropriation."

It is crucial to bear in mind the overall organization of *The Second Sex*, and especially its division into two volumes, which in France were first published separately, several months apart. Volume 1, "Les faits et les mythes" (Facts and Myths) begins with the theoretical introduction. The next section, labelled "Destin" (Destiny), disposes in three chapters of three types of arguments that have been used to "explain" women's supposed destiny in a deterministic way (biological, psychoanalytic, and "the point of view of historical materialism," which is to say, Marx and Engels). Then "Histoire" recounts the changing political and economic positioning of women from prehistory to the (then) present day. Finally "Mythes" analyses both grand collective primitive myths and then some examples from modern literature, pulling together a complex, contradictory, but ultimately unified story of how woman is situated as a dominated Other, by a combination of men's self-interest, women's complicity with it, and the social structures that come to solidify and embody male domination. Volume 2, titled "L'expérience vécue" (Lived Experience), begins again with its own brief introduction; it follows women through the life-cycle, then slides into individual chapters about specific types of women, but always understanding women's *character* as a dynamic response to her *situation*, which includes what we would now call her social location, but also includes the body, understood not as a static thing but as "our grasp upon the world, and a sketch for our projects."[28]

Parshley unhelpfully rendered "L'expérience vécue" as "Women's Life Today," which loses its resonance as technical vocabulary for phenomenologists (see Moi, "While We Wait"). Also obscured is Beauvoir's focus, in this second volume, on life as women live it, live *through* it day after day, as changing subjects in a changing objective world; this is the dimension of "existence" and not of essentialized "Being," it is "lived" rather than (some reified notion of) "Life," as in The Meaning of Life. Like many of Parshley's alterations, the shift from "Lived Experience" to "Life Today" flattens out Beauvoir's account and brings it closer to a monolithic account of Woman than she intended.

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[28] "[N]otre prise sur le monde et l'esquisse de nos projets" (*DS* 1:73).

The first volume's unhooking of women from Woman, and the skepticism toward the Woman men invent and perpetuate, do, I'll argue, carry through and *govern* the second volume's somewhat looser discussion of "women and what they are like." The introduction to volume 2 begins with the paragraph about "women today" I quoted in my introduction, including the reminder that

> [w]hen I use the words "woman" or "feminine," obviously I do not refer to any archetype, or any unchangeable essence; after most of my statements, one must understand [*sous-entendre*] "under present conditions of education and society." The point here is not to pronounce eternal truths, but to describe the common background from which every individual woman's existence arises.[29]

Beauvoir will make the same point in her conclusion (at the end of volume 2), and her philosophical language, in particular her account of "woman as Other" based on her rewriting of Hegel, is consistent throughout both volumes. But volume 2 includes much less explicit methodological self-reflection and almost no epistemological questioning or doubt, as if that had been established and cleared out of the way.

As I noted above, Beauvoir mentions Stekel only once in the first volume, and that mention is a cool one: it arises as part of her criticism of Freud and psychoanalysis more generally. Beauvoir's critique of Freud includes most of the arguments made by later feminists. His idea of female sexual development is simply a "calque" or belated extrapolation from male development, so the Electra complex doesn't make much sense, and his whole idea of sexuality is "flou," vague, because he never makes clear when he's talking about genitality and when he isn't. His concept of "resistance" makes it impossible to argue with him. He doesn't seem to know the difference between the penis, "this fragile stem of flesh,"[30] and the phallus: men's access to power, freedom, activity in the wider world, which little girls might indeed envy, and why shouldn't they? His account is problematically ahistorical.[31] He has an "ersatz de morale" (an ersatz ethics):[32] his system is normalizing, substituting some ideal of "health" where a philosopher would stipulate “the good,” but by pretending to be a scientist and not a philosopher he fails to argue for it properly, and an ethics which denies it is an ethics is particularly dangerous.[33] Perhaps the deepest problem Beauvoir had with Freud was that in his system no human behavior can be fully authentic: anything we think, feel, or do is symbolic of, reducible to, something else, something sexual, something about myself that I don’t have access to, although the analyst (supposedly) does. For her as for Sartre, Freud’s account of unconscious motivation is unacceptable because it reduces purposive human activity, understanding, and choice, to the status of an illusion.

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[29] *DS* 2:9.

[30] "[C]ette fragile tige de chair" (*DS* 1:82).

[31] "It is only within the situation grasped in its totality that the anatomical privilege forms a basis for a true human privilege. The truth of psychoanalysis could be found only in historical context." [Ce n'est qu'au sein de la situation saisie dans sa totalité que le privilège anatomique fonde un véritable privilège humain. La psychanalyse ne saurait trouver sa vérité que dans le contexte historique (*DS* 1:90–1).]

[32] *DS* 1:93.

Sartre pursues this argument rather differently, and at great length, in *L’être et le néant*: his concept of “bad faith,” and his insistence there on the individual’s absolute freedom, required him to disavow the idea of an unconscious completely. I don’t see Beauvoir as rejecting the idea of “bad faith”; in *The Second Sex* she tends to speak of a “fuite inauthentique” (inauthentic flight) rather than using the term “mauvaise foi,” but the latter term does occur. Still, her story-examples tend to be more concrete than Sartre’s, and more embedded in a social context. He sometimes sees “bad faith” when an individual attributes something to the social category he belongs to; Beauvoir sees *refusing* to admit that one belongs to a situated social category as a sign of bad faith. For instance, she writes in the introduction, “[c]learly, no woman can without bad faith claim to situate herself beyond her sex”—a sentence Parshley omitted entirely, as Moi points out.[34]

Beauvoir’s skepticism can be illustrated quickly by an anecdote she takes from Denis de Rougemont: a woman goes into psychoanalysis because of a neurotic delusion that birds are attacking her; after a long, unsuccessful course of therapy the doctor happens to walk into the clinic garden with her and notices that *birds really are attacking her*![35] Existentialism aside, the feminist relevance is clear. The same phenomenon—for instance, a deep and abiding anger—can look like a neurotic failure to “adjust to life,” or a well-founded resistance to oppression, depending on whether one is inside, or outside, the clinical regime.[36]

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[33] She gives him failing marks in every philosophical field—epistemology, ethics, ontology—plus blames him, as others have blamed her, both for being a philosopher and for not being one.

[34] “Il est clair qu’aucune femme ne peut prétendre sans mauvaise foi se situer par-delà son sexe” (*DS* 1:13). For Moi’s analysis, see “While We Wait,” 1012. Again it seems unnecessary to harp on this difference between Beauvoir and Sartre, especially since Sartre’s position evolved during the war toward the view that a refusal of solidarity was a moral weakness, and toward a more realistic understanding of freedom as socially and historically conditioned.

[35] *DS* 2:197.

Beauvoir suggests early in volume 1 that Stekel has somehow escaped the deep ontological error of reducing all human choice and all human behavior to unconscious sexual determinants. So one good explanation for Stekel's strong presence in *The Second Sex* is indeed the reason Beauvoir gives in *La force de l'âge*: he enables her to provide copious *descriptive* psychoanalytic accounts, without being tied to a Freudian ontology or "ersatz ethics." (A "nuisance to psychoanalysis" was precisely what she needed.) And he makes it possible to carry over the psychoanalytic claim that sexuality is fundamental to subjectivity, without making women the helpless victims of their drives. But then she dismisses him in a phrase, calling his analyses "superficial," as indeed they are.

> Without entirely throwing out the contributions of psychoanalysis, some of whose insights are fruitful, we will therefore reject its method. First, we will not limit ourselves by taking sexuality as a given. That attitude falls short, as is shown by its impoverished description of feminine libido, which, as I've already said, psychoanalysts have never studied directly [*de front*], but only by starting from male libido. They seem not to know that the attraction men hold for women is fundamentally ambivalent. Freudians and Adlerians explain the anxiety the woman feels when confronted with the male sex organ as the inversion of a frustrated desire. Stekel saw better that it is a primary reaction [*une réaction originale*], but he accounts for it superficially—on his account, the woman is afraid of losing her virginity, of being penetrated, of pregnancy, of pain, and that fear acts as a brake on her desire. This explanation is too rational.[37]

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[36] On this point, see also Simons: "In describing a subject's failure to effect a transference or a sublimation (and surely the most obvious example here is in the 'failure' of a woman to become a heterosexual), a psychoanalyst, Beauvoir argues, 'does not suppose that they perhaps refused it and that perhaps they had good reasons for doing so; [the analyst] does not want to consider that their conduct could have been motivated by ends freely posed'" ("The Second Sex and the Roots of Radical Feminism," 156, quoting *DS* 1:92).

[37] "Sans rejeter en bloc les apports de la psychanalyse dont certains aperçus sont féconds, nous refuserons donc sa méthode. D'abord nous ne nous bornerons pas à prendre la sexualité comme une donnée: que cette attitude soit courte, c'est ce que manifeste la pauvreté des descriptions touchant la libido féminine; j'ai dit déjà que jamais les psychanalystes ne l'ont étudiée de front, mais seulement à partir de la libido mâle; ils semblent ignorer la fondamentale ambivalence de l'attraction qu'exerce sur la femme le mâle. Freudiens et adlériens expliquent l'angoisse éprouvée par la femme devant le sexe masculin comme l'inversion d'un désir frustré. Stekel a mieux vu qu'il y a là une réaction originale; mais il en rend compte d'une manière superficielle: la femme aurait peur de la défloration, de la

For Beauvoir, female sexuality is not a pale version of male libido—this is one of many moments in *The Second Sex* where Beauvoir indicates that women are different from men in ways that deeply matter—nor is woman's desire a mask or a symbol for something else. It needs to be studied, not for what it resembles, and not for what it conceals, but *de front*, head-on, as itself, for what it does. In other words, women's desire needs to be seen as authentic, just as the desire of a young girl to climb a tree results, not from penis envy, but from a desire to climb a tree.[38] (Later Beauvoir will say that when a woman takes a lover, it is a lover that she wants.)[39]

Whether she is right, in what follows, to describe that "primary" reaction as "this sort of appeal, at the same time insistent and terrified, which is female desire … characterized by an indissoluble synthesis of attraction and repulsion," we may want to debate; and it is hard to know exactly what she means when she explains that

> [t]he idea of "passive libido" is disconcerting because "libido" has been defined, based on the male, as pulsion, energy; but no one could conceive of light being at the same time yellow and blue; what is needed is the intuition of green.[40]

But it is clear that no one (woman or man) can claim without bad faith that Beauvoir did not see, or did not value, woman's "sexual difference." What is unusual is that she located this difference in the experience of sexual *desire*, rather than where traditionalists, and some feminisms, would place it, in the experience of sexual *reproduction*, which is to say, maternity (or "the maternal"). It is also worth noticing that, here as throughout, her discussion of women's embodied experience is not limited to sexuality: she continues,

> [w]e would get closer to reality if instead of defining libido in vague terms like "energy," we brought the meaning of sexuality together with

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pénétration, de la grossesse, de la douleur, et cette peur freinerait son désir; cette explication est trop rationnelle" (*DS* 1:92).

[38] *DS* 1:94.

[39] "[Q]uand elle prend un amant, c'est bien un amant qu'elle veut" (*DS* 2:422).

[40] "Au lieu d'admettre que le désir se déguise en angoisse ou est combattu par la crainte, il faudrait considérer comme une donnée originale cette sorte d'appel à la fois urgent et effrayé qu'est le désir femelle; c'est la synthèse indissoluble de l'attraction et de la répulsion qui le caractérise…. L'idée d'une 'libido passive' déconcerte parce qu'on a défini la libido à partir du mâle comme pulsion, énergie; mais on ne concevrait pas non plus qu'une lumière puisse être à la fois jaune et bleue; il faut avoir l'intuition du vert" (*DS* 1:92–3).

> the meaning of other human attitudes: taking, capturing, eating, doing, dominating, etc., for it is one of the singular modes of taking hold of an object; the qualities of the erotic object should also be studied as it presents itself not just in the sexual act but in perception generally. Such a study would look outside the frame of psychoanalysis, which posits eroticism as irreducible.[41]

The contributions (*apports*) of psychoanalysis, in other words, are useful here only when subordinated to the contributions of phenomenology. Throughout her account of female development, Beauvoir will emphasize that there is more to the sexed (or gendered) body than the sexual body, for instance in the different ways girls learn to occupy physical space, the way aggressive or simply athletic activity is shamed out of us, and the psychological damage this does.[42] But my point for now is simply that she has steered nimbly between two sorts of reductionism: Stekel seemingly can only see either attraction or repulsion, one at a time. Many if not most women will be able to falsify that claim by, um, consulting their own subjective experience. But the view attributed to Freud, which would reduce fear, repulsion, rejection of male advances to secret, repressed desire, is more obviously objectionable, since it smugly authorizes taking a woman's No as a sign that she really means Yes!—something Freud himself did, when he insisted to his patient Dora that Herr K., who was harassing her (with her father's tacit complicity), was a perfectly attractive man and not all that old, really … and sent her home.[43]

It is in volume 2, though, that Stekel comes into his own and prances about displaying his "cases" like a circus ringmaster, or like Charcot presenting his collection of *femmes hystériques* in the theatre of St. Anne's hospital.[44] Here are a group of miserable maladjusted adolescent girls, many of them driven to suicide or psychosis by the onset of menstruation, by belief their breasts are too big, their blushes too red, their feet too ugly, their vaginas too small or in the wrong place or missing altogether. Here are some children fascinated by urination. Here are a horrifying series of wedding night vignettes, all piled up in a heap, repeating the same theme over and over, just as the woman (supposedly) repeats it obsessively every time she tries to have sex. Here are some deluded women who make themselves and everyone around them miserable by insisting they do not want what according to him they do want; in fact here (step right up!) is the "prevaricating woman" who only *thinks* she is frigid, the source for Sartre's claim in *L'être et le néant* that the woman he uses as an example of "bad faith" showed "objective signs of pleasure" though she denied feeling any.[45] As Le Dœuff shows, this assertion fails to conceive of female subjectivity at all, as the only subjectivity in Sartre's scene is male. (Having lost her unconscious, the "frigid woman" can now be blamed: Caprio's oxymoron, "the frigid nymphomaniac," and his rebranding of frigidity as "sexual inadequacy,"[46] also takes off from this very point.)

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[41] "On cernerait davantage la réalité si au lieu de définir la libido en termes vagues d' 'énergie' on confrontait la signification de la sexualité avec celle d'autres attitudes humaines: prendre, capter, manger, faire, subir, etc.; car elle est un des modes singuliers d'appréhender un objet; il faudrait étudier aussi les qualités de l'objet érotique tel qu'il se donne non seulement dans l'acte sexuel mais dans la perception en général. Cet examen sort du cadre de la psychanalyse qui pose l'érotisme comme irréductible" (*DS* 1:93).

[42] This crucial insight would be carried forward by such feminist phenomenologists as Sandra Bartky and Iris Marion Young.

[43] See Charles Bernheimer and Claire Kahane, eds., *In Dora's Case: Freud-Hysteria-Feminism.*

[44] The engraving Freud, who had been Charcot's student, kept in his Vienna consulting room shows a half-clothed, contorted woman fainting on the arm of the doctor's white-coated assistant, while the great man himself discourses to the audience. (US readers may recognize it from the cover of Bernheimer and Kahane's casebook to *Dora*.) Apparently a version of this spectacle, specifically designed for the edification of *philosophy* students,

Moreover, Stekel is linked with some of the parts of *The Second Sex* later feminists have found troubling: places where the female body seems irretrievably ugly; places where women seem not to know what they are feeling or where Beauvoir seems not to allow them the right to what they feel; places which seem to define women's experience of sex according to a paradigm we might question: for example, Beauvoir's statement that women's subordination is expressed through her position in sexual intercourse, which has troubled Toril Moi among others, can be linked to Stekel's *Frigidity in Woman*.[47] He appears very strangely in the rather odd chapter on "La lesbienne" (see chapter 2 below). His name is often close to something uncomfortable, to a place where the reader starts to worry that Beauvoir has lost sight of her project to tear down and de-essentialize a patriarchal myth about women and is either letting the myth speak through her or, worse, building a new myth of her own.

Furthermore, she uses his name in the way one invokes an authority, as evidence to support her own points; in some sections, the thickness and length of her quotations almost cede him the floor. The chapter on "Enfance" (Childhood)

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was still going on in Foucault's day as it was in Beauvoir's (see Didier Eribon, *Michel Foucault*, 41–3, 50). For all I know it goes on there still.

[45] Stekel, *Frigidity in Woman*, 2:62–3; Sartre, *L'être et le néant*, 93–7, *Being and Nothingness*, 95–9; Le Dœuff, *Hipparchia's Choice,* 64–70. See also Moi, "Freedom and Flirtation," where this "scene" from *L'être et le néant* is compared with similar episodes in *L'invitée*.

[46] Caprio, *The Sexually Adequate Female,* 15.

[47] Stekel, *Frigidity in Woman*, 2:3. See Moi, *Making of an Intellectual Woman*, 167–68.

closes with a quotation of almost two pages: Beauvoir calls this a "detailed confession" which "constitutes a concrete synthesis of all the moments we have studied separately."[48] And finally, the concept of frigidity sometimes gets away from its owner and walks around on its own. Sometimes this leads to a sensible analysis, sometimes to a silly side-comment, as when she says that Scandinavian or Dutch women tend to be "clean and cold."[49] While Stekel's name has dropped out by the final section, "Vers la libération" (Toward Liberation), frigidity figures importantly in the account of sexuality given there.[50]

Politically speaking, Stekel is hard to pigeonhole. His homophobia is profound; but he crusaded for a recognition of masturbation and childhood sexuality as normal and healthy. His conclusion decries the sexual double standard and the reduction of women to only a "sexual creature,"[51] but also rants against "defeminization": "maternal love has always been regarded as something lofty, sacred, and unimpeachable" and "the woman who withholds from her calling as mother … denies her womanhood."[52] It is equally hard to say simply whether his influence on Beauvoir was progressive or the reverse. For instance, in her chapter on motherhood, she quotes his ringing denunciation of the hypocrisy of laws forbidding abortion: "the prohibition of abortion is an immoral law because it is bound to be violated every hour of every day."[53] But a moment later, his name authorizes the idea that morning sickness and even miscarriage can result from a woman's internal refusal of motherhood and femininity and from her hostility toward the fetus—an idea that has rightly troubled feminists (and is, medically speaking, nonsense). In fact both his helpfulness and his faults have the same root: because he rightly refuses to naturalize (and normalize) human behavior with some sort of Freudian determinism, he sometimes risks falling into a purely voluntaristic conception of human feeling, which means that people who are unhappy or oppressed can be blamed. (Both Sartre and Beauvoir have been charged with a similar voluntarism.)

But many other points in *The Second Sex* show that Beauvoir should have been able to see through him. Her denunciation of psychoanalysis as an "ersatz ethics" certainly applies to Stekel, who at best is a kind of ersatz Freud. That she did, in fact, see through him becomes clearer if we turn from her work to his.

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[48] "[U]ne confession détaillée. Elle constitue une synthèse concrète de tous les moments que nous avons étudiés séparément" (*DS* 2:85).

[49] *DS* 2:156, 271.

[50] *DS* 2:611–13, 657–59.

[51] Stekel, *Frigidity in Woman*, 2:274–75.

[52] Ibid., 2:292 and 2:300. See Cryle and Moore, *Frigidity,* 216–21 for an excellent, and contextual, discussion of Stekel's conclusion.

[53] "[L]a défense de l'avortement est une loi immorale puisqu'elle doit être obligatoirement violée, tous les jours, à toutes les heures" (*DS* 2:343).

4 Stekel par lui-même

Opening *Frigidity in Woman*, we find that Stekel has his own system, his own theory of human sexual life, about which Beauvoir never says a word. He begins by deploring a sad fact about the modern world, an "unhealthy age": because of evolution, and "the influences brought about by refinement in culture," frigidity and impotence are on the rise; they are thus most prevalent in educated people of the upper classes. This is because, he says, human beings have a "double-chamber arrangement" of the nervous system, and "the specific character of every love is determined by the struggle between brain and spinal cord," between the animal and the spiritual side of Man.[54] "Primitive folk" mostly don't have these problems because they are closer to unproblematic animality.[55] (I'm not making this up.) Since love is immortal and divine, as the poets tell us, it is tragic that so many people (and so many of the best people!) are now incapable of it. "What they need is a new prophet who shall point their way to a new track and set them on the path which leads into the kingdom of happiness and love."[56] This prophet, obviously, he plans to be.

But before he can get to sexual dysfunctionality, he wants us to know what love is. He begins to explain his theory that everyone has an "individual love requisite" by analyzing the phenomenon of love at first sight.[57] All love is at root love of self, and the lover recognizes himself in the other person: we can see this, for example, in the fact that foot fetishists take exquisite care of their own feet, and that a man who likes to have his ear kissed will kiss his partner's ear. Also (?) all love comes from infantile fixations. So, a certain man can only be aroused by a woman who is missing a tooth; this can be explained by the fact that his childhood nurse was missing the same tooth. Another man marries a woman because, he later realizes, she has the same "sideward glance" as his mother. Also (?) the "law of bipolarity" may bring about a reversal.[58] Bald men desire women with lots of hair. Blondes are favored because mankind is in flight from sexuality. Women with dark hair are preferred because dark hair is

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[54] Stekel, *Frigidity in Woman*, 1:4–5.

[55] Ibid., 1:1.

[56] Ibid., 1:5.

[57] Ibid., 1:6–31.

[58] Ibid., 1:4.

"more sensuous."[59] Now, anyone accustomed to reading psychoanalytic material will not be surprised that conflicting examples generate explanations that seem contradictory; indeed, unconscious motivation and overdetermination explain why this must be so. But while Stekel mentions both those ideas, he does not really take them on board, and every one of his conflicting explanations is presented as if it were a universally applicable maxim.

As the discussion continues, curious anecdotes proliferate, innocent of theory. Did you know that Descartes could only be attracted by cross-eyed women? Henry III of France "is said to have had recourse to the odor of excreta as a means of refreshing himself from the fatigue of dancing" and once fell in love with a woman after wiping herself with her sweaty *chemise*.[60] Smell is very important to some people; another man cares deeply about the shape of the ear (and wishes to have intercourse with it). We meet the man who could bring on orgasm by fondling a wart … the man who sucked the dental plates of prostitutes and could orgasm in no other way … and then (right there!) is an example Beauvoir uses, of a woman who fell in love from a distance with a famous tenor, but did not wish to meet him in the flesh.[61]

What's going on here?

It's certainly more *readable* than Freud, because where Freud hedges everything around with scientific apparatus and methodological reflection, Stekel simply asserts, as the expert, that he knows. Such theory as he has lies close to the surface. The "law of bipolarity" is explained as follows: "The self consists of opposite strivings which act as counterparts. One's choice may follow the principle of identification or the opposite principle of differentiation."[62] This "law" forms the basis of his claim to have invented the concept of "ambivalence," which he accused Freud of stealing, but does it amount to anything more than two clichés, "birds of a feather" and "opposites attract," laid end to end? The literalness of his analysis borders on parody.

> Women who "have fallen" or who struggle against temptations, throw themselves out of the window and into the street;[63] the man who entertains secret thoughts of poisoning somebody, takes poison; one who

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[59] Ibid., 1:14.

[60] Ibid., 1:17.

[61] Ibid., 1:52–3; *DS* 2:419.

[62] Ibid., 1:11.

[63] This example seems also to have been picked up by Sartre, but by way of Pierre Janet: see *The Transcendence of the Ego*, 100.

> yearns after the flames of love sets fire to himself; he who believes himself surrounded by poisonous thoughts, turns on the gas.[64]

He believes in the seven-year itch (illustrated with examples from the life of Goethe), and in Fliess's notorious theory that the nose plays an important role in sexual life: for example, he knows a student who could have an orgasm simply by kissing a woman on the nose. "The size of the nasal openings also plays a larger role in sexual excitation than is usually recognized."[65]

Children's incestuous feelings for parents are on the rise because upper-class parents, having fewer children, spoil them through "overtenderness" ("the only child is almost always fated to be a neurotic," and favorite children are more likely to break down);[66] this may be leading to class suicide, a disaster he parallels to the devastation of the First World War. He also says, though, that "love disorders" are "a kind of automatism which intervenes to prevent overpopulation."[67] On the other hand, the prevalence of erotic fixations upon servants and the lower classes is due to neglectful parents who abandon their small children to the care of wet-nurses.[68] He finds all these situations problematic, seemingly without noticing when his claims logically cancel one another out.

So did Stekel, as Beauvoir and Sartre believed, propose a psychoanalysis without the unconscious? Yes, if by "unconscious" one means, "deep." In fact he uses the terms "unconscious" (and also "preconsciousness" and "coconsciousness") from time to time, but unsystematically. Frigidity he seems to think is more or less conscious: you "can get the woman to admit" that she is angry, or thinking about her father or about God; one woman who had "presented" with a wish to be cured finally "admitted" that she had been telling herself funny stories as a distraction, to prevent herself from rewarding her husband with her orgasm. Has this woman gained some healing insight into her own unconscious motivation, or has she merely been caught lying? (That Freud, too, uses phrases like "I brought her to admit," in *Dora* for example, doesn't make this any easier to pin down.)

Some of this is funny, but it can't be dismissed as harmless. The smug, moralizing account of the upward aspiration and the downward longing, and his worries about the sexual degeneracy of modern Europe are disturbingly close to such fascist and protofascist writers as Otto Weininger and Max Nordau, a discourse whose results we know (though he could not).[69] He also leaves one with the feeling that women's accounts of their own experience are not to be trusted—though men don't come out looking very good, either. The solutions he proposes to the dilemmas arising from "individual sex requirements" can feel a little scary. One man is worried because he is sexually aroused only by very young girls—he has opened a candy store in order to be able to see them all the time, but he is afraid he will one day act on his desires and end up in jail. Stekel convinces him to marry a very small woman (located through a marriage broker), and to dress her up in pigtails and school uniform: they live happily ever after.[70] In explaining how what looks like frigidity may actually be concealed masochism (a theme Beauvoir will take up), he tells us about a woman who drove her husband so crazy with her complaining that finally he beat her, which turned out to be what she really wanted—and they too lived happily ever after![71] At this point Stekel quotes Nietzsche, seemingly with approval: "when you go to a woman, forget not your whip!" Not nice, no.

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[64] Stekel, *Frigidity in Woman*, 1:41.

[65] Ibid., 1:16.

[66] Ibid., 1:36.

[67] Ibid., 1:70.

[68] Ibid., 1:37, 39.

And yet, irritatingly, every once in a while he gets things totally right. There's nothing wrong with masturbation, he says: this was one of his explicit disagreements with Freud. "Perhaps there is no such thing as a normal person."[72] Men have problems too. "Disorders of our love life are truly social diseases."[73] "The well-known saying, the criminal is the crime of the state can be paralleled by 'the neurotic is the crime of the family.'"[74] Total frigidity does not exist, all women are able to have orgasms; adult traumas matter, and one should not waste time looking for childhood "keys" when an actual cause, like a rape, or a husband who does not know what he is doing, is staring one in the face. Plus, he seems to see libido as gender-neutral: there seems to be (for him) both a will to dominate, and a will to be dominated, in sex, but neither gender has a monopoly on either position; and he takes it for granted that women have (all sorts of) sexual desires which they, like men, will attempt to satisfy in some way.

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[69] See Erin Carlston, *Thinking Fascism: Sapphic Modernism and Fascist Modernity*, for a good summary of this discourse and its widespread influence on otherwise sensible people of good will. Some of the incoherence of Stekel's conclusion may be attributed to his belated understanding of the consequences of Hitler's pro-natalism, and to the war that would make him, like Freud, a refugee. But on page 291 of the English translation he is still saying that "the future of Europe looms austere and dark.… It is becoming already obvious that the fertility of the Slavic race will destroy Germanic organization and culture after it shall appropriate it to its own uses."

[70] Stekel, *Frigidity in Woman*, 1:24.

[71] Ibid., 1:69.

[72] Ibid., 1:28.

[73] Ibid., 1:33.

[74] Stekel, *Autobiography*, 44.

But as I said above, the progressive and the retrograde have the same roots. His refusal to categorize sexual behavior as deviant ("there is no such thing as a normal person") leaves him no room to condemn rape or pedophilia: he notes several times an assault by a brother, a grandfather, with no particular affect, although (unlike Freud) he is not provoked to doubt the woman's statement that the abuse really happened. The shallow roots of sexual proclivities mean frigidity is not essentialized, can be caused by a bad husband, helped by better "technique"; it also means that lesbianism is "curable," and enables him to terminate many of his triumphant cases, not with clarifying insight (in which he seems largely uninterested) but with a simple "heterosexual adjustment," and wedding bells. The doctor-hero brings closure and respectability to the flood of narrative, supposedly neutralizing (and thereby authorizing) its pornographic potential. "Amor Vincit Omnia" is his conclusion: one patient (identified as a "backfisch," a young girl) says to him, "you may well be proud of what you have done for me."[75] How this can be reconciled with the seemingly fixed nature of the "individual love requisites" is unclear.

But perhaps it's a mistake to take the theory seriously. Stekel's strong point (and his legacy to the drugstore paperback) is as a raconteur of spicy stories. It doesn't advance his analysis, or the cause of science more broadly, for us to learn that case 34 (a lesbian) "can whistle remarkably well and she drinks on average daily about ten glasses of beer,"[76] but it certainly brings her to life for us. His second volume largely abandons (pretention to) theory in favor of serial narrative: "Confessions," "Psychoanalysis of a Case of Dyspareunia," "The Analysis of a Messalina," "Fragmentary Analysis of a Transvestite." It does seem possible he made some of these up, if I judge by an admittedly novel-ridden conception of verisimilitude. (Some of them I hope he made up.) And maybe Beauvoir didn't actually care whether he made them up? At one point she refers to a case study subject as a "heroine."[77]

So, if everything is shallower and less tragic than Freud thought, and most of it can be changed, is this good? On the one hand, the truly frigid woman has been de-biologized and de-pathologized; on the other hand, a new monster has been created, the "prevaricating woman," who pretends, or claims, to be frigid, as part of a battle of the sexes she is carrying out in her own family. In *The Second Sex,* too, we hear about women who are *crispées* (clenched), about women's sexual expression of their *rancune* (resentment, rancor, desire to take revenge). Now, Beauvoir was very lucid in the first volume about how self-serving men's accounts of women's sexual experience could be. In her introduction she describes Marynia Farnham's *Modern Woman: A Lost Sex*, whose jeremiad about modernity is much the same as Stekel's, as "fort agaçant" (very annoying);[78] in later chapters she saw through D.H. Lawrence, Montherlant, Claudel … Couldn't she see through this risible charlatan?

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[75] Stekel, *Frigidity in Woman*, 1:208.

[76] Ibid., 1:121.

[77] *DS* 2:70.

5 What She Made of What He Made of Us

I think she did see through him. Putting the texts side by side, it's striking that she almost always (though not quite always) quotes only his example, omitting his reductive analysis of it. Racquelle Bostow has noticed that "Beauvoir uses only the adjective 'frigid' (*frigide*) and never the substantive 'frigidity' (*frigidité*), which suggests a fixed sickness" or a personality "type."[79] The breezy arrogance of the healer-interpreter that resounds through Stekel's own writings is never heard in *The Second Sex*, either as his triumph or as hers. It is as if she values Stekel's documentary evidence of women's problems, but find his solutions too derisory even to combat; she removes them as neatly as if she'd been reading with a pair of scissors in her hand. It's true that Stekel's name appears uncritically, as though he were a simple professional authority cited to back up her view. But considering how much *The Second Sex* relies on psychoanalytic and sexological descriptive accounts, it is striking that a truly therapeutic discourse is remarkably absent: no one is cured.

Something similar happens with Helene Deutsch. As Éliane Lecarme-Tabone has noted in a detailed and convincing inquiry, Beauvoir cites Deutsch's work very frequently in *The Second Sex*, while continuing to directly oppose Deutsch's naturalistic and normative assumptions about a specifically "different" feminine sexuality.[80] Beauvoir demolishes Deutsch's theory of female masochism in a few well-chosen words, but continues to use her examples copiously, and feminists ever since have wondered why Beauvoir spends so much time discussing women's masochism, if she did not after all see female sexuality as intrinsically masochistic and, well, bad.

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[78] *DS* 1:12. For discussion of Farnham, see Jane Gerhard's excellent article "Revisiting 'The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm,'" 458–59.

[79] Bostow, "Frigidity According to Beauvoir," 4.

[80] Éliane Lecarme-Tabone, "Beauvoir et Hélène Deutsch," 47–61. Stekel and Deutsch are the two most salient authorities dealt with in this way, but there are others: the overlapping fields of psychoanalysis and sexology are very well represented. Beauvoir's use of discredited, or at least unfashionable, sources, and the issue of "guilt by association," will be considered more broadly in later chapters.

But perhaps we can see why Stekel and some of the other authorities that now seem problematic represented such an important resource for Beauvoir that she used them, in spite of flaws she saw, if we reflect on what her alternatives were, since most of what we'd now turn to ("standard works" or more popular materials) had yet to be written. Even Kinsey's volume on women did not appear until 1953.[81] Beauvoir's own sexual education had been so rudimentary, she tells us in her memoirs, that as a child she got a meaningful piece of information from a scrap of newspaper hanging in the bathroom (to be used as toilet paper).[82] As a phenomenologist, if not quite yet as a feminist, she was not satisfied to make up her examples: she needed real subjective accounts, and these were few and far between. So perhaps she read Stekel as lesbians in the 1950s would read pulp fiction (and indeed pulp psychoanalysis!): simply searching for representation, which was very hard to find. In an economy of representative scarcity, biases can be ignored or silently corrected, even when they do not pass unnoticed. One takes what one needs and leaves the rest.

Beauvoir tells us that *The Second Sex* grew out of an autobiographical impulse. But—and this seems important—it did not stop there. Indeed, when (according to this account) Sartre convinced her that an important part of being Simone was being female, and she realized that she had not realized this, she went in search of information, information which would precisely *not* be drawn from her own subjective experience, which supposedly had failed to teach her anything useful about it. (Perhaps this is why her method, especially in the second volume, is to pile example on example, to the point where one can almost forgive Parshley for saying, OK, we get it, enough already.) She tells us she went to the Bibliothèque nationale,[83] where she read everything on the subject of women that had appeared in English or French and used the methods she had learned in her "formation universitaire" to distinguish the material that "really counted" from myths and prejudiced accounts.[84] How close we are here to Virginia Woolf who, given the assignment to lecture on women and literature that would become *A Room of One's Own*, duly trotted off to the British Library with her notebook and looked under W. On the other hand, how far we are, really, from Woolf's surprise and horror at what she found, and her decision to seek the truth about women elsewhere, around the streets of London and in her own common sense. Uncovering her own anger, unmasking the anger of the patriarchs, Woolf "unhooked" herself from Professor X with his measuring rod and from the scruffy, grunting student sitting next to her, and also from the whole prestige of scholarly inquiry, precisely the prestige Beauvoir invokes in reminding us (perhaps defensively) of her own scholarly accomplishments. Where Woolf in the library threw up her hands, went for a walk, and started from scratch, Beauvoir simply got out another pack of blank notecards (as it were).

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[81] See Coffin, "Beauvoir, Kinsey, and Mid-Century Sex": "[Beauvoir] was reading Kinsey's report on men in December 1948, as she composed the introduction to *The Second Sex* and began to write volume 2. 'There are some very interesting things in it,' she wrote to Nelson Algren, 'and other rather funny ones! I should be pleased if the same work was already done for women; it would help me for my book.' That reading may have helped her open *The Second Sex* with the dismissal of the 'voluminous nonsense uttered about women in the last century'—a gesture of grand revisionism that parallels Kinsey's" (27).

[82] *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* [hereinafter *MJFR*], 139–40. See also 28, 56, 77–8, 80–2, 113–21, 138–41, 151–55, 224–28. One of Beauvoir's targets in that book, as in *Quand prime le spirituel* and *The Second Sex*, is the inadequacy of sexual education. Whether this situation has really improved, either for scholars or for curious little girls, is not a question I can take up here.

[83] *La force des choses* (hereinafter *FCh*) 1:136, 235, 258–59; *Force of Circumstance*, trans. Richard Howard (hereinafter *FCirc*), 103, 177–78, 195–96. See also "The Art of Fiction No. 35," interview with Madeleine Gobeil.

So it is clear that scholarly inquiry, particularly empirical inquiry, and even more particularly inquiry with some basis in the physical sciences, maintain a prestige and a value for her. Despite her critique of knowledge-formation, her unmasking of myths and the self-interested motivations behind them, she remains at Sandra Harding's first stage, where the methods and the ethical standards of science are invoked to judge those who fail to meet their own standards and procedures ("sexist science is bad science").[85] But this does not preclude placing an equally high epistemological value upon accounts drawn from everyday experience, introduced by a phrase such as "I knew a young woman who" (j'ai connu une jeune femme qui), "a woman told me" (une femme m'a dit), or or "I remember a friend of my youth, who" (je me rappelle une amie de jeunesse à qui). There is also a proliferation of accounts drawn from women's memoirs and letters, and from fictional texts, some written by women and some by men. I was surprised to realize, in the course of my bean-counting, that the most frequently cited name in *The Second Sex* is Colette's. Sophie Tolstoy also scores high. Beauvoir is even willing to use a passage from a novel by Mauriac, a writer she particularly disliked (and who returned the favor), because the heroine seemed to be describing women's sexual misery in a particularly cogent way. She calls upon women's accounts of their own experience even when these accounts are tremendously mediated. And while different kinds of sources might, one would think, imply different kinds of "truth claims" or levels of authority, Beauvoir does not subordinate one level of example to another: they are simply linked paratactically, side by side. So the sexology does not govern or explain the fiction or the personal anecdote; the heroine of the Mauriac novel, or the Dorothy Parker story, is no more and no less "made up" than the "heroine" of Stekel's case history.[86]

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[84] We may well feel that her university education had taught her nothing of the kind, marked as it must have been by biases and lacunae. But she may mean simply that she had learned to work quickly through a great deal of material, and not to believe everything she read. It's worth remembering that at that time "psychology" was studied as a branch of philosophy, and would have included much that we would now have trouble recognizing as "science."

[85] Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism.* Only in a later stage does "standpoint theory" come to see the procedures as problematic in themselves (exclusionary, and so forth). One may regret this commitment of Beauvoir's, especially when trying to teach the biology chapter! But she herself never regretted it, and employed much the same technique, and the same intellectual structure, in writing *La vieillesse* two decades later. Indeed any expectation of such regret would be anachronistic.

I suspect Karen Vintges is right to label this method phenomenological;[87] if, as Sartre was excited to discover, Husserl's method makes it legitimate to "do philosophy" about a glass of beer, or an apricot cocktail,[88] surely one can also then do philosophy about a menstrual pad. And I think she's also right to see "j'en connais des femmes qui" as one of Beauvoir's most profound legacies to the women's movement. To give one example: leafing through the old version of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, I was struck by the stories, women giving accounts of their sexual histories. This written-down version of consciousness-raising triangulates on the "truth about women," sketches a community of seekers after truth by means of what Woolf scholars used to call "unity in multiplicity." The individual and the collective are not opposed but allied, at least on the page.

But there is one sort of example Simone de Beauvoir never uses in *The Second Sex*. She never uses a hypothetical. This is interesting well beyond the fact that it is another "swerve" from the Sartre of *L'être et le néant* ("Suppose I go into a café looking for my friend Pierre…," "Suppose a waiter asks me…," etc.) and a radical departure from a venerable, perfectly well-respected, philosophical manner of "writing the personal"—still going on wherever philosophers gather ("we tend to say…," "I can imagine …")—a way of thinking and writing in which Beauvoir became completely uninterested. She was looking for data.

Still, to say she got something she needed from Stekel is not to excuse her, exactly. As she herself said (writing about the Marquis de Sade), "one is always more influenced than one believes by the ideas against which one is fighting."[89] I take it as axiomatic that feminism at any period will be inextricably entwined in other discourses of that time about women and sexuality. Cora Kaplan, writing about Mary Wollstonecraft, has made the observation that "all feminisms give some ideological hostage to femininities and are constructed through the gender sexuality of their day as well as standing in opposition to them,"[90] and Foucault says similarly that at any given point in history, the discourses of repression and liberation will be the same discourses.[91] We may find this disconcerting, or we may find it empowering; the point for my purposes is to look not at what the discourse of frigidity was (tainted, "problematic"), but at what in this text it did, and does.

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[86] For discussion of what Beauvoir believed about the truth value of fiction, see Toril Moi, "What Can Literature Do? Simone de Beauvoir as Literary Theorist."

[87] Karen Vintges, *Philosophy as Passion: The Thinking of Simone de Beauvoir*.

[88] *FA*, 157.

I'm now going to suggest some ways in which against all odds, and counterintuitively, examples from Stekel helped Beauvoir make arguments that are key to the usable feminism of *The Second Sex*. To summarize, I believe he helped her establish that women do have, and are entitled as human beings to have, a sexual subjectivity of their own; he furthered her account of women's *character* as constructed by their *situation*, thus potentially changeable; and he enabled her to provide a rich, detailed, concrete, complex picture of women's misery under patriarchy, fueling the argument for change.

First: His detailed examples of childhood sexual play help do away with the myth of childhood innocence. Kids are fascinated by urination, kids try to find out about sex and get some strange ideas, kids play doctor, kids masturbate, girls do this just as much as boys: get used to it. In fact, Beauvoir says, it's a "persecution" to try to stop them.[92] She returns to this topic prominently in her book's conclusion, giving psychoanalysis credit where she feels it is deserved:

> It is already progress that "depraved" little girls are no longer cauterized with a red-hot iron; psychoanalysis has made parents a bit better informed; but women's puberty and sexual initiation still come to pass under such deplorable conditions that none of the objections people make to the idea of a radical change are valid.[93]

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[89] "[O]n est toujours plus influencé qu'on ne croit par les idées qu'on combat" (*Faut-il brûler Sade?*, 60).

[90] Cora Kaplan, *Sea Changes: Essays on Culture and Feminism*, 49.

[91] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1, an Introduction*, 95–101.

[92] *DS* 2:79.

[93] "Qu'on ne cautérise plus au fer rouge les fillettes 'vicieuses,' c'est déjà un progrès; la psychanalyse a un peu instruit les parents; cependant les conditions actuelles dans lesquelles s'accomplissent la formation et l'initiation sexuelle de la femme sont si déplorables qu'aucune des objections que l'on oppose à l'idée d'un radical changement ne saurait être

(Freud himself was much more conservative than Stekel about masturbation, including with his own children.)[94] A key section here is the long quotation, two and a half pages, from Stekel's case study of a "Viennese süße Mädel" with which Beauvoir concludes her chapter on "Enfance." This is the story which Beauvoir says "constitutes a concrete synthesis of all the moments we have studied separately"; it shows children indulging their curiosity about the body through inquiry and sex play of various kinds. Beauvoir comments:

> Even though this is an ordinary [*normal*] and not a pathological case, people might call this child exceptionally "perverse." She was only less closely supervised than others.[95]

That it was "normale" for children to be interested in sex did not go without saying.

Second: Indeed, this did not go without saying even for adult women. On page 237, I began to overcome my distaste for the word "frigidity," because I began to historicize it. Beauvoir has been discussing the reluctance of medical and social authorities to give women access to drugs which will alleviate the pain of childbirth. Something analogous happens, she thinks, with sex itself:

> [M]ales haven't scrupled to refuse their partner sexual happiness; it has even struck them as advantageous to deny her the temptations of desire by denying her the autonomy of pleasure.[96]

This is followed by a footnote.

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valable" (*DS* 2:657). ("Formation" is hard to translate, since it can also mean "development" more generally. Parshley has "training," which is certainly right in a phrase like "formation universitaire," and here does preserve the sense that the girl is being formed, rather than forming herself: someone writing now might simply say, "socialization." But "formation" can also be applied to, for instance, a fruit, as it develops from a blossom, so both biology and culture are kept in play.)

[94] Anna Freud's biographer and Paul Roazen have separately indicated the ill effects on Freud's own children of their father's Victorian intransigence on this point. See Roazen, *Freud and His Followers*, 15; Elizabeth Young-Bruehl, *Anna Freud: A Biography.*

[95] "On dira peut-être—bien qu'il s'agisse d'un cas normal et non pathologique—que cette enfant était d'une exceptionnelle 'perversité'; elle était seulement moins surveillée que d'autres" (*DS* 2:88).

[96] "On comprend donc que les mâles n'aient eu aucunement scrupule à dénier à leur compagne le bonheur sexuel: il leur a même paru avantageux de lui refuser avec l'autonomie du plaisir les tentations du désir" (*DS* 2:237).

Even today, woman's claim to pleasure makes men angry: an astonishing document bearing on this point is Dr. Grémillon's little booklet, *The Truth About Woman's Venereal Orgasm*. We learn from the preface that the author, a hero of the Great War who saved the lives of fifty-four German prisoners, is a man of the highest morality. Taking violent exception to Stekel's work on *The Frigid Woman*, he declares (among other things): "The normal woman, the good producer of children [*pondeuse*, a word usually applied to hens, refers literally to a good layer of eggs], has no venereal orgasm. Numerous are the mothers (and the best ones) who have never felt the fantasmatic spasm … The erogenous zones, usually latent, are not natural but artificial. People boast of acquiring them, but they are the stigmata of abject failure…. You can tell this to the professional lady's man [*homme de joie*—this is an insulting neologism: a *fille de joie* is a prostitute] and he won't care in the least, he wants his partner in crime to have a venereal orgasm and she will have one. If it doesn't exist it will be brought to exist. The modern woman wants to be made to vibrate. We reply: Madam, we haven't got the time, and hygiene forbids it! … The man who creates erogenous zones is working against his own interest: he creates insatiable creatures. The whore can drain innumerable husbands dry without tiring herself …. the woman with a 'zone' becomes a new woman with a new state of mind, sometimes a monstrous woman who can go as far as crime … There would be no neurosis and no psychosis if people could be persuaded that 'making the beast with two backs' was as indifferent a matter as eating, urinating, defecating, sleeping …."[97]

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[97] Parshley gives only: "Even in our time, women's claim to sexual pleasure still arouses male anger. In a small work on the female orgasm, a Dr. Grémillon, taking issue with Stekel, declares that the normal, fertile woman has no orgasm. He goes on to say that erotogenic zones are artificial, not natural, they are signs of degeneration; to create them is unhygienic and foolish, for women then become insatiable, new and terrible creatures, capable of crime, and so on" (436). What gets lost here is both what is most outrageous in the original statement and what is most outraged about Beauvoir's counterattack: the texture, the grain of the voice.

"De nos jours encore, la prétention de la femme au plaisir suscite de mâles colères: sur ce point un document étonnant, c'est l'opuscule du docteur Grémillon: *La vérité sur l'orgasme vénérien de la femme*. La préface nous apprend que l'auteur, héros de la guerre de 14–18, qui sauva la vie de cinquante-quatre prisonniers allemands, est un homme de la plus haute moralité. Prenant violemment à partie l'ouvrage de Stekel sur *La femme frigide,* il déclare entre autres: '*La femme normale, la bonne pondeuse n'a pas d'orgasme vénérien.* Nombreuses sont les mères (et les meilleures) qui n'ont jamais éprouvé le spasme mirifique…. Les zones érogènes le plus souvent latentes ne sont pas naturelles mais artificielles. On s'enorgueillit de leur acquisition, mais ce sont des stigmates de dé-

Repulsive as we find the concept of frigidity, what it replaced was in some ways worse: the good woman and mother as passionless, the woman who feels (or thinks she feels) sexual pleasure as a shameless prostitute, a devourer of men. Where Stekel blamed modernity for impairing sexual fulfillment, Grémillon blames modernity for creating it in the first place: the only excuse for sex in his view would appear to be reproduction. As social historians have shown, the "new woman" of the early twentieth century created a moral panic, implicitly linked to a nationalist moral ideology, and here we have a prime example.[98]

Perhaps it was progress, then, to regard "frigidity" as a problem rather than an accomplishment? Stekel's talk of "cures" is repellent, but if it's a problem that sexual feeling in women can be *missing*, it must be definition normally or naturally be *there*. Logically, one must first argue that women legitimately have sexual feeling before one can criticize the way men have attempted to channel and misdescribe it, whether along the lines Anne Koedt will develop, or in the ways Beauvoir will go on (at length) to do.

So, going back to the quotation from *La force de l'âge*, perhaps frigidity and passion are not opposites after all. There's a nascent politicization of female sexuality: it is part of being human, and thus each woman has a right to it, a right she'll need to fight for, because there are still those who would deny it to her.

Third: In the chapter on "La jeune fille" (The Young Girl), Beauvoir mobilizes many examples from Stekel to make her point that female adolescence is a "travail," a "work" in the sense that psychoanalysts speak of "the work of mourning."[99] Sexuality must be learned, and the way most girls learn it is awful. He is one of many authorities here who provide precise, detailed information, which Beauvoir folds together into a collective phenomenological account. For instance:

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chéance.... Dites tout cela à l'Homme de joie, il n'en tiendra pas compte. Il veut que sa camarade de turpitude ait un orgasme vénérien et elle l'aura. S'il n'existe pas, on le fera naître. La femme moderne veut qu'on la fasse vibrer. Nous lui répondons: Madame, nous n'avons pas le temps et cela nous est interdit par l'hygiène!... Le créateur des zones érogènes travaille contre lui-même: il crée des insatiables. La gouge peut sans fatigue épuiser d'innombrables maris ... la 'zonée' devient une femme nouvelle avec un état d'esprit nouveau, quelquefois une femme terrible et pouvant aller jusqu'au crime.... Il n'y aurait pas de névrose, pas de psychose si on était persuadé que 'faire la bête à deux dos' est un acte aussi indifférent que manger, uriner, déféquer, dormir...'" (*DS* 2:237, ellipses and emphasis in original).

[98] See Cryle and Moore, *Frigidity*, 243–47; Mary Louise Roberts, *Civilization Without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France, 1917–1927*; Christine Bard, *Les garçonnes: modes et fantasmes des années folles*.

[99] *DS* 2:140.

> According to a survey reported by Havelock Ellis in 1896, out of one hundred and twenty-five students in an American high school, thirty-six at the moment of their first period knew absolutely nothing about the matter. Thirty-nine had some vague acquaintance with the idea. That is to say, more than half of them were in ignorance. According to Hélène Deutsch, things had hardly changed in 1946. Ellis cites the case of a young girl who threw herself in the Seine at Saint-Ouen because she believed she had contracted an "unknown disease." In "Letters to a Mother," Stekel also tells the story of a child who attempted suicide, seeing her menstrual flow as a sign and a punishment for the impurities that soiled her soul. It is natural that the girl would be frightened: it seemed to her that her life was slipping away...[100]

Whatever one may think of any of these authorities as theorists, what Beauvoir is doing is mining them for examples, for data if you will, to support her own claim that girlhood is hell. This is entirely a cultural and social account, and the quotations, often long, are in the first person, as in the following example (Beauvoir footnotes *Frigidity in Woman*), which begins "une femme confie" (a woman confides):

> I suffered from a feeling of physical inferiority, maintained by constant criticisms at home. My mother in her exaggerated vanity always wanted to show me off to advantage, and she always had a long list of pointers for the dressmaker, to conceal my defects: the sloping shoulders, the too-prominent hips, the too-flat backside, the overfull breasts, etc.... I tortured myself particularly about my feet which during puberty were very ugly and people gave me a hard time about the way I walked .... There was certainly some truth in all this, but they made me so unhappy .... I was sometimes so intimidated that I no longer knew at all how to stand.

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[100] "D'après une enquête rapportée en 1896 par Havelock Ellis, sur 125 élèves d'une 'high school' américaine, 36 au moment de leurs premières règles ne savent absolument rien sur la question, 39 avaient de vagues connaissances; c'est-à-dire que plus que la moitié d'entre elles était dans l'ignorance. Selon Helen [sic] Deutsch, les choses en 1946 n'auraient guère changé. H. Ellis cite le cas d'une jeune fille qui s'est jetée dans la Seine à Saint-Ouen parce qu'elle se croyait atteinte d'une 'maladie inconnue.' Stekel, dans les 'lettres à une mère,' raconte aussi l'histoire d'une enfant qui tenta de se suicider, voyant dans le flux menstruel le signe et la punition des impuretés qui souillaient son âme. Il est naturel que la jeune fille ait peur: il lui semble que c'est sa vie qui lui échappe" (*DS* 2:68–9).

> If I met someone my first thought was always, “if only I could hide my feet.”[101]

Is there anything outdated about this, apart from the dressmaker with her pins?

At another point Beauvoir observes:

> Many young girls suffer because their calves are too sturdy, because their breasts are either too slight or too heavy, because their hips are skinny, or on account of a wart; or else, they fear some secret deformity:
>
> Every young girl carries within herself all sorts of absurd fears which she hardly dares admit to herself, says Stekel. No one would believe how many young girls suffer from the obsession of being physically abnormal and secretly torment themselves because they can’t be sure of being built in the usual way. One young girl for example believed her “lower opening” was in the wrong place. She thought sexual intercourse took place through the navel, and was unhappy because her navel was closed and she couldn’t get her finger into it. Another believed she was a hermaphrodite. Yet another thought she was crippled and would never be able to have sexual relations.[102]

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[101] “Je souffrais d’un sentiment d’infériorité physique entretenu par des critiques incessantes à la maison.… Ma mère dans sa vanité exagérée voulait toujours me voir particulièrement à mon avantage et elle avait toujours un tas de détails à faire remarquer à la couturière pour dissimuler mes défauts: les épaules tombantes, les hanches trop fortes, le derrière trop plat, les seins trop pleins, etc. Ayant eu le cou gonflé pendant des années, il ne m’était pas permis d’avoir le cou nu.… Je me vexai surtout à cause de mes pieds qui pendant ma puberté était très laids et on m’agaçait à cause de ma façon de marcher.… Il y avait certainement quelque chose de vrai dans tout cela, mais on m’avait rendue tellement malheureuse, et surtout comme ‘backfisch’ et j’étais parfois tellement intimidée que je ne savais plus du tout comment me tenir; si je rencontrais quelqu’un, ma première idée était toujours ‘si seulement je pouvais cacher mes pieds’” (*DS* 2:67). Ellipses in original.

[102] “[B]eaucoup de jeunes filles souffrent de ces mollets trop robustes, de ces seins trop discrets ou trop lourds, de ces hanches maigres, de cette verrue: ou bien, elles craignent quelque malformation secrète

> Toute jeune fille porte en elle toutes sortes de craintes ridicules qu’elle ose à peine s’avouer, dit Stekel. On ne saurait croire combien de jeunes filles souffrent de l’obsession d’être physiquement anormales et se tourmentent en secret parce qu’elles ne peuvent pas avoir la certitude d’être normalement bâties. Une jeune fille par exemple croyait que son ‘ouverture inférieure’ n’était pas à sa place. Elle avait cru que le commerce sexuel se faisait à travers le nombril. Elle était malheureuse que son nombril soit fermé et qu’elle ne puisse y enfoncer son doigt. Une autre se croyait hermaphrodite. Une autre se croyait estropiée et incapable d’avoir jamais de rapports sexuels” (*DS* 160–61).

Nothing natural here, and no indication that these obsessions are especially delusional: they result from an absence of accurate information, and from a lack of openness.

How do these examples bear on the claim, which is still being made, that Simone de Beauvoir did not like the female body?[103] They show something rather different: her understanding that most women did not like their own bodies, and her grasp of the reasons why.

Fourth: Beauvoir also includes two of Stekel's many accounts of the sexual molestation of children. Here again Stekel was in advance of Freud: it would be too simple to say Freud thought sexual abuse never occurred, but he treated such memories with skepticism, as screens for repressed desire for the father. Stekel was more straightforward. "Grandfathers among others are often very dangerous …":

> I was fifteen. The day before the funeral, my grandfather came to sleep at our house. The next day, my mother had already gotten out of bed, he asked me if he couldn't come into my bed to play with me; I got up immediately without answering him …. I began to be afraid of men, recounts a woman.
>
> Another young girl remembers suffering a severe shock at the age of eight or ten years old when her grandfather, an old man of seventy, groped her genitals. He took her on his lap and slid his finger into her vagina. The child felt a boundless distress [*une immense angoisse*] but never dared to speak of it. Since that time she has been very afraid of all that is sexual.[104]

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[103] Patricia Moynagh usefully summarized this controversy in 2006 as follows: "For the opinion that Beauvoir adopted a negative view of women's bodies, see, for example, O'Brien, *The Politics of Reproduction*, which claims that *The Second Sex* undermines women's capacity to reproduce. Similarly, Moira Gatens has taken Beauvoir to task for presupposing that women 'simply *are* absolutely Other' due to female biology. (See Gatens, *Feminism and Philosophy*, 27.) Elizabeth Grosz claims that Beauvoir treats the body as a thing, unlike other feminists such as Irigaray, Cixous, Spivak, Wittig, Butler, and many others who are concerned with the lived body. That Beauvoir treats the body as a thing is simply not true, though she says we may experience it as such and indeed this may be inevitable" (Moynagh, "Beauvoir on Lived Reality, Exemplary Validity, and a Method for Political Thought," 28). See below for further discussion.

[104] Parshley includes most of this one, but reads, "tampered with her genitals, inserting his finger. The child felt severe pain but was afraid to speak of the incident." "Pain" is one solution to the hard-to-translate "angoisse," which can mean both anguish and anxiety; it suggests physical pain, which seems likely enough, though it's not what the text says. "On trouvera des récits de telles expériences dans *L'asphyxie* de Violette Leduc, dans *La haine*

The doctor went outside the clinic and saw that *men really were attacking her*.[105]

However, it's in the chapter on sexual initiation that Stekel really comes into his own. If you add that chapter together with the one on "La femme mariée" (The Married Woman), where the issue of sexual initiation is reprised, you find a total of twenty-one examples of horrible first experiences of sex, of which nine end in hospitalization or suicide, and all result in ruining the woman's enjoyment of sex thereafter. And these are just Stekel's examples: Beauvoir has many more. Frigidity can result from an awful experience of the marriage bed:

> Stekel mentions some gripping examples on this point....
>
> A woman of thirty-six has suffered for fourteen years from lower back pains so unbearable that she has to take to her bed for many weeks.... She felt these violent pains for the first time on her wedding night. During the defloration, which was exceedingly painful, her husband cried out: "You deceived me, you're no longer a virgin...." The pain is the fixation of this unpleasant scene. This illness is the husband's punishment, as he has had to spend huge sums for her numerous cures.... This woman remained numb [*insensible*] during her wedding night and she has remained so

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maternelle de S. de Tervagnes et *L'orange bleue* de Yassu Gauclère. Stekel estime que les grands-pères entre autres sont souvent très dangereux.

> J'avais quinze ans. La veille de l'enterrement, mon grand-père était venu coucher à la maison. Le lendemain, ma mère s'était déjà levée, il me demanda s'il ne pourrait pas venir dans mon lit pour jouer avec moi; je me levai immédiatement sans lui répondre.... Je commençai à avoir peur des hommes, raconte une femme.
>
> Une autre jeune fille se rappelle avoir subi un choc sérieux à l'âge de huit ou dix ans quand son grand-père, un vieillard de soixante-dix ans, avait tripoté ses organes génitaux. Il l'avait prise sur ses genoux en glissant son doigt dans son vagin. L'enfant avait senti une immense angoisse mais n'osa pourtant jamais en parler. Depuis ce temps elle a eu très peur de tout ce qui est sexuel" (*DS* 2:79–80).

[105] Beauvoir's use of Stekel thus brings her closer to the position on childhood trauma now associated with Alice Miller and Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson: stories of childhood abuse, from those Freud discounted in his own practice to those we hear today, were real, they really happened, and when psychoanalytic theory becomes a means to deny this or explain it away, psychoanalysis itself becomes a form of abuse. See Miller, *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware: Society's Betrayal of the Child*, and Masson, *The Assault on Truth: Freud's Suppression of the Seduction Hypothesis*; see also Janet Malcolm, *In the Freud Archives*. That Beauvoir was concerned, in a way we would consider political, with the abuse of women and girls, is suggested by the account she gives in *La force de l'âge* of her sympathy toward a young girl, Violette Nozières, who was accused of poisoning her abusive father, and her outrage at the hypocrisy of the judges and press who in her view "s'employèrent à étouffer la vérité" (busied themselves hushing up the truth) (*FA* 153–54). This would have happened in 1933.

> throughout the time of her marriage.... Her wedding night was a terrible trauma determining her whole future life.
>
> A young woman consults me for various nervous troubles and especially an absolute frigidity.... On the wedding night, her husband uncovered her and cried out, "Oh! What short, thick legs you have!" Then he attempted coitus, which left her perfectly numb [*insensible*] and caused her only pain.... She knew quite well that the insult on her wedding night was the cause of her frigidity.
>
> Another frigid woman recounts that "during her wedding night, her husband profoundly insulted her: while watching her undress, he said, "My God but you're skinny!" Then he made up his mind to caress her. For her, the moment was unforgettable and horrible. What brutality!
>
> Mrs. Z.W. is also completely frigid. The great trauma of her wedding night was that her husband said to her, after the first intercourse, "You have a great big hole, you deceived me."[106]
>
> Mrs. H.N. ...., raised very puritanically, trembled at the thought of her wedding night. Her husband undressed her almost with violence without permitting her to go to bed. He took off his own clothes, demanding that she look at him nude and admire his penis. She hid her face in her hands. Then he exclaimed, "Why didn't you stay home, you stupid idiot [*espèce*

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[106] "Stekel rapporte à ce propos des exemples saisissants:

> Une dame de trente-six ans souffre depuis quatorze ans de douleurs lombaires si insupportables qu'elle doit garder le lit pendant plusieurs semaines.... Elle a ressenti cette violente douleur pour la première fois au cours de sa nuit de noces. Au cours de la défloration qui avait été excessivement douloureuse, son mari s'était écrié: 'Tu m'as trompé, tu n'es plus vierge....' La douleur est la fixation de cette scène pénible. Cette maladie est le châtiment du mari qui a dû dépenser de grosses sommes pour ses innombrables cures.... Cette femme est restée insensible pendant la nuit de noces et elle l'est restée pendant tout le temps de son mariage.... La nuit de noces fut pour elle un affreux traumatisme déterminant toute sa vie future.
>
> Une jeune femme me consulte pour plusieurs troubles nerveux et surtout une frigidité absolue.... Dans la nuit de noces, son mari après l'avoir découverte se serait écrié: 'Oh! comme tu as les jambes courtes et épaisses!' Ensuite, il tenta le coït qui la laissa parfaitement insensible et ne lui causa que des douleurs.... Elle savait très bien que c'était l'offense de sa nuit de noces qui était la cause de sa frigidité.
>
> Une autre femme frigide raconte que 'pendant sa nuit de noces, son mari l'aurait profondément offensée: en la voyant se déshabiller, il aurait dit: 'Mon Dieu que tu es maigre!' Ensuite, il se serait décidé à la caresser. Pour elle, ce moment aurait été inoubliable et horrible. Quelle brutalité!
>
> Mme. Z.W. est également complètement frigide. Le grand traumatisme de la nuit de noces fut que son mari lui aurait dit après le premier coït: 'Tu as un grand trou, tu m'as trompé'" (*DS* 2:161–62).

> *de gourde*]! Finally, he threw her on the bed and brutally deflowered her. Naturally she remained frigid forever.[107]

Trauma can also result from the husband's impotence: she cites an example from Freud—as summarized by Stekel.

> A patient [*une malade*] had the habit of running from one room to another room in the middle of which stood a table. Then she would arrange the tablecloth in a certain way, call the maid to approach the table, and then dismiss her.... When she tried to explain this obsession, she remembered that the cloth had a nasty stain and that she would arrange it each time so that the stain would become obvious to the maid.... It was all a reproduction of the wedding night, when the husband had showed himself less than virile. He ran from his room to hers a thousand times to try again. Embarrassed about the maid who would have to make the beds, he poured out some red ink on the sheet to make her believe there was blood.[108]

Or, personal situation, conditioned by social milieu, can engender frigidity:

> Miss G. S. ... had given herself to a man, expecting that he would marry her, but insisting on the fact "that she didn't care for marriage, she didn't want to tie herself down." She played at being the free woman. In truth, she was a slave to morality, like her whole family. But her lover believed her and never mentioned marriage. Her stubbornness became more and more intense until she became numb. When he finally asked her to marry

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[107] "Mme. H.N.... élevée très pudiquement tremblait à l'idée de sa nuit de noces. Son mari la déshabilla presque avec violence sans lui permettre de se coucher. Il se débarrassa de ses vêtements en lui demandant de le regarder nu et d'admirer son pénis. Elle dissimula sa figure dans ses mains. Alors il s'exclama: 'Pourquoi n'est-tu pas restée chez toi, espèce de gourde!' Ensuite, il la jeta sur le lit et la déflora brutalement. Naturellement, elle demeura à jamais frigide" (*DS* 2:248).

[108] "Une malade avait l'habitude de courir d'une chambre vers une autre au milieu de laquelle se trouvait une table. Elle arrangeait alors la nappe d'une certaine façon, sonnait la bonne qui devait s'approcher de la table et la congédiait.... Quand elle essaya d'expliquer cette obsession, elle se rappela que cette couverture avait une vilaine tache et qu'elle l'arrangeait chaque fois de façon que la tache devait sauter aux yeux de la bonne.... Le tout était une reproduction de la nuit de noces où le mari ne s'était pas montré viril. Il accourut mille fois de sa chambre dans la sienne pour essayer de nouveau. Ayant honte de la bonne qui devait faire les lits, il versa de l'encre rouge sur le drap pour lui faire croire qu'il y avait du sang" (*DS* 2:250).

> him, she revenged herself by declaring her lack of feeling, no longer wishing to hear of a union....
>
> A young girl of seventeen had a love-affair with a man in which she took intense pleasure. Pregnant at nineteen, she asked her lover to marry her; he was indecisive and advised her to have an abortion, which she refused to do. After three weeks, he declared that he was ready to marry her and she became his wife. But she never forgave him those three weeks of torture and became frigid...
>
> Mrs. N.M. ... learns that two days after her wedding her husband went to see an old mistress. The orgasm she had had before that disappeared forever.[109]

What emerges from this sorry litany? For one thing, Beauvoir adds to her indictment of how women are brought up, an indictment of how men behave toward them through physical and verbal brutality or simply by not being up to the task (perhaps because men's education, too, is faulty). To show how badly men treat women under patriarchy was not really Stekel's overall point; but at the end of the day, what we have is a catalogue of male sexual insensitivity to rival *The Golden Notebook.*

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[109] "Mlle. G.S.... s'était donnée à un homme en attendant qu'il l'épouse, mais en insistant sur le fait 'qu'elle ne tenait pas à un mariage, qu'elle ne voulait pas se lier.' Elle jouait à la femme libre. En vérité, elle était esclave de la morale comme toute sa famille. Mais son amant la croyait et ne parlait jamais de mariage. Son opiniâtreté s'intensifiait de plus en plus jusqu'à ce qu'elle devînt insensible. Quand il la demanda enfin en mariage, elle se vengea en lui avouant son anesthésie et en ne voulant plus entendre parler d'une union. Elle ne voulait plus être heureuse. Elle avait trop attendu.... Elle se dévorait de jalousie et attendait anxieusement le jour de sa demande pour la refuser orgueilleusement. Ensuite, elle voulut se suicider uniquement pour punir son amant avec raffinement.

Une femme qui jusque-là avait eu du plaisir avec son mari, mais très jalouse, s'imagine pendant une maladie que son mari la trompe. En rentrant chez elle, elle décide de rester froide avec son mari. Jamais plus elle ne devrait être excitée par lui puisqu'il ne l'estimait pas et n'usait d'elle qu'en cas de besoin. Depuis son retour elle était frigide. Au début elle se servait de petits trucs pour ne pas être excitée. Elle se représentait son mari faisant la cour à son amie. Mais bientôt l'orgasme fut remplacé par des douleurs....

Une jeune fille de dix-sept ans avait une liaison avec un homme et y prenait un intense plaisir. Enceinte à dix-neuf ans, elle demanda à son amant de l'épouser: il fut indécis et lui conseilla de se faire avorter, ce qu'elle refusa. Après trois semaines, il se déclara prêt à l'épouser et elle devint sa femme. Mais elle ne lui pardonna jamais ces trois semaines de tourment et devint frigide. [...]

Mrs. N.M.... apprend que son mari, deux jours après son mariage, est allé voir une ancienne maîtresse. L'orgasme qu'elle avait auparavant disparut à jamais" (*DS* 1:179).

Does it "date" *The Second Sex* that it has no chapter on violence against women? Not so much, in my opinion. It is true that "rape" does not figure in the table of contents, so if you're looking quickly for an excerpt on the topic to include on your Intro syllabus you won't find one. What you will find, though, in the chapter on "sexual initiation," is the statement that women's first experience of sex is always more or less of "un viol," a rape,[110] and a quotation from Havelock Ellis to the effect that there is more rape inside of marriage than out of it.[111] Perhaps she would not have been uncomfortable with the idea of a "rape continuum." There are moments where she almost sounds like Andrea Dworkin.[112]

But insofar as she subsumes rape, including violent rape, under a broader category I've been calling "bad sex," she is departing from a feminist view that was orthodox for many years: that rape should be understood not as sex but as violence.[113] This may raise red flags for those who remember a shallow, antifeminist backlash book by Katie Roiphe, *The Morning After: Sex, Fear, and Feminism on Campus* (1993), which argued that there was no such thing as date rape, just "bad sex."[114] It was Roiphe, I think, who started the backlash against what she called "victim feminism" (such as Take Back the Night marches). That approach was, to put it mildly, unhelpful to grass-roots activists on campuses (where rape remains epidemic); the uptake of the critique of "victim feminism" from *within* feminism, by Naomi Wolf and others, seems to me a further step backward.[115] This really is not what Beauvoir is doing, though: far from dismissing other problems as "just bad sex," her claim is that what I'm calling bad sex is *in itself* a manifestation of male power, and a very bad problem indeed.

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[110] *DS* 2:163.

[111] *DS* 2:248.

[112] For a fascinating application of Beauvoir's phenomenology to the problem of violence against women, see now Fiona Vera-Gray, *Men's Intrusion, Women's Embodiment: A Critical Analysis of Street Harassment*.

[113] I have vivid memories of a woman named Linda Morrison, at a training for campus advocates in the 1990s, raising a rolling pin high over her head and saying, "if I hit you over the head with this, nobody in their right mind would say, wow, Linda Morrison's baking. So just because a penis and a vagina are involved…."

[114] Depressingly similar arguments appear periodically in the backlash against student campus activism, for instance, the 2014 Twitter war between #notallmen and #yesallwomen.

[115] Naomi Wolf, *Fire With Fire: The New Female Power and How to Use It* (1994). For a strong analysis, see Alison Phipps, *Politics of the Body*. It's hard not to notice that criticisms of women's studies programs for "living in the past," and denunciations of "left melancholy" as if that were a character flaw—which is not at all what Walter Benjamin meant, by the way—followed soon after Roiphe's fifteen minutes of fame, and tended in the same direction. See for instance Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*.

But is she then saying—and many have claimed this—that something is wrong with *women*? Did Beauvoir hate the female body, and idealize the male body and men more generally? Quite close to passages I've been discussing is a section that has been key in those arguments and that I admit I myself have never loved. It connects back to the idea of women's sexual arousal as simultaneous attraction and repulsion—the idea Beauvoir advanced as something all the psychoanalysts, including Stekel, had failed to understand or seemed not to know.

> Feminine sex desire [*rut*] is the soft throbbing of a mollusk. Whereas man is impetuous, woman is only impatient; her expectation can become ardent without ceasing to be passive; man dives upon his prey like the eagle and the hawk; woman lies in wait like a carnivorous plant, a swamp which insects and children sink into. She is suction, leech-like suction, inhalation, she is pitch and glue, a passive appeal [*appel*], insinuating and viscous: thus, at least, she vaguely feels herself to be. This is why there is in her not only resistance against the male who claims to make her submit, but also interior conflict....[116]

Commentators, most especially Michèle Le Dœuff, have noted that the language of "holes and slime" is Sartrean language, and have found it problematic here. I certainly agree that as a description of what women's body *is*, in the in-itself, essence, Being sense of "is," this would clearly be unacceptable. (I am not a mollusk. Do not call me a mollusk.)[117] But is this such a description? Suppose we read this paragraph in the light of her statement (early in Volume 1) that "the body is not a thing, it is a situation,"[118] and note the end of its penultimate sentence: "du moins est-ce ainsi que sourdement elle se sent" (thus, at least, she vaguely feels herself to be), "sourdement" meaning, literally, "deaf-ly." Is it not, rather, a description of how it might feel like for a young girl who has been taught to hate and fear her body to be waiting in bed for a man she only sort of knows, to come and do, she's not exactly sure what, to her—although she knows she wants him to do *something* … As a phenomenological account of that lived experience (which is not everybody's, not always, need not be, should not be) it may actually be sort of … recognizable?[119]

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[116] Toril Moi's translation of this passage (*Making of an Intellectual Woman*, 168) helped me here, but I have modified it slightly. "Le rut féminin, c'est la molle palpitation d'un coquillage; tandis que l'homme a de l'impétuosité, la femme n'a que de l'impatience: son attente peut devenir ardente sans cesser d'être passive; l'homme fond sur sa proie comme l'aigle et le milan; elle guette comme la plante carnivore, le marécage où insectes et enfants s'enlisent; elle est succion, ventouse, humeuse, elle est poix et glu, un appel immobile, insinuant et visqueux: du moins est-ce ainsi que sourdement elle se sent. C'est pourquoi, il n'y a pas seulement en elle résistance contre le mâle qui prétend la soumettre, mais aussi conflit intérieur. Aux tabous, aux inhibitions provenant de son éducation et de la société se superposent des dégoûts, des refus qui ont leur source dans l'expérience érotique elle-même: les uns et les autres se renforcent mutuellement si bien qu'après le premier coït la femme est très souvent plus révoltée qu'auparavant contre son destin sexuel" (*DS* 2:167).

[117] I started to write, I am not viscous, but then again ... OK, I took a shower, so I'm not viscous *right now*. But surely if one is not at least *somewhat* viscous during intercourse, it's going to hurt like hell?

Now, the challenge of reading volume 2 is keeping one's mind fixed on the governing theoretical language that opens it: "I do not refer to any archetype, or any unchangeable essence; after most of my statements, one must understand [*sous-entendre*] 'under present conditions of education and society.'"[120] Bearing that in mind, and in the proximate context of rapes, near rapes, insults, misinformation, and general misery with which Beauvoir has just loaded us, it seems to me better to see the "mollusk" section as a description of a woman's experience of her body as conditioned by patriarchy, and not in a shallow way.

If so, this section can be read to show that women's sexual misery is a nontrivial aspect of their oppression, a crime, something worth discussing in order to change it. Part of being a woman is experiencing your own body as loathsome *to yourself*. In a culture where women still starve themselves, cut themselves, rot out their insides with induced vomiting—all phenomena Beauvoir explicitly discusses, by the way—can we really claim that this is *dated*?

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[118] *DS* 1:73. "[D]ans la perspective que j'adopte—celle de Heidegger, de Sartre, de Merleau-Ponty—si le corps n'est pas une *chose*, il est une situation: c'est notre prise sur le monde et l'esquisse de nos projets."

[119] Marso and Moynagh make the point that Beauvoir generally "makes a vital distinction between ontological claims … and phenomenological claims" (*Simone de Beauvoir's Political Thinking*, 4). For a fuller explanation of the phenomenological background see Sara Heinämaa, *Toward a Phenomenology of Sexual Difference: Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir.* See also now Jennifer McWeeny, "The Second Sex of Consciousness."

[120] "When I use the words 'woman' or 'feminine' obviously I am not referring to any archetype or any unchangeable essence; after most of my claims the reader should infer 'in the current state of education and social custom.' The point is not to set forth some eternal Truths, but to describe the common background from which every singular woman's existence takes off." [Quand j'emploie les mots 'femme' ou 'féminin' je ne me réfère évidemment à aucun archétype, à aucune immuable essence; après la plupart de mes affirmations il faut sous-entendre 'dans l'état actuel de l'éducation et des mœurs.' Il ne s'agit pas ici d'énoncer des vérités éternelles mais de décrire le fond commun sur lequel s'enlève toute existence féminine singulière (*DS* 2:9).]

Fifth: Stekel's examples as Beauvoir deploys them provide a powerful critique of bourgeois marriage. He did not mean to do this. She meant to do this. The critique is undertaken directly in the name of sexual pleasure. She meant this, too. The young girl, she says, is sold a bill of goods in the name of bourgeois "bonheur"; sex can, indeed, be an excellent thing; but "the principle of marriage is obscene." Following closely on a page-long account of a woman's disappointment on her wedding night, owing to the husband's timidity and inexperience, Beauvoir writes:

> The difficulties of the early experiences are easily overcome, when love or desire draws a complete consent from both partners. Physical love draws its power and dignity from the joy the lovers give and receive in the mutual consciousness of their freedom. Nothing they do can then be shameful, since neither of them is submitting to it: it is generously desired by both of them. But the principle of marriage is obscene because it transforms an exchange which should be founded on a spontaneous impulse into rights and duties; it gives the bodies an instrumental, thus degrading character in dooming them to take hold of their generality.[121]

The abstraction "generality" is part of an argument she is carrying on with Hegel, but that need not detain us here, since what is at stake is not at all abstract. The passage continues: "The husband is often chilled by the thought that he is carrying out a duty, and the wife feels shame, finding herself at the mercy of someone exercising his rights."[122] Sex is good but only when it is free. As she has said much earlier, "[s]exual instinct cannot be regulated … it will not let itself be integrated into the social,[123] because there is in eroticism a revolt of the instant against time, of the individual against the universal."[124] But when eroticism is pressed into service to mean, or to support, something other than itself—the state, bourgeois values, an economic bargain, or even an enduring relationship—the revolutionary character of free eroticism cannot survive. And, as she continues to describe at some length, it is not just that such relations *should* (theoretically) not be satisfying, they actually and concretely are *not* satisfying, at least after a time.

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[121] "Les difficultés des premières expériences sont aisément surmontées si l'amour ou le désir arrachent aux deux partenaires un total consentement; de la joie que se donnent et prennent les amants dans la conscience réciproque de leur liberté, l'amour physique tire sa puissance et sa dignité; alors aucune de leurs pratiques n'est infâme puisque, pour aucun, elle n'est subie mais généreusement voulue. Mais le principe du mariage est obscène parce qu'il transforme en droits et devoirs un échange qui doit être fondé sur un élan spontané; il donne aux corps en les vouant à se saisir dans leur généralité un caractère instrumental, donc dégradant" (*DS* 2:254–55).

[122] "[L]e mari est souvent glacé par l'idée qu'il accomplit un devoir, et la femme a honte de se sentir livrée à quelqu'un qui exerce sur elle un droit" (*DS* 2:255).

[123] "Le social." We might say "social system," or just "it will not let itself be socialized."

[124] "[O]n ne peut réglementer l'instinct sexuel … il ne se laisse pas intégrer au social parce qu'il y a dans l'érotisme une révolte de l'instant contre le temps, de l'individuel contre l'universel" (*DS* 1:103–4). She says something quite similar in her essay on Sade; and she

6 The Trouble with Happy

I agree with commentators who have read these passages, and a few others, as signs of a utopian strain in Beauvoir's writing about the possibilities of sex and love; both Debra Bergoffen and Karen Vintges have emphasized Beauvoir's development of a sexual ethics of mutual recognition and reciprocity between equals, which is particularly salient when contrasted with Sartre's much grimmer vision of human relationship and his devaluation of emotion.[125] For instance, at the end of her chapter on "sexual initiation": "the normal and happy flowering of female eroticism" requires that "woman succeed in surmounting her passivity and in establishing with her partner a relationship of reciprocity."[126] But Vintges and Bergoffen are concerned with love and not with sex as such—Vintges calls her chapter "A Place for Love"—and both tend to elide the part of Beauvoir's discussion that is specifically sexual, sexual in a concrete and embodied way. Vintges discusses the frigid woman only as she appears in *L'être et le néant*, and Bergoffen never mentions frigidity at all.

Beauvoir certainly did take the view that if and when sexuality was not rooted in a traditional economy with the man as taking and the woman as giving

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drew the ethical reflection in an early diary, as Margaret Simons underlines: "The diary passage (for May 6, 1927) reads in part 'I had just seen Barbier again …. [O]ne instant I held in my hands an entirely new life …. The horror of the definitive choice, is that it engages not only the self of today, but that of tomorrow, which is why basically marriage is immoral" (*Beauvoir and* The Second Sex: *Feminism, Race, and the Origins of Existentialism*, 195). See also Altman, "Beauvoir and the Sexual Revolution."

[125] A similar argument was advanced by Barbara Andrew in her paper "How Love Allows One To Be Free and Vice Versa." See Bergoffen, *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Gendered Phenomenologies, Erotic Generosities*, and Vintges, *Philosophy as Passion*, although Vintges notes that Beauvoir "retains the barb of Sartre's thinking": in general, her discussion is more nuanced and textually grounded than Bergoffen's. See also Bauer, *Beauvoir, Philosophy, & Feminism*, 224–37.

[126] "Cet épanouissement suppose que–dans l'amour, la tendresse, la sensualité–la femme réussisse à surmonter sa passivité et à établir avec son partenaire un rapport de réciprocité" (*DS* 2:189).

(or providing a service), and provided the sexual act itself could be spontaneous and autonomous, it was of enormous value, and that the changes to the world that would be necessary for this to come about were changes worth working for. The passages where Beauvoir discusses this are lovely. But they are tantalizingly brief, and they are rare; whereas the discussions of bad sex are all-too-frequent, all-too-long, all-too-ugly, and very concrete. Bergoffen herself does not claim otherwise; she says Beauvoir "speaks in more than one voice—a voice of the project that appeals to traditional Marxist-existentialist analyses, and a voice that challenges the ethic of the project by calling on the categories of generosity, the gift, and the erotic to liberate us from the perversions of patriarchal gender."[127] Within philosophy today this may count as a brave claim. But we should think about what we do when we use euphemisms like "erotic" and "embodiment" and the "bond"—a word I do not think ever appears in *The Second Sex*—to talk about, well, fucking, and orgasm, and being made to feel like a thing rather than a person. Bergoffen's epilogue notes that

> a book dedicated to the un-thought of Beauvoir's work is a paradoxical enterprise. On the one hand, the point of the book is to assert the presence of a thinking that is integral to the body of Beauvoir's philosophy. On the other hand, it recognizes that the thinking it points to is barely acknowledged by Beauvoir herself.
>
> I do not pretend to understand why the category of the erotic, the revised description of intentionality, the paradigm of generosity, and the ethic of the gift remains on the margins of Beauvoir's work.[128]

Well. There is a broader point to be made here about the tension between two sorts of approaches philosophers take to the work of earlier philosophers. One kind, often disparaged as merely "history of philosophy," "not really philosophy," undertakes to provide an accurate, historicized account of what the earlier writer was doing, to represent their views fully and fairly even when disagreeing with them. In the other kind, a small amount (sometimes a very small amount) of source material serves as stimulus or jumping-off point for the later writer's own creative and speculative thought. Both can be productive for feminism, but the latter can sometimes leave one feeling faintly crazy. ("Did she read the same book I read? Is there something wrong with my head?") Having read a number of books with titles like *Hegel's Philosophy of X* which might more accurately have been titled *Rhapsody on a Theme by Hegel*, I appreciate

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[127] Bergoffen, *Philosophy of Beauvoir,* 110.

[128] Ibid., 221.

Bergoffen's honest epilogue, but I admit to finding this approach to scholarship methodologically foreign—and somewhat perverse.

And I especially have trouble following Bergoffen's slippage from "an ethic that figures our desire for recognition according to the paradigms of generosity and the gift" to the idea that Beauvoir somehow might see (certain kinds of) marriages as worth celebrating after all.[129] This is informed by what I can only call wishful thinking. One may disagree with Beauvoir, but what she said was "the principle of marriage is obscene," and that is, I believe, what she meant.[130]

(Is the feminist critique of marriage itself dated? It is true that one rarely hears it in public any more, even from queers. One has to be so careful not to question any woman's choice. "There's nothing to be gained by offending people." Is there then nothing to be lost by being afraid of offending people?)

Perhaps here is the place to say that Beauvoir's focus on sexuality, which I've been emphasizing here, is not in contradiction to the fundamentally materialist analysis that undergirds *The Second Sex*. Sexuality and economics are tightly intertwined for her, or rather, bad sex and economics are intertwined.[131] What ruins sex for women, even after the difficulties of initiation have been overcome (and incidentally also ruins sex for men) is that it is embedded in a system of economic relationships—chiefly marriage, but her discussion is more wide-ranging (see for example her chapters on the prostitute, and on the woman in love, who is often a kept mistress rather than a wife). As long as some or most women derive their income from marriage, the economic lot of even those women who do not marry is worsened: wages for "women's work" are depressed; the temptation to add to one's low income by taking money from men for sex, directly or indirectly ("se faire aider") understandably becomes greater; this in turn influences the already unpleasant and sexualized conditions of the workplace; all of which makes marriage, even where not women's only choice, more attractive than it would otherwise be, thus perpetuating the whole system, *da capo al fine.* (If at this point you're saying, wait, they told me Beauvoir was a bourgeois liberal feminist with no class analysis … yes, they probably did tell you that. *You have to read the book*.)[132]

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[129] Ibid., 7.

[130] To be fair, Parshley's version—"marriage is obscene in principle"—somewhat weakens the axiomatic force of Beauvoir's claim in English, as a thing could be bad "in principle" ("in theory") but OK "in practice." Parshley's sentence can be read along those lines, but if Beauvoir had meant this, she would have said something like "en principe, le mariage est obscène."

[131] One might contrast this to "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm," where Koedt describes the reasons women sleep with men, fake orgasm, etc., as psychological; she doesn't discuss the economic or other pragmatic factors that frame women's sexual choices. Adrienne Rich would later restore the economic analysis to the discussion of sex in "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence."

The link forged between sex and money by the marriage system is harmful to women in at least two ways. First, because it disadvantages them with respect to men (men have power over women in bed because of all the ways men have power over women outside the bed); but second, because sex is not the sort of thing about which one should engage in economic relationships, buying, exchange. It amounts to buying and selling the body, buying and selling what is precious about individual subjectivity. That's why the utopian sentence about the instant and the individual occurs in the chapter on Marx and Engels, rather than in the chapter on Freud. Even if the bargain of marriage could somehow be made *fairer* (for instance, suppose the state paid women wages for housework including sexual services), that would not satisfy Beauvoir's objection. She remains outraged by the idea of sexuality as a "service," the idea that it should enter into a nexus of economic exchange at all.

Outrage is not too strong a word. We learn from *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* that it was Beauvoir's best friend, Zaza, who first made the connection for her, pointing out that there was no difference between bourgeois marriage and prostitution, except for the amounts of money involved. Zaza figured this out on her own, without having taken Feminist Theory, as her mother was trotting her around in hopes of arranging a money marriage, while forbidding her to have any contact (even through letters) with the man she actually loved. Beauvoir attributed her friend's tragic death to the frustration of both spirit and body, the contradictions between Zaza's lucidity about her individual needs and her loyalty to her mother's bourgeois world; I think she kept faith with that moment of disgust and insight her whole life. The last line of *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* reads: "Together we had fought against the dank quicksands of the destiny which lay in wait for her, and for a long time I felt that I had bought my freedom with her death."[133] This sounds both melodramatic and romantic, I know, but Toril Moi has observed that existentialism is a melodramatic philosophy, and second wave feminism, at least in the United States, was (despite its attack on the *selling* of romance) in some ways a romantic movement, hoping to recover the real body underneath the makeup and the trappings, to find the real love (heterosexual or otherwise) that at least potentially lay on the other side of revolution, once the "power trips" had been gotten out of the way: the hope that (as Foucault would rather snidely parody such discourses of liberation) "tomorrow sex will be good again."[134]

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[132] I'll have more to say about Beauvoir's materialism in chapter 3.

[133] "Ensemble nous avions lutté contre le destin fangeux qui nous guettait et j'ai pensé longtemps que j'avais payé ma liberté de sa mort" (*MJFR*, 503).

Or perhaps the critique of marriage would have struck Beauvoir even without Zaza's mediation. In *Une mort très douce*, she writes about her own mother: "Her case would have been enough to convince me that bourgeois marriage was an unnatural institution."[135]

So in Beauvoir's chapter about marriage, the discourse of frigidity was being deployed against the selling of bourgeois married happiness ("bonheur" was the code word, in her early diaries, for the possibility of marriage to her cousin, which while attractive in some ways would have put an end to her independence and her intellectual life). This connects to the crucial distinction in her introduction between "happiness" and "freedom," which is worth reading in its full context:

> When we look through books about woman, we note that among the viewpoints most usually adopted is the perspective of the public good or the general interest. In truth, what each writer means by this is the interest of society as he wishes to maintain or establish it. As for us, we hold that there is no public good other than that which ensures the private good of citizens; we judge institutions by the concrete opportunities they provide for individuals. But we do not confuse the idea of private interest with the notion of happiness, another frequently-encountered point of view: aren't women in a harem happier than a woman voter? Isn't the housewife happier than the woman worker [*l'ouvrière*]? It's hard to really know what the word "happiness" means, much less what authentic values it may mask [*recouvre*]; there is no way to measure someone else's happiness [*le bonheur d'autrui*] and it is always easy to declare that the situation one wants to impose on them is a happy one: in particular, those whom one condemns to stagnation, one declares happy under the pretext that happiness is immobility.... [Happiness] is therefore a notion to which we will not refer. The perspective we adopt is that of existentialist ethics. Every subject poses himself concretely, by means of projects, as a transcendence; he accomplishes his freedom only by perpetually moving through and beyond it [*dépassement*] toward other freedoms; there is no justification for present existence save its expansion toward an

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[134] Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 7, in the discussion of "the speaker's benefit." For historical context, see Didier Eribon, "Michel Foucault's Histories of Sexuality."

[135] "[Q]ue le mariage bourgeois soit une institution contre nature, son cas suffirait à m'en convaincre" (*Une mort très douce,* 51).

> infinitely open future. Each time transcendence falls back into immanence there is degradation from existence to "in itself," from freedom to facticity. This fall is a moral failing [*faute*] if the subject consents to it; if it is inflicted on the subject, it takes the shape of a frustration and an oppression; either way, it is an absolute evil.[136]

Here Beauvoir anticipates, and argues against, not just the functionalist objection that marriage (and the subjection of women more broadly) is a necessary pillar of civil society required to support the State, but also the criticism that many if not most women *prefer* to be married and actively seek happiness through marriage rather than through work and economic independence. They may well do so, but their complicity is only one more sign of their subordination. This point was well summarized by Shulamith Firestone from the perspective of 1970: "Why should a woman give up her precious seat in the cattle car for a bloody struggle she could not hope to win?"[137] Slaves, and women under patriarchy, may be told by their masters that they are happy; they may put on a good show of being happy, and may even sincerely believe it. But that is no excuse for not freeing them. Consent is no defense.

To be sure, bringing Stekel to bear on a critique of bourgeois institutions involves reading him very much against the grain. His cases tend to have rather pat happy endings, like Dr. David Reuben's. Usually she omits these; at least once she includes it (in explaining why a woman frigid in her first marriage may be sexually happier with a lover or a second husband), but then notes, "[n]ot all affairs have fairy-tale endings."[138]

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[136] "Si nous passons en revue quelques-uns des ouvrages consacrés à la femme, nous voyons qu'un des points de vue le plus souvent adopté, c'est celui du bien public, de l'intérêt général; en vérité chacun entend par là l'intérêt de la société telle qu'il souhaite la maintenir ou l'établir. Nous estimons quant à nous qu'il n'y a d'autre bien public que celui qui assure le bien privé des citoyens; c'est du point de vue des chances concrètes données aux individus que nous jugeons les institutions. Mais nous ne confondons pas non plus l'idée d'intérêt privé avec celle de bonheur; c'est là un autre point de vue qu'on rencontre fréquemment; les femmes de harem ne sont-elles pas plus heureuses qu'une électrice? La ménagère n'est-elle pas plus heureuse que l'ouvrière? On ne sait trop que le mot bonheur signifie et encore moins quelles valeurs authentiques il recouvre; il n'y a aucune possibilité de mesurer le bonheur d'autrui et il est toujours facile de déclarer heureuse la situation qu'on veut lui imposer: ceux qu'on condamne à la stagnation en particulier, on les déclare heureux sous prétexte que le bonheur est immobilité. C'est donc une notion à laquelle nous ne nous référons pas. La perspective que nous adoptons, c'est celle de la morale existentialiste. Tout sujet se pose concrètement à travers des projets comme une transcendance; il n'accomplit sa liberté que par son perpétuel dépassement vers d'autres libertés; il n'y a d'autre justification de l'existence présente que son expansion vers un avenir indéfiniment ouvert. Chaque fois que la transcendance retombe en immanence il y a dégradation de l'existence en 'en soi,' de la liberté en facticité; cette chute est une faute morale si elle est consentie par le sujet; si elle lui est infligée, elle prend la figure d'une frustration et d'une oppression; elle est dans les deux cas un mal absolu …" (*DS* 1:30–31).

[137] Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*, 1.

As I noted earlier, Stekel's name gradually drops out of the last third of volume 2, but "the frigid woman" does not. In the last sections, Beauvoir suggests that, in her misery and "rancune," the frigid woman, like the masochist, at least has a self, a "moi," and that rather than dissolving herself in eroticism, she affirms this "moi" through her resistance and may even achieve some lucidity in doing so. Apropos of the question of how "the independent woman" can satisfy her sexual desires, she considers the idea that women could simply purchase sexual services, as men have done for so long, but rejects this option as simply unsatisfying.

> Masculine pride conceals the ambiguity of the erotic drama from the male: he lies to himself easily and spontaneously. Women are more easily humiliated, more sensitive, and also more lucid: she will only succeed in blinding herself at the cost of a more calculated bad faith. To buy herself a man, even if she could afford it, usually wouldn't seem satisfying to her.[139]

Perhaps the fact that women demand more from sexual encounters than men do is not actually a character flaw. Perhaps it is a sign of her greater potential for authenticity. In her essay on Sade, she says that "infliger une jouissance" (inflicting a pleasure, or inflicting an orgasm) can be a terrible thing, a terrible defeat for the object.[140] Perhaps not to give in is better. The worst thing a woman can do is identify herself wholly with her status as object, as the narcissist and the woman in love do. It is better to be an unhappy person than a happy thing.

This all sounds very odd, doesn't it? So I was reassured to have my reading confirmed in the clearer context of an interview Beauvoir gave in 1976, that is, after she had identified herself with, and put her energies fully at the disposal of, the resurgent and vigorous Women's Liberation Movement.

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[138] "Toutes les liaisons ne s'achèvent pas ainsi en conte de fées" (*DS* 2:424).

[139] "L'orgueil viril masque au mâle les équivoques du drame érotique: il se ment spontanément; plus facilement humiliée, plus susceptible, la femme est aussi plus lucide; elle ne réussira à s'aveugler qu'au prix d'une mauvaise foi plus rusée. S'acheter un mâle, à supposer qu'elle en ait les moyens, ne lui semblera généralement pas satisfaisant" (*DS* 2:608).

[140] *Faut-il brûler Sade?*, 20.

> Alice Schwarzer: What role do you think sexuality, as it is understood today, plays in the oppression of women?
>
> Simone de Beauvoir: I think that sexuality can be a dreadful trap. Some women become frigid—but that is not perhaps the worst thing that can happen to them. The worst is for women to find sexuality so enjoyable that they become more or less slaves to men—which can be another link in the chain shackling women to men.
>
> Alice Schwarzer: If I understand you correctly, you see frigidity, given the current state of malaise created by the power relationships between men and women, as a more cautious and appropriate reaction, because it reflects this unease, and makes women less dependent on men?
>
> Simone de Beauvoir: Exactly.[141]

Notice how neatly this reverses Sartre's use of the frigid woman to define bad faith. For Beauvoir, the narcissist is in bad faith, and the woman in love is in bad faith, and the lesbian may or may not be in bad faith depending on how she "assumes her situation" (see chapter 2 below); and we can extrapolate that a woman who fakes orgasm to hang on to her meal ticket might be in bad faith. But by the end of the book, the frigid woman is simply being honest, not just with her speech, but with her whole body, refusing to understand herself as only an object.[142] This is the opposite of bad faith, this is authenticity. And this is politics.

7 Misery, Agency, Ethics

However, in summarizing Beauvoir's use of Stekel, some troubling points remain so far unaccounted for by my analysis. In the chapter on "La mère," as I mentioned earlier, she invokes his authority for the claim that morning sickness “always expresses a refusal of the child”;[143] she also takes up three bits from one of his case subjects who describes childbirth itself, and then breastfeeding, as sexually exciting, and describes this in a disturbingly erotic way.[144] Perhaps she deploys these examples to undermine and interrupt a bourgeois construction of maternal “instinct” as the automatic, innocent, redemptive attribute of “la bonne pondeuse”? The “prevaricating woman” and her friend the “malade imaginaire” (his unsympathetic version of the “hysteric”) are a much stronger presence in Stekel than in Beauvoir, but they are here, too.

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[141] Alice Schwarzer, *Simone de Beauvoir Today: Conversations 1972–1982*, 76–7.

[142] Odd as this may sound, Beauvoir has some company here. Alison Moore mentions that Andrea Dworkin "ironically … considered the invention of frigidity to be a lesser form of misogyny than the pornographic stereotypes of women as voracious nymphomaniacs, remarking, 'Perhaps this is a recognition, however perverse, that no one could possibly like or want what men do to women'" ("Invention of the UnSexual: Situating Frigidity in the History of Sexuality and in Feminist Thought," 182–83, quoting Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, 179). Moore also mentions Elizabeth Grosz "paraphrasing Luce Irigaray: 'The so-called "frigid woman" is precisely the woman whose pleasures do not fit neatly into the male-defined norms of sexual pleasure'" and then quoting Irigaray: "Many women believe they are 'frigid' and they are often told this is so. When a woman tells me she is 'frigid,' I laugh and tell her I don't know what this means" (182, quoting Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists*, 133).

Perhaps this is in line with Alice Schwarzer’s observation that Beauvoir offered women an explanation, but never an excuse.[145] On an abstract level, holding women responsible for their sexual feelings gives women back what later feminists would call *agency.* It’s hard to feel easy in one’s mind about this, remembering how mainstream American psychoanalysts blamed and abused women in the 1950s,[146] and how closer to our own time Katie Roiphe used a similar line of reasoning to undermine women’s right to say they have been sexually assaulted. But Beauvoir’s version is considerably more complex. She recognizes a terrain of human lived experience that is neither wholly given nor wholly voluntary.

I am not sure subsequent work on this problem has brought us closer to solving it, theoretically or practically. In the early 1980s, Carole Vance explained that it was a mistake to confuse the view of sexuality as socially and culturally constructed with the view that sexuality is voluntary or easy to change. “The cultural analogue is useful here, for although human cultures are arbitrary in that behavior is learned and not intrinsic, anthropologists do not believe that entire cultures can transform themselves overnight, or that individuals socialized in one cultural tradition can acculturate at will.”[147] What feminists then (in the early days of what came to be called the “sex wars”) were arguing about was not so much whether sexual patterning could be changed, but rather whether, and when, it made feminist sense to try to do so. There is a clear break between the way feminists talked about this in the early 1970s, when the point of consciousness raising was described as "starting to stop," collectively uncovering the patriarchal roots of one's inmost feelings in order to work at changing them,[148] and the way most of us (I think) now approach, for instance, the task of increasing the feminist awareness of our students in introductory women's studies classes. One does not want to be prescriptive (indeed, that would be contradictory to the idea of consciousness-raising as authentic *self*-transformation) but I do think most of us, including most of the students, are at least vaguely hoping that something will change, internally as well as externally. (Isn't this what "awareness" means?) It is not always easy to find the middle ground between silencing or "shutting other people down," and the position caricatured in *The Onion* as: "Women Now Empowered By Everything A Woman Does."[149] (Note the "now," which implies a "then.")

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[143] *DS* 2:353.

[144] *DS* 2:363, 371.

[145] Schwarzer, “Introduction,” *Simone de Beauvoir Today*, 25, but the knife of the thought is clearer in the French: “Pour moi, la vie et l’œuvre de Simone de Beauvoir sont un défi lancé aux hommes *et* aux femmes. Car si les femmes peuvent trouver dans sa théorie l’explication de leur situation, elle ne pourra jamais leur servir d’excuse” (*Simone de Beauvoir aujourd’hui: six entretiens,* 26).

[146] See e.g. Firestone, *Dialectic of Sex*, 66–72.

[147] Carole Vance, “Introduction,” *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality,* 9.

Plenty of examples support the view that Beauvoir's support and sympathy for whatever a woman did was not automatic. "There is some truth" in men's indictment of women's conduct, though "it is not dictated by her hormones" but molded by her situation.[150] In the interests of balance, I'll include my least favorite example of Beauvoir's use of Stekel, from her chapter on "La vie de société" (Social Life): three really excessive stories of women who can only experience orgasm on the gynecologist's table. I hope Stekel made these up, and I'm not entirely sorry Parshley omitted most of this.

> [T]hree-quarters of the men who are persecuted by erotomaniacs are doctors: it gives many women great exhibitionist pleasure to strip for a man.
>
> I know some women, says Stekel, who find their only satisfaction in the examination by a doctor they fancy. Among old maids especially, a large number of patients come to see the doctor to be examined "very carefully" for a minor vaginal discharge or some little problem. Others

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[148] See Robin Morgan, "Introduction," *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement* (1970), especially xxvi-xxvii. See also Campbell, "A Feminist Sexual Politics: Now You See It, Now You Don't"; Rachel DuPlessis and Ann Snitow, eds., *The Feminist Memoir Project*; Sandra Bartky, "Feminine Masochism and the Politics of Personal Transformation." In this last piece, which originally appeared in 1984, Bartky both uses, and examines, the language of ethical self-scrutiny, of "criticism and self-criticism."

[149] *The Onion*, February 19, 2003. Actually, this is not entirely a caricature: see Nina Power's analysis of Jessica Valenti's *Full Frontal Feminism: A Young Woman's Guide to Why Feminism Matters*, in *One Dimensional Woman*, 35.

[150] "Il y a dans toutes ces affirmations une vérité. Seulement les conduites que l'on dénonce ne sont pas dictées à la femme par ses hormones ni préfigurées dans les cases de son cerveau: elles sont indiquées en creux par sa situation" (*DS* 2:483).

> suffer from a cancer phobia, or fears of infection (from a toilet) and these phobias give them a pretext for being examined.

He cites among others the two following cases:

> B.V., a rich old maid of forty-three, goes to see a doctor once a month, after her period, demanding a very careful exam because she thought something was wrong. Each month she picks a new doctor and each time plays out the same scene. The doctor asks her to undress and lie down on the table or the couch. She refuses, saying she is too modest, that it is against nature! The doctor forces her or gently persuades her, she undresses, finally, explaining that she is a virgin and that he must be careful not to hurt her. He promises to give her a rectal exam. Often the orgasm appears as soon as the examination begins; it is repeated, and intensifies, during the rectal exam. She always goes under a false name and pays immediately.... She admits that she has played with the idea of being raped by a doctor....
>
> Mrs. L.M., thirty-eight, married, tells me she is completely sexually numb with her husband. She comes to be analyzed. Only after two sessions does she admit to having a lover. But he does not succeed in bringing her to orgasm. She only has them when being examined by a gynecologist. (Her father was a gynecologist!) Nearly every second or third session, she is driven to go to a doctor and ask for an examination. Sometimes she asks for a treatment, and those are her happiest times. The last time, a gynecologist gave her a long massage because of a supposedly prolapsed uterus. Every massage led to many orgasms. She explains her passion for these examinations by the first one she ever had, which brought on the first orgasm of her life....
>
> A woman can easily imagine that the man to whom she has bared herself has been impressed by her physical charms or her beautiful soul, and so in pathological cases she persuades herself that the priest or the doctor is in love with her. Even if she is normal, she gets the impression that a subtle connection has been forged between him and her; she revels in respectful obedience; sometimes, however, she draws from this a confidence that helps her to accept her life.[151]

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[151] "[L]es trois quarts des hommes que persécutent les érotomanes sont des médecins; dénuder son corps devant un homme représente pour maintes femmes un grand plaisir exhibitionniste.

What are we to make of this? Is it simply a feature of the encyclopedic nature of *The Second Sex*, its "nothing human is alien to me" quality, which, I am arguing, interrupts and problematizes any idea that a unitary, naturalized account of "woman" can be given? It may be more significant that the women who love doctors too much are highly respectable bourgeoises, and that these examples come in the chapter on "La vie de société" (Parshley translates this as "social life," but "société" here refers more specifically an uppercrust form of life, as in our phrase "high society"). It is as if to say: see, your nice normal banal "bonheur" has this kind of rot at its root, drives women to this kind of insanity. Beauvoir didn't hate women, but she sure didn't like *ladies* very much. Those

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> Je connais quelques femmes, dit Stekel, qui trouvent leur seule satisfaction dans l'examen par un médecin qui leur est sympathique. C'est particulièrement parmi les vieilles filles qu'on trouve un grand nombre de malades qui viennent voir le médecin pour se faire examiner 'très soigneusement' pour des pertes sans importance ou pour un trouble quelconque. D'autres souffrent de la phobie du cancer ou des infections (par les W.-C.) et ces phobies leur donnent un prétexte à se faire examiner.

Il cite entre autres les deux cas suivants:

> Une vielle fille, B.V. ...., quarante-trois ans, riche, va voir un médecin une fois par mois, après ses règles, en exigeant un examen très soigneux parce qu'elle croyait que quelque chose n'allait pas. Elle change chaque fois de médecin et joue chaque fois la même comédie. Le médecin lui demande de se déshabiller et de se coucher sur la table ou le divan. Elle s'y refuse en disant qu'elle est trop pudique, qu'elle ne peut pas faire une chose pareille, que c'est contre la nature! Le médecin la force ou la persuade doucement, elle se déshabille enfin, lui expliquant qu'elle est vierge et qu'il ne devrait pas la blesser. Il lui promet de faire un toucher rectal. Souvent l'orgasme se produit dès l'examen du médecin; il se répète, intensifié, pendant le toucher rectal. Elle se présente toujours sous un faux nom et paye de suite.... Elle avoue qu'elle a joué avec l'espoir d'être violée par un médecin....
>
> Mme. L.M...., trente-huit ans, mariée, me dit être complètement insensible auprès de son mari. Elle vient se faire analyser. Après deux séances seulement, elle m'avoue avoir un amant. Mais il n'arrivait pas à lui faire atteindre l'orgasme. Elle n'en avait qu'en se faisant examiner par un gynécologue. (Son père était gynécologue!) Toutes les deux ou trois séances à peu près, elle était poussée par le besoin d'aller chez un médecin pour demander un examen. De temps en temps, elle demandait un traitement et c'était les époques les plus heureuses. La dernière fois, un gynécologue l'avait massée longtemps à cause d'une prétendue descente de la matrice. Chaque massage avait entraîné plusieurs orgasmes. Elle explique sa passion pour ces examens par le premier toucher qui avait provoqué le premier orgasme de sa vie....

La femme s'imagine facilement que l'homme à qui elle s'est exhibée a été impressionné par son charme physique ou la beauté de son âme et ainsi se persuade-t-elle, dans les cas pathologiques, être aimée du prêtre ou du médecin. Même si elle est normale, elle a l'impression qu'entre lui et elle existe un lien subtil; elle se complaît dans une respectueuse obéissance; parfois, d'ailleurs, elle y puise une sécurité qui l'aide à accepter sa vie" (*DS* 2:417–18).

who complain that she spends too much of the book talking about her class of origin overlook the special hostility she shows toward that milieu.

Parshley does something interesting here. He cuts the passage way down and eliminates the quotations, substituting this comparatively dignified paraphrase: "Stekel reports many cases of this kind: especially old maids who come to the doctor for trifling reasons and ask for 'a very thorough examination,' or go from one gynecologist to another in search of 'massage' or 'treatment'; some frigid wives experience orgasm during medical examination only." But then off his own bat he adds a footnote:

> Dr. R.L. Dickinson, famous American gynecologist, reports a number of cases of the same kind in his works (with Lura Beam) *A Thousand Marriages* (1931) and *The Single Woman* (1934). Many patients simply displayed more or less eroticism, but others made such pests of themselves that the doctor would refuse further treatment, or he would cool their ardor by hurting them intentionally. TR.[152]

Words fail me, or rather, the sort of words that come to me are not very scholarly (we *won't* go *back* we'll *never* go *back* … and for these and lots of other reasons …). Presumably it was not part of Parshley's project (nor Stekel's) to underscore the sadism of the medical profession. I would like to think Parshley's footnote is at cross-purposes with Beauvoir's intention, but I also wish I could be clearer about what her intention was.[153]

The strange examples are not entirely gratuitous, however, because they connect to Beauvoir's important idea that the effects of sexual dysphoria are problematic, not just psychologically, but ethically.

> The great danger our social customs create for the child, is that the mother to whom he is entrusted (bound hand and foot) is almost always an unsatisfied woman. Some would claim that women have less need of sexual satisfaction than men do; nothing is more dubious. Repressed women make bitter wives, sadistic mothers, fanatical housekeepers, unhappy, dangerous creatures. In any case, even if her desires happened to

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[152] *The Second Sex*, trans. Parshley, 547.

[153] It's also hard not to wonder how Stekel, Dickinson, etc., can be so sure that the woman on their examining table is in love with them. Does she display "objective signs of pleasure," such as "viscosity"? Faugh. Think I'll postpone that Pap smear a couple more decades after all.

> be less frequent than a man's, that's no reason to find it superfluous for her to satisfy them.[154]

In other words, sexual frustration is a harm, and the harmed woman cannot be good.

Now that a new, complete, and accurate translation is available, it may seem otiose to keep going after Parshley, who may well have been trying to help: he may have been more aware than Beauvoir that Stekel was a sketchy authority and that some of these cases could be spurious. He also might have seen it as a writing problem that Stekel's voice comes to dominate and Beauvoir's gets lost. Around these same issues, he takes out many other quotations: a long passage about bad sex in marriage quoted from *Thérèse Desqueyroux*, a novel by Beauvoir's enemy Mauriac; oodles of Sophie Tolstoy; long strands of Hegel.... Insofar as I argue that the right to sexual subjectivity was part of what American feminists latched on to in *The Second Sex*, enough of Beauvoir's point must have been left for this message to carry. What has vanished, however, is the concreteness and plausibility of the women's misery. Oddly, it is the voices of women who are taken away (Stekel's patient, Mauriac's heroine, as well as Tolstoy's wife). The texture is changed. Yes, these chapters were redundant, but redundancy is the point. These are not isolated, odd, or pathological cases. Rather, they feed into Beauvoir's composite account of the "lived experience" of being a woman.[155] In a way, this is the women's liberation poster ("for these and other reasons") writ large: it's not that every injury on the list happened to every woman, or that there is even one woman to whom all the injuries on the poster occurred, as is underscored by the fact that some of the items contradict others. Rather, the family resemblance among all these grievances becomes an urgent call to collective action: not an assertion that all women *are* something, but a resolution to *do* something.

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[154] "Le grand danger que nos mœurs font courir à l'enfant, c'est que la mère à qui on le confie pieds et poings liés est presque toujours une femme insatisfaite" (*DS* 2:372).

"On prétend que la femme a moins besoin que l'homme de l'activité sexuelle: rien n'est moins sûr. Les femmes refoulées font des épouses acariâtres, des mères sadiques, des ménagères maniaques, des créatures malheureuses et dangereuses; en tout cas, ses désirs fussent-ils plus rares, ce n'est pas une raison pour trouver superflu qu'elle les satisfasse" (*DS* 2:426).

[155] Patricia Moynaugh has repurposed Kant's idea of "exemplary validity" to explain this very well: "Beauvoir's examples interest us because they transcend themselves yet remain situated.... [She] describes experiences that have been lived by actual women, and she situates them in the moment, both in *The Second Sex* and in her fiction.... [E]xamples pay tribute to the utter and complete singularity of any one event or life ... yet her examples go beyond themselves. For all their specificity, which Beauvoir is intent on preserving, her examples are not contained to themselves because they expose the oppression of women in its 'endless variety and monotonous similarity'" ("Beauvoir on Lived Reality," 24).

To say this another way: redundancy demonstrates mimetically that women's oppression is overdetermined. One girl gets oppressed one way; another girl escapes that but gets oppressed in a different way; one way or another, it's coming at/for you. Also: if one kind of argument doesn't convince you, another may: there's a dissertation-y amount of evidence provided here, perhaps reflecting Beauvoir's awareness that she would not be taken at her bare word. She knew this would be controversial, and it was.

Despite the new translation, it is still important to attend to the criticisms of the old one made by Moi and Fallaize because, as Moi shows, subsequent work in feminist theory (Penelope Deutscher, Tina Chanter, Judith Butler) seem to have used it, and thus misread Beauvoir.[156] By changing the texture of Beauvoir's writing, Parshley's revisions make Beauvoir's discussion more homogenous than it originally was. This is not "merely" a question of style. Some commentators have worried that despite Beauvoir's announced intention of de-naturalizing and de-essentializing women's experience, the account of what "elle" (she) goes through in the course of volume 2 slips back from the experiences of women to the Experience of Woman, as a reified thing. I too would find this troubling were it so; I don't think it is; but it is truer of Parshley's Beauvoir than of Beauvoir herself.

As I see it, another kind of unhelpful flattening results from analyses that emphasize Beauvoir's utopian account of erotic possibilities, rather than her depressing catalogue of the difficulties and impasses of women's sexual situation. Disciplinary differences may account for some of this: Bergoffen, Vintges, Andrew, and Bauer approach *The Second Sex* by way of Beauvoir's earlier philosophical essays, whereas my first point of entry to her work is more literary. But their emphasis is also more in keeping with the trend of feminist theory to locate and foreground women's agency wherever possible, in the face of accusations about "victim feminism" or "left melancholy." Like finding "continuities" with the later work of Irigaray and Kristeva, or with the "ethic of care," this looks like an attempt to update her and underscore her continuing relevance, not just to make ourselves feel better.

But since my project is historical, it seems important to also underscore that the impetus to second-wave feminism involved pointing out over and over that the situation of woman was miserable, whatever *Redbook* and *Mademoiselle* might say, and (by multiplying examples from different genres and different walks of life) to convince women that their misery was a collective feature of their unjust situation, not a symptom of some shameful individual neurosis.[157] The claim of 1970s feminists, at least in the United States, was partly an assertion of a woman's *right to be unhappy*, to understand her unhappiness as unhappiness, rather than depression, maladjustment, or some other character flaw. One could take this back even farther: Lucy Stone said in 1855 that "disappointment is the lot of women," adding that "it shall be the business of my life to deepen this disappointment in every woman's heart until she bows down to it no longer."[158] And one could note that the "right to be unhappy" has been withheld particularly, though differently, from American women of color, as Tamara Beauboeuf-Lafontant shows in *Behind the Mask of the Strong Black Woman*.

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[156] "While We Wait," 1022–25. See also Winter, "L'essentialisation de l'altérité," 77–9, 81.

Besides, *The Second Sex* does, in fact, include a strong account of women's agency—possibly *too* strong for some people's tastes. Beauvoir's analysis of women's "complicity" with their status as Other holds women responsible, as full human beings and ethical agents, for their own success or failure, within the horizons of possibility offered to them. This insistence motivates passages that have looked to some like they are "against women" or "blaming women." The question is, *which* women? A properly intersectional analysis, of the sort feminists of color and transnational feminists have been demanding, requires us to admit that women's "agency" is not always well-deployed, and that the agency of some women involves the subordination of other women.[159] Such an account will include the "adaptive preferences" of women who make hard choices from among an unenviably impoverished menu of options—as Offred in *The Handmaid's Tale* puts it, explaining why she doesn't use the word "rape" to describe what's happening to her, "[t]here wasn't a lot of choice, but there was some, and this is what I chose."[160] It must also cover the actions some women take that do direct and serious harm to other women, whether or not it is their fully conscious intention to do so. I think Beauvoir already saw this in the 1940s.

Later parts of this book will speak more fully to claims that Beauvoir failed to understand the constraints less privileged women were under, claims I agree with Sonia Kruks and others are unfair. My observation now is simply this: one especially productive feature of Beauvoir's approach is her recognition that the question of "agency" is not the only question, and does not exhaust feminist ethical and political analysis: remember that she says, "[t]his fall [from freedom to facticity] is a moral failing if the subject consents to it; if it is inflicted on the subject, it takes the shape of a frustration and an oppression; *either way, it is an absolute evil*."[161] There is something refreshing about the reminder that identifying an evil thing, and working to get rid of it, is actually more important than figuring out whose fault it was and how it came about.[162] It's not that agency doesn't matter, it's that the concept of harm is *broader* than the question of agency, and we should not be sidetracked into taking the part for the whole.

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[157] See Altman, "Beyond Trashiness."

[158] Remark made at a National Woman's Rights Convention in Cincinnati, Ohio, as quoted in Miriam Schneir, ed., *Feminism: The Essential Historical Writings*, 106.

[159] See Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," and Chandra Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse." I'll discuss this more fully in later chapters.

[160] Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, 94. See also Serene Khader, *Adaptive Preferences and Women's Empowerment*.

Truth to tell, I find it hard to see how one could speak of a feminist ethics, let alone a feminist politics, without some conception of women as agents making choices, however constrained those choices may sometimes be; and it must be possible for women to make *bad* ethical choices if it possible for women to make *good* ones. The distinction between ethics and politics was one Beauvoir did not make, either before or after she began to call herself a feminist. I see no good reason to make that distinction, either. As Chris Cuomo has remarked, "feminism is an ethical system."[163]

If we accept all this, we will next have to accept the need to specify a content to our ethical judgment, and take responsibility for that, rather than quasi-democratically falling back on "agency" as if that were the ultimate feminist good. For instance, we might say that, on a collective level, women's subordination was connected to the commodification of sexuality whether through marriage or through sex slavery/trafficking or through anything in between. Women may *feel* powerful through sexual performance and exchange and yet not actually *be* powerful (they could be wrong about it). Or, some individual women might *genuinely* be "empowered" through complicity, but the individual agency of some women is detrimental to other women *and to the interests of*

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[161] Emphasis added. "Chaque fois que la transcendance retombe en immanence il y a dégradation de l'existence en 'en soi,' de la liberté en facticité; cette chute est une faute morale si elle est consentie par le sujet; si elle lui est infligée, elle prend la figure d'une frustration et d'une oppression; *elle est dans les deux cas un mal absolu*" (*DS* 1:31).

[162] As she said in another context, "[t]o look for the reasons why one should not stamp on a man's face is to accept stamping on his face." [Chercher les raisons pour lesquelles il ne faut pas marcher sur la figure d'un homme, c'est accepter qu'on lui marche sur la figure (*FCh* 101, *FCirc* 77, translation modified).]

[163] NWSA Conference, Program Administration and Development Workshop, November 12, 2009, Atlanta, Georgia.

women as a class.[164] What ethical content we specify is left open, but, once we specify it, we will have to admit that we disagree, say what our values are, and acknowledge that, as Beauvoir says in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* (*The Ethics of Ambiguity*) and elsewhere, to work toward one good may damage another.[165]

Like it or not, the root of Beauvoir's claim for women's agency was in the existentialist account of freedom. This account has usually been labelled "Sartrean," and Sartre has become so unpopular now within both feminism and philosophy that it may be hard to remember his value for an earlier generation of feminist ethicists (like Sandra Bartky and Iris Marion Young), not to mention the successful political mobilizations that have been taken up in his name.[166] But Foucault scholar and queer theorist Didier Eribon takes his cue from Sartre;[167] and the young British activist (and philosopher) Nina Power, who came to public attention around 2011 as a blogger for student street protests, startled me in a talk at Oxford by saying nonchalantly, as if it were a matter of course, "well, I'm an existentialist…" It's almost enough to make one stop believing in the idea of intellectual history, or at least the idea of "generations."

Sartre's own writing certainly deserves the feminist critiques it has attracted. But the fact that in academic circles it has become slightly embarrassing to use words like "freedom" and "liberation" *at all* strikes me as seriously problematic. Do we say "agency" now simply to avoid saying "freedom," as we say "the body" or "the erotic" to avoid saying "fucking," let alone "frigidity"? (To avoid being associated with braless bead-wearing hairy-legged viragos who actually meant it when they said they didn't want to get married, that marriage was a trap, that the only way to win the "Beauty Myth" game was to *refuse to play*?) Well, yes, it's a fairly terrifying idea, freedom. As the existentialists said.

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[164] See Altman and Kerry Pannell, "Policy Gaps and Theory Gaps: Women and Migrant Domestic Labor."

[165] See Kruks, "Introduction to 'Moral Idealism and Political Realism,'" and *Simone de Beauvoir and The Politics of Ambiguity*. I'll discuss *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* in more detail in chapter 3.

[166] Bartky, for instance, in explaining that "feminist consciousness, in large measure, is an anguished consciousness," quotes *L'être et le néant*: "It is on a day that we can conceive of a different state of affairs that a new light falls on our troubles and we *decide* they are unbearable" ("Toward a Phenomenology of Feminist Consciousness," 14).

[167] Eribon's collection *Papiers d'identité* takes its epigraph from Sartre: "L'important n'est pas ce qu'on fait de nous, mais ce que nous faisons nous-même de ce qu'on a fait de nous" (What matters isn't what they make of us, but what we make of what they make of us).

8 Therapy and Self-Improvement

Once we overcome our anxiety about genre—there's no reason good philosophy cannot be written about bad sex—we might note without concern that popular sexologists and even marriage manuals from the 1950s and 1960s refer back to Beauvoir. (I find this less surprising now that I've seen Judith Coffin's excellent article documenting how the reception of Beauvoir's work was intertwined with the reception of Kinsey's.)

Anne Koedt does not mention *The Second Sex*. But in 1964, a little book called *The Sexually Responsive Woman*, by Phyllis and Eberhard Kronhausen, was published by the slightly disreputable Grove Press, with an approving (though brief) preface by Beauvoir.[168] Perhaps it is fanciful to see this title as a deliberate refutation of Caprio's *Sexually [In]Adequate Female*: the word "responsive" clearly places it as one of a spate of books popularizing and domesticating the research of Masters and Johnson, which was published as *Human Sexual Response* (Grove had quite a line-up of these).[169] The authors, a married couple and both therapists, do set out in some detail the Masters and Johnson findings, which (by the way) corroborated through measurement what Beauvoir had said in *The Second Sex* about the timing of woman's arousal. They are very critical of Freud and psychoanalysis, very much pro-orgasm, and very clear about the sorts of stimulation that are effective in bringing it about. Most of the book, however, is given over to the life histories of five women chosen as representative: they are called "The More-Than-Average-Housewife," "The Married Lesbian," "The Doctor's Wife," "The Sexual Sophisticate," and "The Female Psychoanalyst." Certainly, as with Stekel, someone could read and buy it for the spicy stories (this was what kept Grove in business), and the chapter titled "The Struggle for Orgasm" is not at all political, but otherwise there is little for a feminist of any era to object to. I find it interesting that Beauvoir continued to support this kind of work. I don't know what position she would have taken in the "sex wars" of the 1980s and 1990s, but we can be pretty sure she wouldn't have taken the position that they were irrelevant.

So is *The Second Sex* a self-help book? Hardly. For one thing, it doesn't offer any *help*. As I said earlier, there's no use of psychoanalysis as a therapeutic discourse (it is mainly descriptive, occasionally explanatory), nor does she make any allusion to possible therapeutic uses of existentialist philosophy. And she appears to have had some suspicion of the self-help genre herself.

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[168] Phyllis Kronhausen and Eberhard Kronhausen, *The Sexually Responsive Woman*. Flap copy tells us they are also "authors of the widely read and much-discussed *Pornography and the Law*."

[169] See Paul Robinson, *The Modernization of Sex: Havelock Ellis, Alfred Kinsey, William Masters and Virginia Johnson*.

> Americans today, who are quite respectful of the institution of marriage and also individualists, are redoubling their efforts to integrate sexuality with wedded life. Each year a great many works are published about starting married life, designed to teach spouses to adapt to one other, and especially to teach the man how to create a happy harmony with his wife. Psychoanalysts and doctors take the role of "marriage counselors," and it is acknowledged that, yes, the wife *too* has a right to pleasure, and the man should be acquainted with the best techniques to arrange it for her. But we have seen that sexual success is not just a matter of technique. Even if the young man knows by heart a hundred manuals like *What Every Husband Should Know*, *The Secret of Conjugal Bliss*, and *Love Without Fear*, he still cannot be sure of getting his new wife to love him. For she reacts to the situation as a whole. And traditional marriage hardly creates the most conducive conditions for female eroticism to awake and bloom.[170]

To get from bad sex to good sex will require more than an earnest "good faith" effort: institutions will have to change.

And in fact Beauvoir's view of good sex is very demanding. Good sex must be autonomous, spontaneous, free—Bergoffen is right to quote the bit about the "instant." But the further implication is that good sex will also be episodic, that there is no way to stabilize it as part of a permanent arrangement. Couples who've been together for a long time, she says, tend to fall into something resembling incest or mutual masturbation; fantasizing about one person while you're in bed with another, she calls a "comédie" (playacting); "infliger une jouissance" can be a power play; being deliberately, almost professionally, "good at" giving another person pleasure, as Elisabeth's boy-toy Guimiot does in *L'invitée*, is faintly disgusting; another form of ersatz sexuality is the pursuit of sexual experience in the absence of genuine and deep desire (she says American girls are particularly prone to this, but in *Les mandarins* something very similar is attributed to Nadine).[171] So it seems unlikely that she would have thought very highly of the "sensate focus" exercises recommended by Masters and Johnson, or of the books on "improving sexual communication" that filled the shelves and tables of the Barnes and Noble in its heyday. Perversely, all these approaches are *too conscious*, too deliberate and intentional, not truly intersubjective. *Good sex cannot be a project*. So where Beauvoir's statement of the *problems* draws on and in some ways resembles the sexological sources foregrounded by self-help (she even uses some Kinsey statistics about the timing of orgasm), she wouldn't have liked any of their *answers*. As Vintges notes, "when a young woman came to see her and asked advice, Beauvoir told her to think about things other than herself, and to read rather than to talk."[172]

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[170] "[L]es Américains d'aujourd'hui, qui sont à la fois respectueux de l'institution conjugale et individualistes, multiplient les efforts d'intégration de la sexualité au mariage. Chaque année paraissent quantité d'ouvrages d'initiation à la vie conjugale destinés à enseigner aux époux à s'adapter l'un à l'autre, et singulièrement à enseigner à l'homme comment créer avec la femme une heureuse harmonie. Des psychanalystes, des médecins jouent le rôle de 'conseillers conjugaux'; il est admis que la femme a, elle aussi, droit au plaisir et que l'homme doit connaître les techniques susceptibles de le lui procurer. Mais on a vu que la réussite sexuelle n'est pas seulement une affaire de technique. Le jeune homme eût-il appris par cœur vingt manuels tels que *Ce que tout mari doit savoir*, *Le secret du bonheur conjugal*, *L'amour sans peur*, il n'est pas certain qu'il saura pour autant se faire aimer de sa nouvelle épouse. C'est à l'ensemble de la situation psychologique que celle-ci réagit. Et le mariage traditionnel est loin de créer les conditions les plus favorables à l'éveil et à l'épanouissement de l'érotisme féminin" (*DS* 2:244).

Like much else, this goes back to the distinction between "happy" and "free." It seems to me that Beauvoir's view of "happiness" owes a lot to the trip to the United States she recorded in *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947* (*America Day by Day 1947*), which overlapped with the writing of *The Second Sex*. I agree with Edward Fullbrook that people should pay more attention to that book, which he says "stands in relation to *The Second Sex*, rather like Darwin's *The Voyage of the Beagle* does to *The Origin of Species*."[173] A lucid, but not unloving, critique of American popular culture, at the height of McCarthyism and the Jim Crow South, it could be compared to William Whyte's *The Organization Man* in some ways, to Adorno's *Minima Moralia* in others. Beauvoir talks there about "bookstores where men and women buy books with promising titles: *The Secret of Happiness*, *Happiness in Five Lessons*," and also about the "mystification" practiced by radio therapists, and the general tendency of Americans to see nonconforming individuals as "cases."[174] With particular reference to returning GIs and the treatment of what's now called "post-traumatic stress syndrome," she observes:

> Psychoanalysis is a vast enterprise of social recuperation; its sole aim is to enable each citizen to take up a useful place in society.... To be

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[171] *DS* 2:256–58, 177; *L'invitée*, 107–10; *Les mandarins* 2:174–75.

[172] Vintges, *Philosophy as Passion*, 90.

[173] Fullbrook, "Patriarchy's History of Ideas," 125.

[174] *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947* (hereinafter *AJ*), 90–1.

> well-adapted, here, means in truth to hand in one's resignation from oneself; to be happy is to persist stubbornly in blinding oneself. Many things would change for Americans if they could only admit that there is unhappiness on earth, and that unhappiness is not *a priori* a crime.[175]

What's interesting is that while Beauvoir dismisses "the pursuit of happiness," which can result from and/or lead to false consciousness, bad faith, complicity, etc., she does not dismiss the question of unhappiness, which results from objective conditions of unfreedom, and is destructive of both the self and others. Unhappiness presumes the possibility of happiness, which lies somewhere over the horizon: one cannot and should not will it into existence, any more than one should "infliger une jouissance." Nonetheless, as an American product of that same vintage insisted, *attention must be paid.*

These ideas seem unlikely to sell any mugs or t-shirts for the Feminist Majority. But they resonate with Arlie Hochshild's *The Managed Heart*, Barbara Ehrenreich's *Bright-Sided: How the Relentless Promotion of Positive Thinking Has Undermined America* and, in a different way, Sara Ahmed's *Promise of Happiness*, which warns particularly of the ways "happiness is used to justify oppression."[176]

Where does this leave psychoanalysis? One irony of teaching Beauvoir now is that it may be the first exposure to Freud students have ever had—whether because feminist critiques have been successful, or for more depressing reasons. It feels slightly insane to have to *introduce* students to the idea of "penis envy" in order to show them what nonsense it is: their faces show pretty clearly that they can figure that out for themselves. The smug determinists feminism must now confront are not psychoanalysts but neuroscientists and their pill-pushing accomplices.

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[175] "La psychanalyse est une vaste entreprise de récupération sociale; son seul but c'est de permettre à chaque citoyen de reprendre une place utile dans la société.… On comprend bien qu'après avoir respiré pendant toute leur jeunesse l'optimisme américain, après avoir vécu dans un pays qui nie l'existence du mal, ces jeunes gens ont étés bouleversés par une brusque confrontation avec le monde en guerre, et leur expérience ne s'intègre plus au système dans lequel il leur faut à nouveau se situer. Ceux qui ont le courage de continuer à croire en cette expérience représentent une force neuve; mais beaucoup se sentent simplement perdus. On les regardera comme guéris quand ils auront perdu la conscience d'être perdus. S'adapter, ici, c'est en vérité se démettre de soi-même; être heureux, c'est savoir s'aveugler avec entêtement. Beaucoup de choses seraient changées chez les Américains s'ils voulaient bien admettre qu'il y a du malheur sur terre et que le malheur n'est pas *a priori* un crime" (*AJ* 93).

[176] Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, 2. Ahmed starts from Beauvoir, but also takes aim at what she sees as a *recent* "happiness turn."

But I still think it's worth engaging with the part of Beauvoir's uptake of Freud that was not just critique. An examination of the issues of *Les Temps Modernes* around the time she was working on, and serially publishing, *The Second Sex*, shows a more profound and more eclectic engagement with his work than has previously been assumed.[177] And I find it a promising development that European psychoanalysts seem to have become interested in Beauvoir, and especially that a number of them seem to be recognizing the value of a feminist psychoanalysis that would not be Lacanian.[178] Élisabeth Roudinesco notes that, toward the end of her life, Beauvoir expressed a wish that she had written a study of psychoanalysis from woman's perspective; Roudinesco points out that actually, she had already done so. Those who want "les apports de la psychanalyse" without the gender normativity may find some cues in Beauvoir's work, even now.

It's not usually noted that Anne, the heroine of *Les mandarins*, is working on a book—when another character asks her if she too is a writer, she answers, "Thank God, no!"[179] And commentators have sometimes criticized Beauvoir for not creating a model Woman Writer in this character with whom she shares so much else of her life. Nonetheless there are a few points where we see Anne working on "mon livre," which is an attempt to bring together the insights of Marxism and psychoanalysis. Perhaps the book she was working on was *The Second Sex*. Or perhaps (in spite of the energy expended on the question in the 1970s and 1980s) that book remains to be written.

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[177] For instance, in issue 32 (May 1948), the first extract from what would become *Le deuxième sexe* appears under the title "La femme et les mythes," described in a footnote as "extrait d'un ouvrage à paraître sur la situation de la femme." The same issue also includes a long extract by Freud himself, "Moïse et son peuple," translated by Annie Merma—it seems to be from the third part of *Moses and Monotheism*. What interests me is the unsigned introductory note, which contextualizes it and ends with the following paragraph:

> As always, one might find some of the interpretations Freud gives to be narrow. Rather than explaining human conflict by sexual conflict, one might reintegrate the hatred of the father to human aggression. The study by Simone de Beauvoir, published in this issue, shows precisely, on certain points, how sexuality is taken up in human conflicts which do not go beyond it ["dépassent" translates the Hegelian term "Aufhebung"] but rather, so to speak, set it in motion. However, these very conceptions were not foreign to Freud and in any case are only made possible by his work, to which, in publishing these texts, we wish to pay homage." [Comme toujours, on peut trouver ici que certaines interprétations données par Freud sont étroites. Au lieu d'expliquer le conflit humain par le conflit sexuel, on pourrait réintégrer la haine du père à l'agressivité humaine. L'étude de Simone de Beauvoir publiée dans ce même numéro montre justement, sur certains points, comment la sexualité est reprise dans des conflits humains qui ne la dépassent pas, mais qui, pour ainsi dire, l'animent. Cependant, ces conceptions mêmes ne sont pas étrangères à Freud et, en tout cas, elles n'ont été rendues possibles que par son œuvre, à laquelle, en publiant ces textes, nous voudrions rendre hommage.]

[178] See Élisabeth Roudinesco, Juliet Mitchell, Jacqueline Rose, and other contributors to the excellent *Simone de Beauvoir et la psychanalyse*, edited by Pierre Bras and Michel Kail.

[179] *Les mandarins*, 52.

9 Last Thoughts

So what have we learned from the frigid woman, that can still matter to us today?

First, that women's sexual and bodily unhappiness should not be disregarded. (Date rape, anorexia.)

Second: that we should be suspicious of the promises of therapy and self-help, even as we recognize that we cannot hope to extricate feminism from them. (Oprah, *Glamour* magazine.)[180] We should work with this rather than isolating ourselves. Because as long as women are perceived as having to choose between their emancipation as human subjects on the one hand, and the possibility of sexual and personal happiness on the other, feminism cannot occur, as we who try to teach it to the young are well aware.

In her youth, Simone de Beauvoir saw herself as facing this choice, between her independent, intellectual self and the possibility of "bonheur," because marriage to her bourgeois cousin Jacques and a future life as a "femme d'intérieur" would have meant sacrificing literally everything else she cared about. Later she met Sartre and discovered (she says) that she could have both. Vintges suggests that Beauvoir's contribution to ethics is partly her creation of her own life as "exemplary," her description of an "art of living," and I think this is right; but some who have taken this too literally ("Simone de Beauvoir, Live like Her")—have taken it as if it were self-help, in fact—have ended up disappointed in her, or in Sartre (and his New Left avatars), or in themselves.[181] It might make more sense to look at what she says about this "choice" on the level of theory, which I think is roughly the following: the opposition is false from the start, bourgeois happiness is a sell, because oppressed sex is bad sex.

Third: you can use a bad tool to do a good task.

Michèle Le Dœuff suggested that Simone de Beauvoir had a "genius for the inappropriate," meaning that she started from a philosophical viewpoint (Sartre's solipsistic version of existentialism) that was poorly suited to what she wanted to make of it (feminism).[182] At the very least, she had an unusual willingness to make use of whatever came to hand. I do think it's reasonable to hold people accountable when they use problematic discourses uncritically, e.g. "Lacan dit," as though the mere citation of an authoritative name put an end to thought. But I hope feminism has set aside the task of purifying our own discourse (or policing the language of other feminists) for residues. Indeed, for a text to be political in any meaningful sense it must engage with, be embedded in, concrete and substantial circumstance. We all have to stand somewhere.

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[180] See Rapping, *The Culture of Recovery*.

[181] See for instance Nancy Miller, *Bequest and Betrayal: Memoirs of a Parent's Death.*

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[182] *Hipparchia's Choice*, 55.

CHAPTER 2

Simone de Beauvoir and Lesbian Lived Experience

> There is a large family of things *we know* and need to know about ourselves and each other with which we have, as far as I can see, so far created for ourselves almost no theoretical room to deal.
>
> EVE KOSOFSKY SEDGWICK[1]

> I'd be careful about saying any woman had no consciousness.
>
> JOAN NESTLE[2]

> Every act of becoming conscious
> (it says here in this book)
> is an unnatural act
>
> ADRIENNE RICH[3]

On the first International Women's Day of the new millennium, I walked across the small midwestern campus where I work to sit sipping punch with a miscellaneous group of people. The sweet-tempered woman leading our discussion asked each of us to name one woman who had inspired us, whose life we wanted to celebrate on this special occasion. Most of those present, ranging from an earnest sophomore girl to the campus rabbi, a man in his seventies, said, "my mother." I named Rosa Luxemburg—a lie, but I wanted Socialism to be at least *mentioned* … Only one person named Simone de Beauvoir: H., the music librarian, whose self-description when we'd first met had been as a lesbian, but who by the time of this discussion was transitioning from female to male.

The Second Sex was a strange, unwieldy book to begin with, and it seems to get stranger all the time; Beauvoir still means a lot to people, but just *what* she means keeps changing. When I asked H. "why Beauvoir?" he referred to Judith Butler, then got a little nervous: "I need to sit down and really read *The Second Sex*," he said; "I've never actually done that." That reaction has become very familiar to me over the several decades I've been working on Beauvoir.

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[1] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Epistemology of the Closet*, 24.

[2] Joan Nestle, remark made during discussion of *The Feminist Memoir Project: Voices from Women's Liberation*, Columbia University Seminar on Woman and Society, New York City, May 17, 1999.

[3] Rich, "The Phenomenology of Anger," 169.

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People seem to attribute a profound, even a life-changing, significance to Simone de Beauvoir even when they have not read a word she wrote. Her name stands for some kind of deep unsettling (in the good sense), unhooking, undermining, kicking loose: things, as it turns out, are not, or at least do not have to be, as Mother said they were; what you've always suspected was going on underneath the everyday human comedies of gender, is in fact *there*, and everywhere.

At the same time Beauvoir has been a target for disappointment and anger.

The first time I read *The Second Sex* was around 1981, in a graduate literature seminar at Columbia co-taught by Carolyn Heilbrun and Nancy Miller. I didn't understand the book, I didn't understand why it was important to them that we read it, and I totally hated it. Partly I think I was blaming the messenger: that my oppression was that deep, that total, was not something I wanted to know. The parts I hated most, though, were the parts about sex, especially the chapter titled "La lesbienne." Oddly, some of the same parts that then furnished me with reasons for utterly dismissing her now seem to me the backbone of Beauvoir's project, and a good second starting-point for my argument: that it is worth reading Beauvoir, that she is less wrong about many things than has generally been supposed, and that reading *The Second Sex* with attention to time, both the time of its writing and the different times of its readings, helps us better understand what she meant, and discover what we can still use.

But then, coming out in my early twenties, with the theory wars dividing Columbia's English department and the sex war starting across the street, I had a checklist of myths to distrust: arrested development, mother-daughter patterns, inversion, butch-femme roles, masculine protest, anything to do with Sigmund Freud. All these myths seemed to be repeated in Beauvoir. None of them had anything to do with me: I was me, and I was in love, for my own reasons, many of which had to do with feminism. I also had a deep, deep suspicion of seeing lesbians marshalled as symbols or allegories in the texts of straight women.[4]

I was not alone. Many American lesbian feminists have found Beauvoir's chapter "La lesbienne" ("The Lesbian") problematic, from the 1970s on: it provides no "positive role models," appears to include biologistic explanations, and cites such discredited authorities as the rather bizarre Wilhelm Stekel (see chapter 1 above). And who is "la lesbienne," *the* lesbian, anyhow? The definite article certainly dates the chapter theoretically, in the same way Beauvoir's use of "*la* femme" (Woman) and "elle" (she) throughout the book does. This, plus her seeming failure to take the position about "inversion" we thought was the correct one—that there was no such thing, that same-sex love had nothing at all to do with a desire to *be* the opposite gender—made us think she couldn't possibly be a social constructionist after all. Then there was the way she drew on literary texts we did not think much of, such as the poems of Renée Vivien, as though they had a nonfiction, documentary authority. And finally there was her overt disdain for the idea of lesbians and/or homosexuals organizing themselves as a political movement.

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[4] See Altman, "How Not To Do Things with Metaphors We Live By." This was before the 1990 publication of Beauvoir's *Lettres à Sartre* complicated what we knew about her love life.

But this may be a good time to look again. Beauvoir's view that lesbian lives may be lived in many different ways, that gender "inversion" and object choice are not *necessarily* related but sometimes *may* be, does not look so retrograde in this age of "queer," of the revaluation of bisexuality, of new transgender possibilities and subjectivities. Her contentions that lesbianism, like heterosexuality, like anything else, may be lived either in bad faith or in authenticity, depending on the way it is chosen, and that the body matters, but doesn't determine us, may, as Toril Moi has argued, be helpful in formulating a conception of agency feminism can use.[5]

But why were we originally angry and embarrassed, rather than simply dismissive? We found in that text neither a mirror nor a model, and yet some ideas there seemed familiar enough that we resented an intrusion: *how dare she talk about my private things in this way I don't quite recognize?* It was a bit like Freud's uncanny, or the existentialist Look of the Other which steals from me my position as center of the world, as subject. Now I wonder whether I was at that time so concerned to stress the ordinary normality of my life that I was unnerved by the very ideas, terms, and images that might now be praised as resistance to normalization of the female body. Rereading with the understanding that, as I discussed above, feminism at any period will be inextricably entwined with other contemporary ways of seeing women and sex, that, as Foucault tells us, the discourses of repression and liberation can't be pried apart,[6] I see something rather different. In the early 1980s, my classmates and I found Beauvoir's discussion of lesbian sexuality both heterodox and incoherent, which it was, and is … but this no longer strikes me as such a bad thing.

Much of the work done on Beauvoir and lesbianism has been biographical. Here, as in the first chapter, I will continue to sideline that approach, by which I don't mean to suggest it isn't important; but I think the way many generations of women have read her life looking for either reassuring mirrors or hopeful models, and then often reacted to what they found out with disappointment or even rage, doesn't help us remember to read her work and listen to what she actually says. This is just as true for "the lesbian question" as it has been for the question of the success or failure of her lifelong relationship with Sartre.[7]

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[5] See Toril Moi, *What is a Woman?* 3–120.

[6] Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 95–101.

But those less familiar with Beauvoir may still want at least a seat-of-the-pants answer to the question, "Was she a lesbian?" One can't answer this question, and one can't not answer it, either. Let me just say that the world is divided into people for whom the question has a simple one-word answer, and those for whom it does not; Beauvoir is in the latter category.

She was certainly *accused* of being a lesbian at least three times. First, during the phony war of 1939–40, when her journal records that her friend Stepha "interrogated" her one day (in the Café Dôme) "to find out whether I was really a *piège*."[8] Second, during the German occupation of France, she was fired from her teaching job on the basis of an accusation of "détournement de mineur" (corruption of a minor) brought (with some accuracy, if little justice) by the mother of one of her students, Nathalie Sorokine, an incident she masks in her autobiography.[9] And third, charges that Beauvoir was a lesbian figured in the stream of logically inconsistent vilification with which such established French literary figures as François Mauriac greeted the publication of *The Second Sex*: "Frustrated, frozen, priapic, nymphomaniac, a lesbian, a hundred times aborted: I was accused of everything, even of having an illegitimate child"[10]—the French version of the nympho-lesbo-killer-whore, with additional charges of frigidity, abortion, and out-of-wedlock motherhood.[11] And since her death she has been accused both of being a lesbian and of not being one, sometimes in the same breath.

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[7] Both issues have been entangled with posthumous revelations and with questions about public versus private presentations of self. Responses have ranged from the hagiographic to the wounded to the passive-aggressive. Useful discussions include Margaret Simons, "Lesbian Connections"; Jeffner Allen, "A Response to a Letter from Peg Simons, December 1993"; Hazel Barnes, "La lesbienne."

[8] "Je me suis assise à côté d'elle et elle m'a interrogée pour savoir si j'étais vraiment piège; on a lu le journal, regardé *Marie-Claire* qui donne des modèles de lettres aux soldats à se fendre la pipe.... " Beauvoir, *Journal de guerre*, 88. *Piège* is short for "*piège-à-loups*," literally "wolf trap" or "man trap." Apparently this phrase was used to describe a homosexual person of either sex by Beauvoir's friend Mme. Morel, who seems to have invented it. I have not seen it used by anyone outside the Sartre circle, nor have I yet succeeded in getting any French person to recognize it. As Margaret Simons notes ("Lesbian Connections," 122–26), Beauvoir did not record her reply to Stepha, nor did she mention this conversation in her letter to Sartre detailing her day; but both journals and letters for the period suggest it was a question she was asking herself.

[9] Although Beauvoir covers up the content of the charge, her comment there is interesting: "Before the war, the matter would have ended there; with the clique of Abel Bonnard [a reactionary Minister of Education installed by the German occupiers] it happened otherwise; at the end of the school year, the headmistress with the blue chin informed me that I was excluded from the University" (which is to say, banned from teaching in the public sector). [Avant-guerre, l'affaire n'eût pas eu de suite; avec la clique d'Abel Bonnard, il en alla autrement; à la fin de l'année scolaire, la directrice au menton bleu me signifia que j'étais exclue de l'Université (*La force de l'âge* [hereinafter *FA*], 617).]

What else can I say?—that she had a number of very important loving relationships with women early and late in life, which may or may not have been sexual; that she had sexual contact with women, at least through the early 1940s, in ways that may or may not have been loving;[12] that she never said she was a lesbian; and that she had her homophobic moments—like most people.

1 Where the Lesbians Are

It's helpful, as always, to keep the basic structure of Beauvoir's argument in mind. The first volume, "Les faits et les mythes," performs a series of moves that unsettle any naturalized notion of femininity as essence and expose men's view of women as "Other" as a disabling mystification. The second volume, titled "L'expérience vécue," takes us through women's life cycle *under present conditions of education and society*.[13] Beauvoir describes "la femme" as she is, but "what we must understand is the range of the verb 'to be'"—as Bill Clinton once put it, it all depends on what the meaning of the word "is" is.

> We find this vicious circle in all such circumstances. When an individual or a group of individuals is kept in a situation of inferiority, the fact is that

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[10] "Insatisfaite, glacée, priapique, nymphomane, lesbienne, cent fois avortée, je fus tout, et même mère clandestine." She continues: "People [wrote and] offered to cure me of my frigidity, or to satisfy my monstrous appetites; they promised the filthiest revelations, but in the name of the True, the Beautiful, the Good, and even of Poetry, all of which I had outraged." [On m'offrait de me guérir de ma frigidité, d'assouvir mes appétits de goule, on me promettait des révélations, en termes orduriers, mais au nom du vrai, du beau, du bien, de la santé et même de la poésie, indignement saccagés par moi (*FCh* 1:260–61).] See also Ingrid Galster, Le deuxième sexe *de Simone de Beauvoir: Mémoire de la Critique*, and Moi, *Making of an Intellectual Woman*.

[11] So, if as Didier Eribon says in *Réflexions sur la question gay*, "l'injure" (the insult, the curse) is the beginning of gay identity....

[12] Perhaps the best description of this period was her own, much later, in a letter to Nelson Algren: "I happened to behave very badly," she wrote (*A Transatlantic Love Affair: Letters to Nelson Algren*, 135).

[13] "Après la plupart de mes affirmations il faut sous-entendre 'dans l'état actuel de l'éducation et des mœurs.' Il ne s'agit pas ici d'énoncer des vérités éternelles mais de décrire le fond commun sur lequel s'enlève toute existence féminine singulière" (*DS* 2:9).

> he, or it, *is* inferior; but what we must understand is the range of the verb "to be": bad faith consists in giving it the value of a static substance, when it has the dynamic Hegelian meaning: to be is to have become, to have been made what one now shows oneself to be.[14]

Nothing about what women are like now has any necessary implications for, or deep claim upon, what the women of tomorrow could be, and if you refuse to recognize this, if instead you pile up reasons why nothing can change and why you can't change, you're guilty of bad faith. As Adrienne Rich put it, "Only she who says / she did not choose, is the loser in the end."[15]

But I tell my students to write this point on an index card and keep it in front of them while they read the rest of the book, because it is very easy to lose track of, in the welter of detail about how women under present conditions of culture and society do, in Beauvoir's view, happen alas to be. Many chapters and sub-arguments in *The Second Sex* take the form of a sandwich, with problematically essentialist or essentializing filling between slices of social constructionist bread. In her chapter on biology, for example, after reminding us that a woman is not the same thing as an ovary and that it is a long way from the egg to the woman, she leads us through a tortured discussion of the sperm, the egg, and animal behavior from anaerobes to us, before telling us that none of it much matters because "man" is not a natural species but a cultural idea—the body is the instrument of our grasp on the world; the body is a *situation*, which we may choose to live freely or otherwise.[16]

"So why didn't she just say so, and spare us what all those stupid scientists said?" the annoyed student wants to know. Apparently the project to "understand everything" and "say everything" that Beauvoir conceived in adolescence did not issue in systems-building (as it did for Sartre) but in a dislike of leaving anything out.[17] I've been arguing, though, that this is actually a strength: the encyclopedic piling up of seemingly everything available on a topic corrects for the philosopher's habit of categorical statement, opens up spaces to think in that a tighter argument might have foreclosed, makes it possible to engage with the thickness, the depth, the ambiguity of the lived world.

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[14] "On retrouve ce cercle vicieux en toutes circonstances analogues: quand un individu ou un groupe d'individus est maintenu en situation d'infériorité, le fait est qu'il *est* inférieur; mais c'est sur la portée du mot *être* qu'il faudrait s'entendre; la mauvaise foi consiste à lui donner une valeur substantielle alors qu'il a le sens dynamique hégélien: *être* c'est être devenu, c'est avoir été fait tel qu'on se manifeste" (*DS* 1:25). This passage develops from an analogy between the situation of women and the situation of Blacks, which I'll explore in my later chapters.

[15] Rich, "Twenty-One Love Poems," 244.

[16] See Fallaize, "A Saraband of Imagery."

[17] *MJFR* 335.

But as with *The Golden Notebook*, the structure of *The Second Sex* is integral to the argument. The chapter titled “La lesbienne” occurs in the middle of the section on women’s life cycle, but lesbian experience and feeling in *The Second Sex* are not confined to that chapter. Rather, lesbian existence is diffused throughout, as perfectly ordinary, only to be expected, even something any rational woman, if not deformed by her culture, might well prefer. The opening pages of the first chapter, “Enfance,” tell us that both boys and girls begin by desiring their mothers;[18] a bit later we hear that the *garçon manqué* (tomboy) is only rebelling against the social constraints that deny her the human right to actively possess the world.[19] According to the next chapter, “La jeune fille” (the young girl), another form of adolescent reluctance to go along with the conventional *vocation féminine* can be found in schoolgirl romances, which are described at length with reference to *Mädchen in Uniform*, Emily Dickinson’s letters, and the novels of Colette and Rosamund Lehmann, alongside psychoanalytic and sexological narratives.[20] Then, when it comes time for “L’initiation sexuelle” (Sexual Initiation, by which Beauvoir means heterosexual initiation), women have a lot to overcome: for one thing, male flesh is resistant and repulsive compared to the more familiar sensation of touching a woman’s smooth body;[21] there is often not much distinction between a woman’s first heterosexual penetration and rape;[22] and finally, it is difficult for a woman, who is a free desiring subject and a human being grasping the world, to resign herself to the sexual passivity and dependence involved in “becoming a woman.”[23] Readers might be forgiven for concluding that lesbian feeling is more basic, or at least more obvious, that it is heterosexuality that must be learned, very often in fear and trembling. “If we must speak of nature, one might say that naturally every woman is lesbian.”[24]

That heterosexuality has to be learned is a big part of Beauvoir’s central contention throughout her second volume. I’ve argued in chapter 1 that her long catalog of things that can go wrong for the young girl, the adolescent, the married woman, which are often difficult to read or even disgusting and have led some readers to say Beauvoir “didn’t like women,” is in fact making this point: the development of “patriarchal femininity,” as Moi helpfully calls it, is a wrenching experience;[25] the process of becoming a “woman” deforms you. The crisis of adolescence, Beauvoir says, is a *travail*, a “work,” comparable to the work of mourning described by psychoanalysis.[26] Showing this is part of showing that it is a process: it’s not natural or inborn, and thus, it could be otherwise. At one time, I was bothered by her description of same-sex affection as a phase or stage because I took this to mean she was minimizing its authenticity, by reinscribing it within normative heterosexuality. But now it strikes me as a key move in her unsettling of heterosexual “development,” which is so far from obvious, so bizarre, in fact, that the explanation for it must involve social power.

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[18] *DS* 2:13–14.

[19] *DS* 2:50–51.

[20] *DS* 2:108–13.

[21] *DS* 2:154–55, 191.

[22] *DS* 2:148, 162–63.

[23] *DS* 2:165, 195–98.

[24] “[S]i l’on invoque la nature, on peut dire que naturellement toute femme est homosexuelle” (*DS* 2:195).

Is the chapter on “La lesbienne,” as Ursula Tidd has said, marginalized by its placement within the life cycle of “the woman”?[27] There are two ways to see this. Volume 2 has four parts, “Formation,” “Situation,” “Justifications,” and “Vers la libération.” “La lesbienne” is at the end of the “Formation” section, poised on the cusp of adulthood, between “L’initiation sexuelle” and “La femme mariée” (The Married Woman)—two chapters that contain the densest and most awful descriptions of rotten heterosexual sex in the book. The lesbian chapter is not in section 4, “Towards Liberation,” which has only one chapter, “La femme indépendante,” but things could be worse. At least it’s not in the third section, “Justifications,” with its protracted jeremiads against three life paths women can take in complicitous bad faith: “La narcissiste,” “L’amoureuse” (The Woman in Love), and “La mystique.” “La lesbienne” is taken as part of the life cycle, part of ordinary development, and yet, there she also is, as herself.

2 Reading in Time

It is curious to me now that around the same time I was learning to detest Beauvoir’s view of lesbians, I was very much liking Adrienne Rich’s “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” which first appeared in *Signs* in 1980, and which makes what now seems a very similar point: why would women ever turn from loving women to loving men unless they were forced to? Rich never mentions Beauvoir by name in that essay, but the word “existence” in her title now jumps out at me, as does the word “phenomenology” in her poem, “The Phenomenology of Anger,” from which one of the epigraphs to this chapter is taken.[28] For those of us trying to do work on lesbians within women’s studies, itself a fledging field, Rich’s essay was tremendously helpful, not least because her “lesbian continuum” seemed to offer a way out of the mulberry bush game of “X was a lesbian? You can’t *prove* that, so we won’t approve your dissertation topic.”[29] But I also remember vigorously defending “Compulsory Heterosexuality” against the anxiety and anger of heterosexual feminists who resented being told that their own sexual choices were not authentic or feminist enough and that they were not entitled to want what they felt they wanted.

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[25] Moi, *Making of an Intellectual Woman*, 190–94.

[26] *DS* 2:140.

[27] Ursula Tidd, “*Le deuxième sexe*, la conscience noire et la conscience lesbienne,” 75.

I have now taught the essay to mainly heterosexual undergraduates of both sexes approximately fifty times, and have learned to deal with this issue a bit more tactfully. Rich doesn’t actually *say* that heterosexuality can’t be a genuine choice, but she never suggests that it *can*. It’s still a real issue and a hard one to discuss without resurrecting that old existentialist term, “authenticity.”[30] The problem is, while you're busily unsettling normativity, how not to erect another competing norm that oppresses and marginalizes other people.

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[28] For a reading of Beauvoir through the lens of Rich’s argument, see Simons, “Lesbian Connections.” Rich herself explains her terms as follows: “Lesbian existence suggests both the fact of the historical presence of women and *our continuing creation of the meaning of that existence*”—italics mine, to indicate a very Beauvoirian turn of thought. It is interesting as well that in the exchange of letters about this essay Rich reprinted alongside it in *Blood Bread and Poetry* (1986), the editors of *Powers of Desire* question, among other concepts, the term “false consciousness”—in some ways, another version of “bad faith.” Perhaps this marks the historical moment when both terms left the lexicon of feminist theory, probably for perfectly good reasons, but not without loss (see Moi, *What is a Woman*). Also, like Beauvoir, Rich begins her argument by turning psychoanalysis against itself, by using the evidence it uncovers to expose its tacit normativity. (Rich’s particular target is Nancy Chodorow.)

Beauvoir’s legacy to Rich and other early lesbian-feminists is complex. For instance, Lillian Faderman uses the term “existentialist lesbians” to refer to what were more often called “political lesbians” or “women-identified-women,” when they weren’t being called by worse names (*Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, 207, 269). Why existentialist? Rich signals her indebtedness to Beauvoir most clearly in *Of Woman Born*; when she said, in the famous talk reprinted in *On Lies Secrets and Silence*, “[i]t is the lesbian in us who is creative, for the dutiful daughter of the fathers in us is only a hack”—she must have been thinking of Beauvoir’s *Mémoires d’une jeune fille rangée*, which was translated as *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*. But *what* was she thinking—that Beauvoir had stopped short of this insight about lesbians? That she had had it in spite of herself?

[29] This seems quaint now even to me, although it wasn’t much fun at the time. *De mortuis nil nisi bonum.*

[30] Interestingly, GLBTQ politics seems to be one place where the fundamentally existentialist questions about “choice” have retained cultural salience, with implications for political activism.

Beauvoir had a lot of problems, but this one she avoided: either choice can be lived authentically, she says: it depends. Her ethics are extremely demanding, as I discussed in chapter 1, but they are equal opportunity ethics. The lesbian chapter concludes:

> In truth, homosexuality is not a deliberate perversion, any more than it is a fatal curse. It is an attitude *chosen in situation*, that is to say at the same time motivated, and freely adopted. None of the factors the subject takes on board by this choice—physiological givens, psychological history, social circumstance—is determinative, even though all contribute to explain it. This is for woman one way among others of resolving the problems posed by her condition in general, by her erotic situation in particular. Like all human behaviors, it will lead to masquerades, disequilibrium, failure, lying, or, on the contrary, it will be the source of fruitful experiences, depending on whether it is lived in bad faith, laziness, and inauthenticity, or in lucidity, generosity, and freedom.[31]

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[31] "En vérité l'homosexualité n'est pas plus une perversion délibérée qu'une malédiction fatale. C'est une attitude *choisie en situation*, c'est-à-dire à la fois motivée et librement adoptée. Aucun des facteurs que le sujet assume par ce choix—données physiologiques, histoire psychologique, circonstances sociales—n'est déterminant encore que tous contribuent à l'expliquer. C'est pour la femme une manière parmi d'autres de résoudre les problèmes posés par sa condition en général, par sa situation érotique en particulier. Comme toutes les conduites humaines, elle entraînera comédies, déséquilibre, échec, mensonge ou, au contraire, elle sera source d'expériences fécondes, selon qu'elle sera vécue dans la mauvaise foi, la paresse et l'inauthenticité ou dans la lucidité, la générosité et la liberté" (*DS* 2:217–18), emphasis in original.

It is hard to know how to translate "assumer"; if one uses "assumes," readers who don't know this is a key existentialist term may assume [*sic*] it has its ordinary English meaning. "Takes on board" is at least better than Parshley's "accepts." No wonder I didn't understand this when I read it in English! I have translated "comédies" as "masquerades," which doesn't quite satisfy me, either, since "comédies" for the existentialists includes any occasion on which one "plays a role," even when one is (culpably) unaware of doing so. It's not all that far from Judith Butler's "repeated stylizations of the self," except that Butler thinks this is a good thing (or at least, that it is inevitable), whereas Beauvoir thinks it is a bad thing that free people should (and can) avoid.

Much more might be said about Butler's relationship to Beauvoir: as Lisa Knisely ("Oppression, Narrative Violence, and Vulnerability: The Ambiguous Beauvoirian Legacy of Butler's Ethics") and Diana Coole ("Butler's Phenomenological Existentialism") have shown in convincing detail, Butler's earliest publications praise Beauvoir for views of sex and gender she would set out in *Gender Trouble* as her own argument *against* Beauvoir. H.'s comment seems to have been more acute than I realized at the time.

That's the last paragraph. But the road by which Beauvoir reaches it is rough.

The chapter opens with the question of "inversion," and here is where the "sandwich" I referred to earlier begins. Her very first statement takes apart the received representation of "the lesbian" as a short-haired woman in a bowler hat and tie whose "virility" results from a hormonal anomaly. Nothing could be further from the truth, she says, than this confusion between the *invertie* and the *virago*: lots of lesbians are feminine, and many of the most masculine women are heterosexual. "There is no 'anatomical destiny' which determines their sexuality."[32]

But why then does she choose the word *invertie* to name the lesbian? And why does she then launch into a discussion of this very connection between sexuality and soma, drawing on such problematic authorities as Helene Deutsch, Stekel, Ernest Jones, Havelock Ellis, Krafft-Ebing? Why is she even willing to give the time of day to so tainted a concept as "masculine protest," especially since she has handily refuted it in her chapter on childhood?[33] Has she changed her mind about whether there is, in the static bad sense of "is," such a thing as "feminine" or "masculine," after all?

As I argued in the previous chapter, though, we need to remember to read her use of the psychoanalysts and the other sexologists in volume 2 through the statements about method in volume 1: again, she's making use of their descriptive accounts, particularly on subjects where reliable data are scant, without privileging scientific claims over other sorts of truth claims (made for example by memoir or imaginative literature) and without accepting the underlying determinisms that the scientific or pseudoscientific accounts imply. Psychoanalysts, she says in volume 1, always make the mistake of seeing a "signification" or meaning and taking it for a "reason," and this results in an "ersatz ethics," an ideal of normality.[34] Here again she is using their case stories, their readings, and even their ways of reading, without accepting the normativity or the moralizing. "The history of the individual is not a fatal procession … Homosexuality can be, for the woman, a way of fleeing her condition or of taking it on board. The capital error of the psychoanalysts is, through moralizing conformism, never to envision it as anything but an inauthentic attitude."[35] My favorite example of this argument also comes from this chapter:

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[32] "Aucun 'destin anatomique' ne détermine leur sexualité" (*DS* 2:192).

[33] "[P]rotestation virile" (*DS* 2:197).

[34] *DS* 1:93.

[35] "[L]'histoire de l'individu n'est pas un progrès fatal…. L'homosexualité peut être pour la femme une manière de fuir sa condition ou une manière de l'assumer. Le grand tort des psychanalystes c'est, par conformisme moralisateur, de ne l'envisager jamais que comme une attitude inauthentique" (*DS* 2:195).

> The notions of "inferiority complex" and "masculinity complex" remind me of an anecdote Denis de Rougemont tells.... A lady imagined that, when she took a walk in the country, the birds were attacking her. After many months of psychiatric treatment failed to cure her of her obsession, the doctor accompanying her in the clinic garden noticed that *the birds were attacking her*.[36]

A joke, but one that restores a woman's right to name her own experience, her right to common sense, perhaps even her agency—at least her epistemological agency. Elsewhere Beauvoir says yes, tomboys like to climb trees, but who wouldn't want to climb trees? What requires explanation is not the desire, but its cultural prohibition to half the species.

And in a way, what choice did Beauvoir have? It almost sounds like a party game: try to handle this issue in the twentieth century without using Freud. Try to pick up this plate of Jello without using your hands.

I also see her as using sexological discourse, and the discourse of "inversion," against normativity, against itself. For example, she opposes the idea that every *invertie* is really a "hidden man" by introducing the stories of a "hermaphrodite" who desired only men and of a "passing woman" who was taken for a homosexual because she followed her male lover into the army.[37] If our first concern is to prove that gay people are no different from anyone else, we might see the proliferation of strange stories as ultimately pathologizing and sensationalizing the whole topic; but if that's not our first concern, we can see them as cumulatively destabilizing, unhooking gender identity from sexual "preference" and sexual behavior: if so many different things are possible, how could we say that any single simple connection was necessary? "Rien ne suffit à expliquer" why some women are lesbians: nothing suffices to explain it, nothing finally explains it, no one factor can explain it; but some *are*. Recognizing this is one more way Beauvoir breaks the link between sexuality and procreation.

However, if this was hard for me to see in the 1980s, it must have been even less clear when the book first appeared in the United States. This came home to me when I found the lesbian chapter from *The Second Sex* included in an anthology edited by Hendrik Ruitenbeek, *The Problem of Homosexuality in Modern Society*, which appeared as a Dutton paperback original in 1963.[38] Dominated by American psychoanalysts of the type Carol Groneman has brilliantly named "cookbook Freudians" (a pinch of this, a dollop of that, season with prejudice and stir) the book includes essays with titles like "The Flight From Masculinity" and "The Effectiveness of Psychotherapy with Individuals Who Have Severe Homosexual Problems," and it smells strongly of moral panic. Like many popularizations of sexual theory, it also delivers titillation under the legitimating cover of science.[39] Seeing Beauvoir in this company reminds me how impossible (and wrong) it is to try to extricate the meaning of any work from its discursive surround; while most of the other articles are much worse, it is discouraging to think of readers of the anthology taking at face value Beauvoir's descriptions of "the lesbian" who seeks a narcissistic mirror relationship, "the lesbian" who turns to women because there are no men where she is or because men don't desire her, "the lesbian" who is haunted by a frustrated longing for her mother[40]—even though, in the context of *The Second Sex* as a whole, these examples pile up, contradict each other, are declared to be descriptive rather than explanatory, and in the end suggest that the ways of being a lesbian are many, rather than one.

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[36] "Les notions 'complexe d'infériorité,' 'complexe de masculinité' me font songer à cette anecdote que Denis de Rougemont raconte.... [U]ne dame s'imaginait que, lorsqu'elle se promenait dans la campagne, les oiseaux l'attaquaient; après plusieurs mois d'un traitement psychanalytique qui échoua à la guérir de son obsession, le médecin l'accompagnant dans le jardin de la clinique s'aperçut que *les oiseaux l'attaquaient*" (*DS* 2:197).

[37] *DS* 2:193. The first example seems to be based on someone Beauvoir actually knew, who had lived in the same building during the war. She tells the story in *La force de l'âge* (472) and, somewhat differently, in *L'invitée* (171–72).

The title of *The Problem of Homosexuality in Modern Society* is particularly interesting. For whom is homosexuality a problem? For homosexuals, or for the "modern society" that would prefer to exclude them but must learn to manage them? I am reminded of Sartre's statement that the Jewish problem is not a problem for Jews but "our" problem, of Gunnar Myrdal's statement that racism is a white problem. And yet, both alternatives seem troubling: either homosexuality is a pathology (a problems homosexuals have), or there is an "us" whose problem it is and homosexuals who are not "us" become, in Beauvoir's language, the Other. Is she doing the latter thing in her text when she speaks of "the lesbian" as "she"?

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[38] I am not sure how this happened; probably Beauvoir did not have control over the uses to which her English-language text was put by Knopf.

[39] Carole Groneman, *Nymphomania: A History*. See also Altman, "Everything They Always Wanted You to Know," and Jay Gertzman, *Bookleggers and Smuthounds: The Trade in Erotica, 1920–1940*.

[40] It's especially depressing to remember that pulp paperbacks, of which this is one, were among the few sources lesbians in the 1950s could turn to for information about how to interpret their own feelings. However, gay people have often been very creative at elaborating positive and even political identities from images and ideas acquired in the oddest places.

Not all the essays in Ruitenbeek's book are equally awful; for instance there's a solid social approach by Evelyn Hooker. Ruitenbeek's obituary describes him as "among the first psychoanalysts to advocate equal rights for homosexuals" (*New York Times*, May 26, 1983), and John D'Emilio discusses his contribution to the movement in *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940–1970* (141, 166). According to the *Times*, he died at fifty-five "as a result of complications from a rare infection, said his sole survivor and adopted son, Richard McConchie." Nineteen eighty-three. Moment of silence. (We *won't* go *back*.)

In the early 1980s, some American feminist philosophers, among them Ann Ferguson, Claudia Card, and Marilyn Frye, faulted Beauvoir for refusing to take on the possibility of lesbian identity, and for seeming to split off "the lesbian" from "the woman," presumably to the benefit of the latter (conceived as heterosexual).[41] Ferguson in particular found that Beauvoir's existentialist focus on individual choice had blinded her to the possibility of lesbianism as a political and social collective identity. Frye's argument is characteristically lucid, but all three essays are marred by numerous misreadings, especially of Beauvoir's conception of the body, unfortunate effects of engaging in intense exegesis of brief utterances, as philosophers in the analytic tradition tend to do, rather than locating meaning in the work as a whole. Curiously, all three employ Beauvoir's basic concept, authenticity, in judging her own statements as lacking it. But there is an important kernel of truth here: at the one point in Beauvoir's lesbian chapter where she mentions that certain lesbians like to get together in clubs and groups because they are lesbians—that is, come together around and on behalf of a political identity—they are dismissed as inauthentic, "pointless[ly] grandstanding."[42] And this occurs just before the concluding paragraph I quoted above.

Does it make sense to object both to what seems to be Beauvoir's refusal (here) of the idea of lesbianism as a group identity, and to what seems to be her assertion of lesbianism as a group identity for "elles," that is, for someone else? The logical contradiction is more apparent than real, though. In the first instance, Ferguson and the others were looking for affirmation of a collective lesbian subjectivity, in the second instance, they were troubled by what struck them as lesbian objectification.[43] The relation between oppression and identity was, of course, the sixty-four thousand dollar question for gay and lesbian thinkers in the 1980s, but it was our question, not Beauvoir's, and there may still be something to be said for refusing to answer it.

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[41] Ann Ferguson, "Lesbian Identity: Beauvoir and History"; Marilyn Frye, "History and Responsibility"; Claudia Card, "Lesbian Attitudes and *The Second Sex*."

[42] "Inutiles fanfaronnades" (*DS* 2:217).

[43] Similar concerns were raised later by Ursula Tidd, *Simone de Beauvoir: Gender and Testimony*, 55–7, and Toril Moi, *Making of an Intellectual Woman*, 199–203.

It is also misleading to see Beauvoir as focused on individual choice in the way that Sartre (at least the Sartre of *L'être et le néant*, the only Sartre then available to her) indeed unfortunately was. In fact what she talks about when she talks about freedom in that chapter and elsewhere is the freedom to assume one's situation in one or another way. The situation, remember, is the body, plus the *social* situation, which for her involves givens, *données*: this was her objection to Sartre's early theory, an objection he'd later take on board.[44] You have to see that socially speaking some free subjects are freer than others to undertake *any* kind of analysis of oppression, really—and certainly to become any kind of a materialist, which by 1949 they both were. So to say as Beauvoir does that one can "assume" or take up homosexuality (or heterosexuality) in a number of different ways is not to say that this is a mere matter of individual "preference" like vanilla vs. strawberry. It is in fact not to take a position on that question at all, in the final analysis, which—given what Eve Sedgwick and Didier Eribon say about the potential political dangers of either position in that debate—actually looks somewhat prescient.[45] It is good also to bear in mind Sedgwick's demonstration in *Epistemology of the Closet* that one should not expect a person to be consistently essentialist (or social constructionist) about *both* gender identity and sexual identity: the mixed configuration often appears.

In a way, Beauvoir started the whole problematics of identity with her question—are there women, really?—although I agree with Moi that in the end her answer to that question was, yes. As Beauvoir says about Woman in the discussion of myth: "If she did not exist, men would have invented her. They did invent her. But she also exists."[46] So, if no single factor suffices to explain lesbianism, and if lesbian existence may be assumed by individuals in various ways, are there lesbians, really? Her answer by the end seems to be, yes and no; no, but yes. Moi's insight that Beauvoir expected identity to be "a consequence and not a cause of freedom" seems apposite.[47]

But certainly there was nothing here you could build a movement on or around. *Or was there?* If the objections of Ferguson and Card amount to blaming Beauvoir for not inventing or predicting the identity politics of the 1980s, this no longer looks as bad as it once did. But I also want to question their reading that because she didn't affirm a distinct identity category for lesbians to mobilize around, heterosexual normativity forms the basis of *The Second Sex*.[48] Again, it all depends on the meaning of the word "is." Perhaps the way same-sex desire runs all through the book like a thread, plus the insistence on how difficult and unpleasant the establishment of heterosexual pleasure is, accomplished an anti-homophobic work, or at least made that possible later—in the way that her discussion of frigidity as a perfectly reasonable reaction to married life, and a mode of female resistance, made possible Anne Koedt's "Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm," of which, in fact, the superior rationality of lesbianism is the final argument?[49] How should we judge a theory: by where it came from? By where it went?

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[44] See Sonia Kruks, "Simone de Beauvoir: Teaching Sartre About Freedom."

[45] See also Vera Whisman, *Queer by Choice*.

[46] "[S]i elle n'existait pas, les hommes l'auraient inventée.
Ils l'ont inventée. Mais elle existe aussi sans leur invention" (*DS* 1:303).

[47] Moi, *Making of an Intellectual Woman*, 144.

3 The Time of Writing

When I first began writing about Beauvoir and lesbians, I thought of defending her on the grounds that 1970s and 1980s critiques were anachronistic, because the idea of lesbianism or homosexuality as a political identity, a grounding for collective liberation, simply was not available before the Stonewall protest in 1969. But this would be wrong. Christine Bard's wonderful book *Les garçonnes: modes et fantasmes des années folles* mentions, for example, that in 1924, a pro-homosexuality review called *Inversions*, with both men and women as contributors, appeared in Paris (and was immediately suppressed by the censors).[50]

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[48] Hazel Barnes, in what is probably the best close analysis of the chapter as a whole, makes a similar argument. Barnes cites Beauvoir—"What requires explanation is not the positive aspect of the invert's choice, but the negative side of the coin: she is not defined by her taste for women, but by the exclusivity of that taste" [Ce qu'il faut expliquer chez l'invertie ce n'est donc pas l'aspect positif de son choix, c'en est la face négative; elle ne se caractérise pas par son goût pour les femmes mais par l'exclusivité de son goût (*DS* 2:196)]—and notes: "It is entirely evident that she starts from a position of bisexuality.... The truth is that it is these critics who have fallen into the trap of the binary reasoning they deplore so much, and it is Beauvoir who corresponds to the post-modern position." [De façon tout à fait évidente, elle part de la bisexualité.... La vérité est que ce sont ces critiques qui sont tombés dans le piège du raisonnement binaire qu'ils déplorent tant, et c'est Beauvoir qui correspond aux positionnements post-modernes (Barnes, "La lesbienne," 323–24).] Barnes does not name all the "critics" she means; one she does name is Marie-Jo Bonnet.

[49] "Lesbian sexuality could make an excellent case, based upon anatomical data, for the irrelevancy of the male organ.... The recognition of clitoral orgasm as fact would threaten the heterosexual *institution*" (Koedt, "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm," 116).

[50] Bard, *Les garçonnes,* 78. I am deeply indebted to Didier Eribon for pointing me toward this and other crucial resources, as well as for the example of his own inspiring intellectual and political work.

Beauvoir and Sartre were well aware of the pioneering work of Magnus Hirschfeld's Institute for the Study of Sexuality in Berlin[51]—"scientific" work (and itself not unproblematic) but clearly directed toward bringing about positive social change in legal and cultural attitudes towards both homosexuals and women, which was why the Nazis burned it. Bard's book documents the storm over Victor Margueritte's controversial best-selling 1920s novel, *La garçonne*, which caused a moral panic over "the liberated woman" but also became a lifestyle, a fashion sensation, and especially a *haircut* eagerly adopted by women of all sorts. Semi-pornographic and wildly popular, probably for both good and bad reasons, that novel begins with an attack on the sexual double standard and ends as an argument for companionate marriage, but includes a long excursion into the lesbian "underworld." Bard's discussion shows that there was a significant prewar history to the mutual implication of lesbianism, transvestism as a cultural style, and feminism in France, and that the alliances were not always what one might have expected them to be.

There's a parallel temptation to explain Beauvoir's statement in her introduction, "women … do not say 'we,'" by saying that she wrote *The Second Sex* "before feminism," in a kind of political void. But that, too, would be wrong. There *was* a feminism in her day, she knew it well—one of its leaders, Cécile Brunschvicg, was married to her graduate school advisor—and she consciously rejected it. (Her full sentence reads, "women—except in certain conferences which remain abstract demonstrations—do not say 'we.'")[52] The French suffrage movement was bourgeois, nationalist, strongly Catholic, and in France as elsewhere many of its early arguments were based in a traditional view of women as moral guardians of the family.[53] As Bard shows, most feminists joined the culturally conservative attack on Margueritte's novel, and were opposed to the cultural style of the sexually emancipated woman that it both depicted and helped produce. These feminists were not obvious allies for Beauvoir, since the future freedom she projects in *The Second Sex* is centrally a freedom of sexual self-expression and pleasure for women.

So perhaps it's better to examine Beauvoir's conscious rejection of lesbian collective identity by specifying historically which forms of this were available and visible to her. What was she responding to? Should we see her analysis (some have) as cowardly, as yet one more example of Marcel Proust's famous insight that it would be no good rebuilding Sodom, because all the actual sodomites would immediately flee, crying, "I'm not one of *those*"?[54] The effects of oppression should never be discounted.[55] But there may be more to see.

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[51] *FA* 153.

[52] "Les femmes—sauf en certains congrès qui restent des manifestations abstraites—ne disent pas 'nous'" (*DS* 1:19). She's drawing a contrast to Blacks, especially "the Blacks of Haiti," and proletarians.

[53] See Sylvie Chaperon, *Les années Beauvoir, 1945–1970*.

Didier Eribon has drawn my attention to some of the ways homophobic remarks were used after the war, by Sartre and others, as part of the *épuration* (purge) whereby the literary establishment, with Sartre the young Turk now firmly at its center, cleansed itself of those writers who had collaborated with the Nazis. For example, in "Qu'est-ce qu'un collaborateur?" (What is A Collaborator?), Sartre wrote that because collaboration was feminine, it was not surprising that so many of the collaborators were homosexual.[56] Eribon commented, "the assertion is unbearable, but it is also true."[57] Many of the writers and artists who collaborated were, in fact, homosexuals, members of what Eribon called "our tradition"—Marcel Jouhandeau, Jean Cocteau, Colette (who seems to have contributed to a fulsome festschrift for the traitorous Vichy leader, Maréchal Pétain)—and there was a strong, and repulsive, homoerotic element to the embrace of the fascist "blood consciousness," under the sign of "revolutionary" (woman-hating) masculinity, by such targets of the *épuration* as Robert Brasillach and Maurice Bardèche. Of course, as Eribon went on to say, many members of the *Résistance* were also homosexual, and it is important not to oversimplify what led various people to do, or not do, various things during the war:[58] his underlying argument is that being homosexual, even being a pro-homosexual homosexual, was (and is) no guarantee that a given writer (or human being) would take progressive positions on other issues; it did not (and does not) insulate anyone from the worst political mistakes and crimes. (Eribon's political conclusion is that solidarity must be demonstrated and can never be presumed.)[59] My own point here is simply that if Beauvoir looked around her for examples of homosexual clubs or "interest groups," some of what she saw wasn't very pretty.

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[54] See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Proust and the Spectacle of the Closet," and Eribon, *Réflexions sur la question gay*.

[55] "September 9 [1939].… I go to the Dôme with Olga. There are two little lesbians next to us, and one gets into a thing with the waiter: 'I don't talk to waiters,' she says; and the moustached waiter, easy-going yet threatening: 'But waiters have ears to hear, and what they hear they can repeat, and the dungeon of Vincennes is nearby.'" [9 septembre (1939).… Je vais au Dôme avec Olga. Il y a deux petites lesbiennes à côté de nous, et l'une s'engueule avec le garçon: "Je ne parle pas avec les garçons," dit-elle; et le garçon, moustachu, bonasse et menaçant: "Mais les garçons ont des oreilles pour entendre, et ils peuvent le répéter et le donjon de Vincennes n'est pas loin" (*FA* 443).] "Garçon" is also the word for "boy," so there's a *double entendre*: "I don't talk to boys."

[56] Sartre, "Qu'est-ce qu'un collaborateur?"

[57] Eribon, "Fascists, Anti-Semitism, and Homosexuality in France since the 1930s."

[58] See Alice Kaplan, *Reproductions of Banality: Fascism, Literature, and French Intellectual Life* and *The Collaborator: The Trial and Execution of Robert Brassilach*; Erin Carlston, *Thinking Fascism*; Gisèle Sapiro, *La guerre des écrivains*; Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*.

Indeed, going back to prewar Germany, the socialist pro-inversion model of Hirschfeld's Institute could be contrasted with the repressive, anti-Semitic, and militantly anti-effeminate homosexuality of the Ernst Röhm circle and the Wandervogel groups. At the same panel where Eribon spoke (at a Chicago conference on "The Future of the Queer Past"), Todd Shepard showed that, a bit later, French critics of torture in Algeria would be attacked by French nationalists as pederasts; meanwhile those leftist activists themselves described the torturers as homosexual.[60] In short, we need to recognize both homosexual identity and homophobia as generally available languages that were not marked as either Left or Right, as either pro- or anti-woman. Again, the Foucault touchstone seems apt: "There is not, on the one side, a discourse of power, and opposite it another discourse that runs counter to it."[61]

I do not mean to excuse Sartre's remark, merely to contextualize it. Note that (unlike Beauvoir) he seems committed here to a rather simplistic version of the "inversion" model, and willing to use the term "feminine" as though it had a stable and permanent meaning. In fact the picture of homosexuality in his work overall is murky. Sometimes he presents a homosexual as a striking example of a person caught in an attitude of "bad faith": Daniel in *Les chemins de la liberté* (*The Roads to Freedom*) is a clear example of someone who is unable or unwilling to assume his freedom in any authentic way, and he serves as a foil to the heterosexual male protagonist, who can't quite handle his freedom, either, but is at least making a lucid effort. The lesbian in *Huis clos* (*No Exit*), who may be partly based on Beauvoir, is morally sophisticated without being sympathetic. In "L'enfance d'un chef" (The Childhood of a Leader) there's more than enough homosexual bad faith to go around, but it's hard to tell against whom the satire is directed, exactly. But Sartre's fullest treatment of the issue, in his book about Genet, may show (one form of) male homosexuality as a fully authentic choice. It interests me that Sartre wrote about Genet after reading *The Second Sex*, and in fact he even *cites* some of Beauvoir's descriptions of "la femme"—a thing people often suppose he never did.[62] On the other hand, he is working quite firmly within an "inversion" model (as if Genet and his male homosexual characters were "really" women, and thus Beauvoir's thoughts about femininity would be helpful in understanding them). Might he, too, perhaps with her assistance, have come to see homosexuality (like heterosexuality) as something people might "assume" either authentically, or otherwise? He does not seem to have thought so in 1945, when his introductory manifesto for *Les Temps Modernes* stated (as part of an attack on Proust), "we refuse to believe that a homosexual's love has the same character as a heterosexual's."[63] Presumably he saw this differently by the 1960s, when he would take a public stand in favor of Gay Liberation, and against state censorship of their publications. Whether one chooses to see his view as self-contradictory, or as evolving in a progressive direction, one thing seems clear for Sartre and also, I think, for Beauvoir: the major sources for their views of homosexuality were not psychoanalytic or sexological, but literary.

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[59] This seems truer, and even more unbearable, than when he said it in 2000. Xenophobic mobilization against Islamic immigrants in the Netherlands, the most sexually "progressive" country in the European Union, *partly on that basis*; charges of racism against the Human Rights Campaign ... Milo Yiannopolous...

[60] Questions of homosexuality in France were deeply involved with national identity and pride, with military and reproductive vigor. One may compare the McCarthyite charge that homosexuality, like Communism, was "un-American," and note the deep connections between anti-Semitism and homophobia in both cases. This helps contextualize, for example, why there is so much about the Dreyfus affair in Proust's *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, and why Gide's *L'immoraliste* opens with a fictional letter from a not unfriendly government official, who asks, "how can a man like Michel *serve the state*?" (*L'immoraliste*, 3; emphasis added).

[61] Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 101. He continues: "Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and contradictory discourses within the same strategy; they can, on the contrary, circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy. We must not expect the discourses on sex to tell us, above all, what strategy they derive from, or what moral divisions they accompany, or what ideology they represent; rather, we must question them...."

4 Between Gide and Proust

The unsettling, destabilizing move that Beauvoir accomplished for so many readers was mainly accomplished for her, I think, by her early reading of André Gide. In *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* she records her encounter at the age of fifteen with the literature of *inquiétude* (restlessness), to which she was introduced by her cousin Jacques, and her eager embrace of Gide's values, "sincerity" and "immoralism." She quotes particularly the famous sentence from his 1897 *Les nourritures terrestres* (*The Fruits of the Earth*): "Family, I hate you!

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[62] Sartre, *Saint Genet, Actor and Martyr*, 37, 57, 291. For fuller discussion of how Beauvoir's conception of the Other influenced Sartre's book on Genet, see Simons, *Beauvoir and* The Second Sex: *Feminism, Race, and the Origins of Existentialism,* 46.

[63] "Nous refusons de croire que l'amour d'un inverti présente les mêmes caractères que celui d'un hétérosexuel" (Sartre, "Présentation," 12).

Shut-in homes, bolted doors."[64] "We were on the same side," she notes—not least, as she saw in humorous hindsight, because Gide and other violently anti-bourgeois writers were themselves disoriented children of the bourgeoisie, and because their revolt, interior and poetic rather than social or political, could enable one to take deep intellectual pride in an adolescent spat with one's mother. Still, his influence endured. As a young teacher, she tried to pass on Jacques's awakening gift to her by teaching and discussing Gide's views with her students, with mixed success: parental complaints resulted in a series of unpleasant incidents with the authorities, which perhaps prepared the way for her dismissal from the teaching corps for "détournement de mineur." By this time, she could have shared with them the overt, if somewhat bizarre, sexual theory Gide offered in *Corydon* (1924) and the franker insights about his own homosexual experiences, which he'd sketched as fiction in *L'immoraliste* (1901), then openly presented in the autobiographical *Si le grain ne meurt* (1926). One wonders what she told them. At the most intense period of triangular sexual activity with Sartre and various of her students and younger friends, she was avidly reading Gide's journals … and sending them on to Sartre and to their young friend Jacques Bost in the army, as soon as she finished them.[65]

It's hard now to see Gide's work as in any way sexually progressive: the early work is timid, diffuse, coy, shot through with religious agony and moralizing; *Corydon*'s insistence on a Greek pedagogical model of masculine, even military (and non-sexual) *pédérastie* rests on a deep and absolutely explicit misogyny; *L'immoraliste* and the most autobiographical narratives eroticize colonial "natives" and lower-class boys generally in a thoroughly racist and insufferably aristocratic way, and … well, frankly, one can't help feeling sorry for his wife, imprisoned all the while in celibate respectability. To understand why Beauvoir found Gide's writings revolutionary and even empowering, one needs to realize how profoundly Catholic and bourgeois and nationalist and generally stifling the "foyers clos" of her milieu were; that in her mother's house one could transgress sexually just by being alone in a room with a man, the best kind of marriage was an arranged marriage, etc. Must one see in Beauvoir's appropriation of Gide another example of what Le Dœuff has called Beauvoir's "genius for the inappropriate"?[66] Perhaps it is simply the operation of a common mechanism of readerly identification: identification with/in *narrative*, unlike adherence to a philosophical or political position, is rarely single or total, sole or whole, and is not meant to be.

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[64] "Famille, je vous hais! foyers clos, portes refermées" (*MJFR* 268). Ménalque, the character who says this, is often seen as a version of Oscar Wilde.

[65] *FA* 111–12. *Si le grain ne meurt* may have been one model (among others) for *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*, where Beauvoir seems similarly concerned to trace the steps of her sexual coming-of-age in a matter-of-fact, straightforward tone.

[66] *Hipparchia's Choice*, 55.

In any case, Gide's explicit taking up of the cudgels "pour l'homosexualité"—for which despite his unparalleled cultural capital he was duly vilified—did not provide any space for lesbian identity. His was hardly a call to arms any woman could reasonably heed. But the insistence that homosexual men were not effeminate or "inverted"—*au contraire! en garde!*—made a point that may have been theoretically useful to Beauvoir in a different way. In the lesbian chapter, she remarks in passing that

> [e]ven man does not desire woman exclusively; the fact that the organism of the male homosexual may be perfectly manly implies that the manliness of a woman does not necessarily commit her to homosexuality.[67]

And the observation, or the unsettling move, may touch the book's argument as a whole as well: because once the question of femininity has been raised with respect to men, that is, to those who are biologically male, the question of what femininity can mean for *anyone*, including women, has been raised. The word "femininity" has acquired its implicit inverted commas, and a return to naïve essentialism about gender is (or should be) impossible.[68]

The history of homosexuality in French literature has often been written in the light of Proust's advice to Gide—"you can tell everything, as long as you never say 'I'" (advice Gide ignored).[69] As a result of this comment, of the presumed (though somewhat unusual) heterosexuality of the narrator in *À la recherche du temps perdu*, and of the fact that some of his portraits of what he calls *invertis* are less than flattering, Proust is often seen as the loser in this exchange, as an apologist for the closet or even a self-hating homosexual. Like Beauvoir, he oscillates between diverse and complicated and self-contradictory portraits of individuals, their behavior, its meaning, etc., and blanket theoretical statements about *l'inverti*, *the* homosexual. And like her he has been blamed for conforming to his own joke about the sodomites who flee Sodom *pour ne pas avoir l'air d'en être*, so as not to be taken for "one of those."[70]

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[67] "L'homme même ne désire pas exclusivement la femme; le fait que l'organisme de l'homosexuel mâle peut être parfaitement viril implique que la virilité d'une femme ne la voue pas nécessairement à l'homosexualité" (*DS* 2:193).

[68] The issue of whether a homosexual man really "is" a woman might look different, too, after Beauvoir's critique (what is a woman, are there women, really) places those inverted commas around "is," and de-biologizes the question of "femininity." I would like to think this was a legacy from second-wave feminism to the gay (and gay and lesbian) movements of the 1970s and 1980s.

[69] "[V]ous pouvez tout raconter, mais à condition de ne jamais dire, Je" (Gide, journal entry for May 14, 1921, quoted in Michael Lucey, *Never Say I: Sexuality and the First Person in Colette, Gide, and Proust,* 1). A younger Gide had already received (and ignored) the same advice from Oscar Wilde himself: "promise me, never write 'I' anymore.... In art, you see, there *is* no first person" (Alan Sheridan, *André Gide: A Life in the Present,* 148).

I think this is unfair. It's possible to argue that in *À la recherche* as a whole, the question of inversion, after a million tortured explanations, twists and turns and exceptions, falls apart of its own weight or, if you like, deconstructs itself. By the very end of the work it has been said of nearly every character that he or she "en est une" (is one of those), at least sometimes; as Eve Sedgwick points out, the question of sexual identification becomes progressively less coherent and more interesting.[71] Finally the question about "en être"—who is *one of those*?—may be answered as Beauvoir answered the determinists: it all depends what you mean by "être." The key element for Proust is, of course, time, which produces "les intermittences du cœur" and allows for change and contingency. Perhaps what we're seeing here is a love that would prefer not to speak its name, because all the available names feel wrong. In any case, Proust was another writer Beauvoir read and reread throughout her life; his thought was formative to how both she and Sartre, and indeed the French generally, thought through the question of homosexuality (and the related question of Jewishness).[72]

Beauvoir's debt to Proust was profound and productive. But the helpfulness of male models to lesbian writers tends to be ambiguous. In Proust, men who desire men and women who desire women occupy very different epistemological positions. The questions he poses about homosexual men are questions about the formation of subjectivity: who or what is this guy, what does he want and why does he want what he wants, how did he get that way, etc., with the old "who or what am *I*?" lurking in the street outside or peeping over the transom. But the lesbian question is always "does she or doesn't she?" and it is posed by an amorous or voyeuristic male subject to whom the woman's desire remains opaque, and for whom its ambiguity is a source of anxiety.[73] This anxious gaze is objectifying or, more accurately, is *about* objectification, because Proust's point is precisely that objectification *doesn't work*. No one but Odette will ever know what Odette is thinking or feeling, or what she wants, even at the moment of the act of physical "possession"—"in which, in any case, one possesses nothing," as Proust says—a very Beauvoirian point.[74] We're surprisingly close, here, to Sartre's and Beauvoir's account of "the Look," the moment where one suddenly remembers that one is not the only subject in the world, and that the other person may have a different idea about what is going on.[75] And despite the ineffable silence of women in Proust's text, I would not be quick to say whether Swann or Odette, "Marcel" or Albertine, finally has the upper hand.

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[70] Marcel Proust, *Sodome et Gomorrhe,* 615–32.

[71] Sedgwick, "Proust and the Spectacle of the Closet." *À la recherche du temps perdu* is another very long book which will look quite different depending on whether one reads and absorbs the whole thing, or takes the part for the whole. I'd argue, for example, that Charlus is not "the homosexual" in any reified way; but one must live with him well into the final volume, and his old age, to grasp that he is, in fact, Charlus, and not "the" anything. (He is not even "a" Charlus; he is himself.)

[72] Discourses about homosexuality and about Jews are inextricably related throughout Europe at this period, in ways I haven't space to discuss. See Carlston, *Thinking Fascism.* See also Altman, "A Book of Repulsive Jews? Rereading *Nightwood*."

But if Beauvoir sought literary models for full-fledged lesbian *subjectivity*, Proust could be little more help than Gide. She turned instead to the tradition of the girl's school crush romance story (or, to put it more elegantly, the lesbian *Bildungsroman*): *Mädchen in Uniform*, *Dusty Answer* … turned to it in *The Second Sex*, in her novels, and perhaps even in her own life.[76]

5 Lesbian Reading

> She would not say of any one in the world now that they were this or were that …
>
> VIRGINIA WOOLF, *Mrs. Dalloway*[77]

---

[73] Sedgwick also observes that the language of "inversion" is never applied to the lesbians in the text (234); it is not Albertine's gender identity that is in question, but the things she (maybe) *does*, the features of her life that escape the narrator's gaze.

[74] "[O]ù d'ailleurs l'on ne possède rien" (Proust, *Du côté de chez Swann*, 275). Compare Beauvoir's description (discussed in chapter 1 above) of eroticism as a revolt of the instant against the flow of time, and thus unsocializable in any systematic way.

[75] Sartre sees this mainly as the opening of hostilities between competing subjectivities, at best a source of nausea, where for Proust it is the beginning of all desire.… In *L'invitée*, Beauvoir seems to do both: Xavière is an opaque and therefore fascinating object of desire for both Françoise and Pierre, but as the source of a competing view of Françoise to Françoise's own view of herself she is so threatening that she must be killed at the end of the novel.

[76] The schoolgirl romance was largely an English vein, but it would be mined by Beauvoir's protégée and disappointed admirer, Violette Leduc, in such works as *La bâtarde* and *Thérèse et Isabelle* and, very differently, by Monique Wittig in her marvelous first novel, *L'Opoponax*.

[77] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 8.

> But lesbian erotics are only partially about conscious victories and romantic sunsets. They are also about conscious and unconscious struggle, circulations of power, failure of nerve, and fear of loss, always in the context of a hostile public.
>
> CAROLYN ALLEN, *Following Djuna*[78]

The "lesbian question" has been, and is, a literary question, as Julie Abraham shows at the beginning of *Are Girls Necessary?*.

> In Anglo-American culture, fiction has been a primary arena for the representation of sexuality and gender and the construction of identities. First cousin to the case history, and more accessible than scientific texts, novels remained over the first half of the twentieth century easier to produce and harder to censor than theater or film. So, for a combination of formal, cultural, and material reasons, the novel has been *the* genre in which representations of lesbianism have been recognized.

As Abraham argues, quite a bit of twentieth-century writing by and about lesbians goes on outside "lesbian novels" about happy or unhappy couples, "coming out," and so on, and it takes longer to recognize or even notice what is lesbian about the work of, say, Willa Cather or Gertrude Stein. "Nonetheless it is surprising … how much lesbian writing contains aspects of the subjects and formula of the lesbian novel."[79]

Abraham's work mainly references British and American fiction, and so, to a surprising extent, does Beauvoir's. Or perhaps what is surprising is to what extent the lesbian literary tradition *was* an Anglo-American phenomenon.[80] Indeed, the women's literary tradition was.[81] Beauvoir's autobiographies record a fiction-dependent process of self-formation and *Bildung* strikingly similar to the stories Rachel Brownstein and Nancy Miller have told about middle-class girls reading under the bedcovers, learning to write and live their own stories.[82] After all my careful attempts at historicity and distance, it is startling to realize that Beauvoir read what I read: that she wept over *Little Women*, then threw it across the room when she learned that Laurie married the insipid, pretty Amy, and not the clever and bookish "Joe [*sic*]";[83] that she took to heart the sorrowful story of Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss*, and vowed to do better by becoming, not Maggie, not Lucy, but George Eliot;[84] that she read all of Woolf's novels and essays as they appeared, even made her way through Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*.[85] As a girl who sought models and possibilities in her reading, rather than her milieu, which was limiting and distressing, she had taught herself (by the time she met Sartre) the first half of the "women in literature" survey as it would appear in the United States around 1975.

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[78] Carolyn Allen, *Following Djuna: Women Lovers and the Erotics of Loss*, 23.

[79] Julie L. Abraham, *Are Girls Necessary?: Lesbian Writing and Modern Histories*, xiii.

[80] Even Renée Vivien and Natalie Barney, who lived in Paris and wrote in French, were Americans. The only exception, if she even counts, is Colette.

[81] See Susan Suleiman, *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics, and the Avant-garde*, 30.

[82] See Nancy K. Miller, "Emphasis Added: Plots and Plausibilities in Women's Fiction," and Rachel Brownstein, *Becoming a Heroine*.

Many of the texts named in her autobiography find their way into *The Second Sex*, too, supplemented by examples and arguments drawn from Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. But how can fiction be source material for philosophy? What *kind* of book is this, anyway? Genre matters because it determines what kinds of truth claims are being made, and what will constitute acceptable evidence for those claims. But genre also matters because it determines how readers are being invited to participate in the work of constructing a text. Who is, and who isn't invited? What implicit contracts between writer and reader are in play? What relationship, what community, is being constructed? (Or imagined, through an intuition of future community among a set of solitary readers, each isolated, and yet all passionately engaged.)

I am sympathetic to the insistence of Christine Delphy, and numerous feminist writers internationally, that "Simone de Beauvoir, c'était un philosophe," which I take to mean, *pay attention to what she actually said*, take its propositional content, so to speak, seriously, and argue for or against it in a grown-up way; master your transferences, be a reader and not just a fan. Beauvoir's exclusion from the philosophical canon as it is read and taught resulted from pure misogyny; disagreeing with that exclusion is a key move in recognizing her importance as a thinker, period. *Agreed.* Yet philosophical accounts can tend to smooth out the lumpy, digressive, baggy texture of Beauvoir's writing, and leave out the parts of *The Second Sex* that, whether I love them or hate them, seem most meaningful to me: the stories about women, told in their own words.[86]

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[83] *MJFR* 122–24 and 145–46.

[84] *MJFR* 194–95.

[85] "Dorothy Richardson's interminable novel, which over the course of ten or twelve volumes succeeds at telling absolutely nothing." [[L]'interminable roman de Dorothy Richardson qui réussit pendant dix ou douze volumes à ne raconter strictement rien (*FA* 63).]

[86] As I hope I showed in chapter 1, what we hear in the extended sexological and psychoanalytic examples is often not the voice of the "expert" but the suffering woman; in the same way, we often seem to be hearing from the heroine of a novel, rather than the novel's male author.

The Second Sex is not a lesbian novel. But if it were a lesbian novel, what lesbian novel would it be?

Not Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*, which Abraham and most other commentators see as *the* formative template for twentieth-century lesbian literature. In a footnote to the last paragraph of the lesbian chapter, Beauvoir says, "*The Well of Loneliness* presents a heroine marked by a psychopathological fate. But the documentary value of this novel is very thin, despite the reputation it has found."[87] What did she dislike, one wonders: Hall's ersatz ethics? the God-talk? The tortured final plea for tolerance toward homosexuals as a group? The stereotypical division Hall draws between "real" (mannish) lesbians and the other, temporary, feminine kind, a distinction that other sorts of "documentary" evidence, cited in Beauvoir's chapter, falsifies? Hall's excruciatingly bad writing? Or … maybe it was the maudlin unhappy ending, the self-sacrifice of the guilt-tripped heroine, and her seemingly inevitable defeat and misery?

A closer model may have been Rosamond Lehmann's *Dusty Answer*, which Beauvoir and Zaza read together, and which Beauvoir tells us she tried to imitate in her own first unsatisfactory attempts to write.[88] She draws on it, and on another Lehmann novel, *Invitation to the Waltz*, repeatedly in the parts of *The Second Sex* that deal with the young woman's development, the *Bildungsroman* parts if you will. Only Alain-Fournier's *Le Grand Meaulnes* seems to have made a comparable impression on her young projections of how her life, and her writing, might turn out.

Lehmann herself was a 1920s English writer to the bone, linked with other post-World War I feminists (Vera Brittain, Winifred Holtby, Storm Jameson, Rebecca West) who have been relegated, with some justice and some injustice, to the B-list as more of sociological than literary interest. Her books, to borrow a phrase from *A Room of One's Own*, lay about in second hand shops like fallen pockmarked apples, until the day they were found and resurrected as Virago Modern Classics.[89] There is no such thing as "women's writing," but if there were, these would be it. They sit on the border between being "good bad novels" and "bad good novels," by which I mean that they make tremendous use of sentimental longings, on the part of characters and readers—both are tremendous tearjerkers—even as they sketch an ironic awareness of the limitations posed for a young woman by her inscription and self-inscription in romance plots. Imagine D. H. Lawrence's Ursula, or Miriam, transplanted into a Jane Austen novel, and you will have a fair sense of *Invitation to the Waltz*'s Olivia, *Dusty Answer*'s Judith. (Naked swimming and rapture over gardens feature heavily.) Lehmann appeals to the instincts of romance-reading even while she seems to sow the seeds for seeing beyond them.[90] What she captures best is the intensity of sexual feeling and power of sexual fantasy in the life of a creative young girl; and also the profound humiliations into which such feelings can lead her, given that other people (especially young men) may have different ideas, or just limited imaginations. The attraction of *Dusty Answer* may partly have been that it shows sexuality as confused, diffused, and multiple. Judith's love for Jennifer is central, sensual, lyrical, and her grief and confusion when Jennifer leaves her (for an older woman more clearly marked in the text as lesbian) cut very deep. But Judith is simultaneously in love with, and attracted to, a variety of other people, including a man who keeps trying to warn her that he is homosexual.

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[87] "*Le puits de solitude* présente une héroïne marquée par une fatalité psychophysiologique. Mais la valeur documentaire de ce roman est fort mince en dépit de la réputation qu'il a connue" (*DS* 2:217N).

[88] Most of these early attempts remained unfinished. See Altman, "Necessity but [unintelligible]."

[89] Lehmann is to Woolf as Howells is to James.

Dusty Answer has usually been discussed in terms of its contribution to the canon of "lesbian images," and as such it has been judged wanting, in terms that strikingly recall the criticisms of Beauvoir I described earlier. English critic Gabrielle Griffin compares it to Clemence Dane's (monstrous) *Regiment of Women*, complaining that Jennifer and Judy's relationship is "pre-sexual" and familial, while Jennifer's relationship to the more masculine Geraldine Manners is "purposeless," "deracinated," "promiscuous" and provides no viable alternative.[91] One thing that might be said of these criticisms is that they keep us from reading and enjoying the book on its own terms; another is that they develop an ersatz ethics no less chilling than the heterosexual plotting Griffin presumably means to oppose. (What conceivable lesbian image, or reality, *would* be acceptable?)

What did Beauvoir look for, and find, in *Dusty Answer*? Arguments of the "Emily must have felt" sort often feel tricksy. But having compared Lehmann's novel with Beauvoir's autobiographical writing about her youth, and with her youthful diaries, I want to speculate that she *didn't* pore over it in a hungry search for lesbian representation, for information about her own same-sex desires, for cultural legitimation that would bless her union with her friend Zaza and empower her to give up on Jacques. Rather, she sought and found a young woman full of life, full of passionate feeling for people of both sexes, and also of a longing to be herself *for herself* first … and capable too of study and intellectual detachment, but unwilling to give up on love.

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[90] See Suzanne Clark, *Sentimental Modernism,* and Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance,* for a less unsympathetic view than mine of the romance genre.

[91] Griffin, *Heavenly Love? Lesbian Images in Twentieth-Century Women's Writing.* Despite its date, 1993, Griffin's book sits firmly within a strong lesbian-feminist paradigm, and opens with a polemic against queer theory.

Does this have to be inauthentic? Isn't it how it just, uh, *is*, sometimes? Or, in the dignified phrase Beauvoir chose sometimes when she wished to introduce her own life into that dignified philosophical tome, *The Second Sex*, "I myself know some women who…"

6 Lesbians and *L'invitée*

But of course *The Second Sex* is not a lesbian novel, or any other kind of novel. The closest thing to a lesbian novel Beauvoir actually wrote was *L'invitée*.[92]

L'invitée is a lesbian novel only in the way that *To the Lighthouse* and *Mrs. Dalloway* are, in the same way (but much more strongly) that according to Barbara Smith *Sula* is one.[93] They don't signal themselves as such, aren't *The Well of Loneliness* or *Riverfinger Woman*; they do not say "we." But there are a few passages that, once you've understood them, radiate meaning subtly throughout the whole text.[94] And you say to yourself, or your students, well what did you *think* it was about, silly? Once pointed out, the emotional current is irreversibly evident. But such works are totally unconcerned about "lesbian identity," about drawing a line of demarcation between heterosexuality and homosexuality.

L'invitée includes a number of scenes between Françoise and Xavière that are both emotional and erotic, including a number of scenes where the two of them together appreciatively watch other women.[95] This may help us make sense of the intensity of Françoise's desire to bring Xavière to Paris, and of her sadness when Pierre decides to make seducing Xavière one of his projects, in a sense cutting Françoise out of her share of Xavière's affection: she is jealous of *both of them*. Eroticism between women, while never named, is diffused and unsettling throughout … in the same way that the deep bonds between men are diffused, unsettling, *troublants* throughout *Le Grand Meaulnes* and the early work of Gide. The "pedagogical model" of the relationship also seems influenced by Gide's life and work, as well as by some of the schoolgirl lesbian romances I discussed earlier.

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[92] Julie Abraham makes a distinction between "lesbian novels" and "lesbian writing" which I am not following here; my usage of the term "novel" is looser.

[93] Barbara Smith, "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism."

[94] Rich's idea of "lesbian continuum," Audre Lorde's similarly diffuse and inclusive notion of "the erotic," might be relevant here.

[95] Xavière, who is described as both opaque (in the manner of Proust's *êtres de fuite*) and perverse, has a fine selection of pinups on the wall of her room. Some, though not all, of the women they watch together are women of color. I'll return to this issue in chapter four below.

As much as I have learned from Toril Moi's work on Beauvoir, I find myself dissenting from her Freudian and somewhat Kristevan reading of *L'invitée*. To me, *L'invitée* is not about separating from the symbiotic mother.[96] It is, among many other things, about not quite having the courage to bring another woman out, to be a younger woman's first and real lover; and envying the men for whom heterosexual seduction is an obvious, and culturally syntonic, move. Perhaps an insight into the ethical limitations of the pedagogical model itself—an awareness she began developing in the manuscript that became *Quand prime le spirituel*, and that took its baldest form in her much later statement to Nelson Algren, "I happened to behave very badly"—is at least on the horizon as well. What's interesting is that because lesbian desire is never *named*, it need never be named as a problem, a crime, a disease, or any of a number of other distressing options that were certainly culturally available to Beauvoir. The question of how the characters' behavior might relate to conventional morality (whether bourgeois or Kantian) is simply irrelevant. Possibly an advantage.

This does not *really* make *L'invitée* a lesbian novel. But it is not exactly a heterosexual novel either, because the heterosexuality it foregrounds is an attempt to, in Woolf's phrase, "live differently."[97] However problematic this turns out to be (it does lead to murder) the attempt is never abandoned. For this reason Toril Moi's question, why Françoise doesn't just do the obvious thing and ask Pierre not to sleep with Xavière, seems misguided. To do that, to enact the same sort of possessive jealousy as an ordinary bourgeois wife, would be to vitiate not just the basis for that couple's original "pact," but the whole idea or original choice around which Françoise is constructing her own new form of subjectivity in relationship. The final line, "[e]lle s'était choisie" (she had chosen herself) doesn't mean, or doesn't *only* mean, that she killed Xavière so she could keep Pierre for herself—that would reaffirm the heterosexual plot; rather I think it means, she chose to keep her different story going, even though there was no existing paradigm within which her story could be said to "make sense." Perhaps precisely *for* that reason. Just as in the lesbian chapter of *The Second Sex*, ethical questions about the authenticity or inauthenticity of desire are foregrounded; but here, ideas about homosexual versus heterosexual desire, about lesbian "identity," do not speak to these questions: so they are silent.[98]

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[96] Moi, *Making of an Intellectual Woman*, 118–23.

[97] Woolf, *The Years*, 286, 309.

7 Last Thoughts

> *La théorie, c'est bon, mais ça n'empêche pas d'exister.*
>
> Charcot quoted by Freud[99]

> Sexual theory has been traditionally used to say, "People have been forced to be this thing; people could be that thing." And you're left in the middle going, "Well, I am here, and I don't know how to get there." It hasn't been able to talk realistically about where people are sexually.
>
> AMBER HOLLIBAUGH[100]

As I said above, *The Second Sex* is of course not a lesbian novel, or any other kind of novel. But I do hope that this juxtaposition at least helps us wonder whether it can finally be judged to be monologic. So many competing voices, saying so many different things, at such length, so many instances of "on the other hand," are not digressions from her point, they *are* the point. This has profound implications for how we read it, both for the experience of (sitting there and) reading it, and for the final act of deciding "what she means" and passing political judgment. A certain statement, presented as a generalized account of how things always are for everyone, may offend me terribly; if it is offered, instead, as a story among others, I may swallow it, may even remember a similar story that once happened to me, may now read my own story differently. If *identification* with the text, like identification in reading a novel, need not be sole or whole or involve *identity*, perhaps the resulting text will speak to many different readers and seem to be saying many different things? (As this one, remember, did.)

Perhaps one might call the lesbian chapter a piece of literary criticism (among other things). An attempt to put together, to cut together (in the sense of montage) a picture of "lesbian existence" from the documents that were to hand, judging some more effective than others but leaving in a lot of rough edges. Because she did not trust her own fragmentary experience, or her understanding of it? Or, because she wanted it to be better than it had been for her?

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[98] A very compelling 2010 article by Michael Lucey, "Simone de Beauvoir and Sexuality in the Third Person," reaches a similar conclusion by a different route.

[99] Roazen, *Freud and His Followers*, 72.

[100] Amber Hollibaugh and Cherrie Moraga, "What We're Rolling Around in Bed With," 72.

Or because she did not in the final analysis wish to speak for others?

Who knows? I am not however interested in fleeing Griffin's ersatz ethics in the other direction, and suggesting that every indication of lesbian existence, however slight or problematic, constitutes a "queer touch" that renders the text and the author deliciously subversive. Foucault's insight cuts both ways, cuts many more ways than two.

What then is the theoretical payoff, for example for some future conversation I might have with H., or with my feminist students who wonder quite reasonably what any of this has to offer them? If what is useful and exciting is always the first awareness, the first unsettling move, the first undermining of heterosexist "common sense," the first uncoupling of sex from gender and of sex-as-it-has-been from sex as it might be … well, this can be accomplished by a number of "theorists" in a number of ways. What Gide did for Beauvoir, Beauvoir did for Judith Butler, and Butler did for H.; it was probably Foucault who did it for me. A true and important thing will be thought more than once and by more than one very smart person. This does not particularly help us assess the adequacy or inadequacy of the various theories we have in front of us. But maybe that's the wrong game.

My original claim was a modest one: simply that it is interesting and worthwhile to read Beauvoir, and to read her in this way, in time. This is the sort of claim literary critics like myself do tend to make, though we sometimes dress them up in fancier language. It might be tempting to make a stronger claim: that the readings of Ann Ferguson et al. were "gay" or "lesbian" readings, which accounted for their flaws, and that my own reading was "queer" and therefore better. (As some are now saying that *The Well of Loneliness* is not, as was thought, a bad and somewhat cowardly novel about lesbians, but a good and brave novel about a transgendered person: Jay Prosser advances this sort of view in *Second Skins*, and I think H. for example holds it.)[101] I don't think these readings are *wrong* by any means … but …

What do we want from a theory, anyhow? Perhaps the richest and most enduring theories are those that, far from legislating a single outcome for a single moment in time and space make it possible to think … more than one thing, in more than one way?

---

[101] Jay Prosser, *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality*.

CHAPTER 3

Nothing to Say About Race and Class?

> We should be judged, not by the errors we make but by what we make of our errors.
>
> ANNIE SUGIER[1]

> Critics should not construct for our subjects a historically impossible purity.
>
> JONATHAN ARAC[2]

> [B]eaucoup de problèmes nous paraissent plus essentiels que ceux qui nous concernent singulièrement….
>
> *The Second Sex*, 1:29

Summer 2006. I am traveling to Berlin to speak at a conference, "Black European Studies in Transnational Perspective," stopping for a month in Oxford on the way. Dragging three overweight suitcases stuffed with books and notes about Simone de Beauvoir, I land at Heathrow and find myself in a longer immigration queue than usual (because England is playing in the World Cup), and I fall into conversation with two very young American women, recent college graduates. One, who asserts gamely that she "works in improv in New York," is coming "to study Shakespeare at the Globe"; the other, nervous and asthmatic, is emigrating, moving to (I think) Hertfordshire to get married and live happily ever after. She is carrying her wedding dress with eight-foot train in a monster-sized garment bag over her shoulder, and oozing anxiety about her prospective in-laws, who appear to have a great deal of money. "I'm from a humble background," she explains to me, a total stranger. She's from New Haven, but she didn't go to Yale … This isn't going to work, I think, but of course

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[1] Colloque internationale, Université Paris Diderot Paris 7, January 2008. Annie Sugier was introduced as "physiciste et militante, ancien combattante du MLF et de la Ligue des Droits de la Femme." She delivered a powerful testimony about Beauvoir's direct impact on feminist activism in the 1970s and into the twenty-first century. Some of what she said has been published as Annie Sugier and Kahina Benziane, "Nos chemins se sont croisés," in the conference proceedings.

[2] Jonathan Arac, "Imperial Eclecticism in *Moby Dick* and *Invisible Man*: Literature in a Postcolonial Empire," 152.

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I don't say so. As an older woman, a "frequent flyer," I make reassuring noises to both. "We're almost there," I say.

As we finally approach the immigration desk, the budding actress asks me to look over her landing card, because she isn't sure she filled it out right (I have admitted to being a teacher). I see that in the box for "nationality," she has written, "Hispanic, Jewish." So I say gently, no, that's where you put "USA."

And the other young woman says "Oh. I just put 'White.'"

•••

A funny story (sort of); when I told it in Oxford, D. started teasing me: "when are you going back to White?" But how does it happen that perfectly likeable, well-meaning, well-educated young people seem oblivious to their own nationality as a salient fact about themselves *even when traveling*? Is it that Americans "generously" assume all human beings to be American till proven otherwise? Or, that within the United States questions of race and ethnic identity are so heated and vexed that they block out all information about the rest of the world?

Issues of nation and race were urgent for Simone de Beauvoir and her intellectual and political traveling companions in the years following the Second World War, as the Cold War consolidated American hegemony, while old-style European colonialism exploded, decayed, shifted shape. Such issues are equally urgent for feminists today: in France, where questions about hijab and secularism have divided feminists, with Beauvoir's legacy claimed by both sides; in the United States, where the lip service given to multiculturalist ideals in mainstream civic life seems to have left kneejerk nationalism largely undisturbed; and in feminist theory, where we are still looking for a way to think about more than one kind of oppression at the same time, without subordinating one to another or excusing any, trying to find our way toward a fully anti-racist and transnational feminism that does not dissolve into paradoxes. It would, I will argue, be a mistake to assume that Beauvoir has nothing to contribute to those discussions.

The task of the next four chapters is partly to answer what I view as misunderstandings and misappropriations of Beauvoir's views on race and class, a task already well begun by Margaret Simons, Sonia Kruks, Doris Ruhe, others. But I hope to go beyond the rather strange professional activity of "defending my author" to convey a richer understanding of what Beauvoir actually said, and why, and how that can help us. I place particular emphasis on what literary scholars call "reception contexts." It is important to situate Beauvoir with respect to the discourses of the time and place from which she wrote: many misunderstandings have arisen from not doing so, from imposing anachronistic expectations and/or recruiting her to later intra-feminist debates. But also, placing Beauvoir's *readers* in historical context can usefully complicate the usual map we draw of feminist history since the middle of the last century.

I'll be reading Beauvoir in dialogue with other discourses around race and class, both upstream and downstream from her arguments, including her engagement with the anti-colonial and anti-racist work being done by Richard Wright, Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, and also with a more problematic discourse of "appreciation" of non-European cultural forms by the French intellectual left and the avant-garde. International travel, both real and imaginary, played a crucial role in all those discourses, and in how her relationships to them developed. And, as one might expect, it is not always easy, perhaps not always possible, to pry the progressive and regressive discourses apart.

1 Beauvoir's Trip to America, and What She Found There

What I had been doing on that airplane was re-reading Beauvoir's *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947* (*America Day by Day 1947*), a book-length essay-travelogue-diary about her first visit to the United States.[3] In that book Beauvoir suggests that Americans, including American college students, really don't know much about the wider world they live in, a situation she found strange and somewhat terrifying, given the enormous power the United States was wielding as the Cold War got under way. She was especially concerned to ask how a sense of political impotence and fatalism, including among intellectuals and on the so-called Left, could co-exist with an American optimism and idealism she regarded as sincere. *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947* is an interesting book in its own right, but also because while she was writing it, she was working out the ideas that would emerge as *The Second Sex*.[4] Beauvoir spent time in New York and Chicago, where she met with leading American intellectuals and French expatriates; she also took a far-flung lecture tour of college campuses, visited California and New Mexico, and traveled through Texas and the Deep South on a Greyhound bus with her friend Nathalie Sorokine Moffat. And while she saw a lot about the United States that she liked, she was also quite critical, particularly of an American tendency to think in abstractions, because abstractions tend to be mystifications, or myths. Abstraction, she says, is a way of making things bearable that ought to be, and remain, unbearable.[5] She also notes that the idea of "Europe," of herself as "European," first became salient to her in the course of that trip.[6]

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[3] Translations from this text are my own. Of the two available English versions, both titled *America Day by Day* (without the year), the better one is Carol Cosman's (1999). The earlier one (1953), by Patrick Dudley, includes some good photographs, but made very significant cuts from the French, eliminating most of the Beauvoir's political and economic critique and her discussion of current events, including many of the passages I discuss below. See William McBride, "The Postwar World According to Beauvoir," for a comprehensive account of what is missing. Beyond a simple "dumbing down" for American audience, McBride sees "obvious malice aforethought": "In fact, there is something quite sinister about this first English translation, which in certain respects is more like a Hollywood film version of *L'Amérique au jour le jour*" ("The Postwar World According to Beauvoir," 432).

[4] Excerpts from *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947* appeared in four issues of *Les Temps Modernes*, from December 1947 through April 1948; in the very next issue, the lead article is "La femme

Travel's power to reverse the optic of identity is a familiar enough idea. She'd reach for it in the introduction to *The Second Sex* as a way to clarify her basic concept of the Other: while traveling, the "native" is scandalized to see that other countries have their own natives, who look at him and see a foreigner.[7] That underlying problem of intersubjectivity, which Sartre so memorably phrased as "the Look of the Other that steals my world from me," had preoccupied Beauvoir from her earliest writings, and had taken center stage in her first published novel, *L'invitée*, with its epigraph from Hegel: "every consciousness desires the death of the other." But the problem of the Other had turned out not to be as simple as it had seemed when Françoise in that novel, looking through a keyhole, saw herself as the villainess in someone else's story rather than the heroine of her own life. In the post-war writing of what Beauvoir called her "moral period" (*Le sang des autres* [1945], *Pyrrhus et Cinéas* [1944], *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* [1947]), the struggle for subjectivity became less claustrophobic, more oriented toward responsibility for a collective future. *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947* takes a further step. The identity thrown in her face here is both collectivized and politicized in a concretely historical way: postwar international rearrangements and regroupings have decisively marginalized Western Europe, which now appears as a mere battleground or

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et les mythes," described in a footnote as "an extract of a forthcoming work on the situation of women" (extrait d'un ouvrage à paraître sur la situation de la femme). Writing *The Second Sex* seems to have taken about three years, with *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947* in the middle. For details, see Doris Ruhe, "Femmes, Juifs, Noirs: *Le deuxième sexe* en situation," Penelope Deutscher, *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Ambiguity, Conversion, Resistance*, and Margaret Simons, "Richard Wright, Simone de Beauvoir, and *The Second Sex*," a pioneering article to which all subsequent work on this topic, including mine, is deeply indebted.

[5] *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947* (hereinafter *AJ*), 527–34.

[6] *AJ* 108.

[7] "En voyage le natif s'aperçoit avec scandale qu'il y a dans les pays voisins des natifs qui le regardent à son tour comme étranger" (*DS* 1:17).

terrain of ideological encounter for the two "real" powers. Perhaps one could phrase this as "the Look of the Others, which steals our world from us"—except that it is not just their Look; it is their army.[8]

L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947 is a key transitional text in Beauvoir's thinking and also in her intellectual "style" (for want of a better term). It takes up again the central philosophical insight of *Pyrrhus et Cinéas* and *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*: *dépassement*, the freedom to move beyond the "givens," is basic to human life, but a million traps entice people to betray that freedom. However, *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947* leaves behind the arid abstract tone that later made her dissatisfied with her moral period works; perhaps this smoothed her return to philosophical thinking with *The Second Sex*.[9] Her book on America was also a cautious transition into Beauvoir's vast autobiographical project, which in itself has been enormously important for feminism: most people have tended to see that project as starting with *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*, but in fact *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947* is the first place where the inchoate personal writing of diaries and letters begins tentatively to coalesce into a coherent yet embodied, public yet personal, "voice."

The book loosely follows a journal format, and she records impressions rather than aiming to give a definitive single view: she explains, "I must underline that no single passage, taken on its own, amounts to a definitive judgement; often, moreover, I did not arrive at a firm and final point of view, and it is the whole collection of my indecisions, additions, and rectifications that constitutes my opinion."[10] Nonetheless her impressions are strongly and decisively expressed, and it is most definitely a political essay.[11] For one thing, as I mentioned in Chapter 1, *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947* begins Beauvoir's critique of consumer culture and of what Adorno about the same time was calling "the administered life,"[12] a critique that would culminate in her late novel *Les belles images*. She finds American advertising especially fascinating: "The constipated young woman smiles a loving smile at the glass of orange juice that loosens her bowels."[13] Dazzled at first by the variety of choices available in American drugstores, she is disillusioned to find that all the brands of toothpaste, all the kinds of chocolate, taste exactly the same. "This pointless profusion has an aftertaste of mystification. A thousand possibilities open before us; but they are all the same. Thus the American citizen can consume his freedom within the life that is imposed on him, without even noticing that this life is not a free one."[14] American intellectuals, like novelist and critic Mary McCarthy, responded as though "our American way of life" had been attacked, and they were not entirely wrong; but those who mocked the book as simply incoherent or filled with trivialities didn't grasp that Beauvoir was trying also to communicate the texture of what she called a "world," in the way a novel might do, while working through crucial social postwar problems by means of concrete and situated examples.[15]

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[8] In *La force des choses* she tells the story of an encounter Sartre had on his earlier visit to the United States, as part of an official French delegation; he's been warned about rising repression of left-wing intellectuals, and "in effect, what was said was hardly reassuring. Over lunch, the public relations director of Ford referred lightly to the coming war against the Soviet Union. 'But you have no common frontier, where will you fight?' asked a journalist from the Communist Party. 'Oh, in Europe,' was the carefree response." [En effet, on lui avait tenu des propos peu rassurants. Au cours d'un déjeuner, le directeur des *Public relations* de Ford avait évoqué avec bonne humeur la prochaine guerre contre l'URSS. "Mais vous n'avez pas de frontière commune, où se battra-t-on?" avait demandé une journaliste du PC. "En Europe," répondit-il avec naturel (*FCh* 1:54–5).]

[9] See Ruhe, "Femmes, Juifs, Noirs": "Some fundamental ideas relevant to her research on women are, so to speak, tested out [in *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947*]. Certain stances which, in *The Second Sex*, derive somewhat dogmatically from existentialist doctrine, appear in a different and gentler light.... Her book about America lets her try out the interpretive method she will bring to bear in *The Second Sex*." [Des idées fondamentales touchant ses recherches sur les femmes y sont en quelque sorte mises à l'essai. Des positions qui, dans *Le deuxième sexe*, suivent de manière quelque peu dogmatique la doctrine existentialiste, apparaissent sous un autre jour, un jour plus "doux".... Son livre sur l'Amérique lui permet de mettre à l'essai la grille théorique dont elle va se servir dans *Le deuxième sexe* (85–7).]

Part of why *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947* was not well-understood or liked by American readers was Beauvoir's stubborn refusal to see herself as visiting the land of White. Quite early in the book she goes to an embassy cocktail party of French expatriates, and one of them (whom she doesn't identify) takes her by the hand and says, you must promise me you won't write anything about America, and especially about the problem of the Blacks, which is difficult and painful and hard to understand.[16] Beauvoir bristles at the idea of being told what she should and shouldn't write, and interprets what she calls his "servility" as just what one would expect from a former supporter of Pétain. He and others seem to be reading the race question as a stand-in for Cold War politics.[17] Others warn her not to go to Harlem—she'll be found in a gutter with her throat cut, she'll be raped … she identifies this as a strange fantasy on the part of the whites, and goes there anyhow, first on foot by herself, later accompanied by her friend Richard Wright.[18] She writes about how "the irrational fear [Harlem] inspires can only be the other side of hate and a sort of remorse…. Harlem weighs on the conscience of whites like original sin on the conscience of a Christian."[19] She accompanies Richard Wright to a variety of Black churches, and sees at first hand the difficulties he and his wife Ellen are having living as an interracial couple in Greenwich Village. Visiting New Mexico, she is charmed by Taos Pueblo but unnerved by its resemblance to a "Jardin d'Acclimation" or zoo; she has much to say about the way Native Americans are encouraged to stage their own ethnicity for an audience of arty, liberal whites who collect their art.[20] Some months later, when she and her friend Nathalie Sorokine Moffat see how Blacks waiting for the bus are treated by the whites, she will write,

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[10] "Je tiens à signaler qu'aucun morceau isolé ne constitue un jugement définitif; souvent, d'ailleurs, je n'aboutis à aucun point de vue arrêté, et c'est l'ensemble de mes indécisions, des additions et rectifications qui constitue mon opinion" (*AJ* 10).

[11] The directness and specificity of these interventions into Cold War national and international discourses, underscored by the placement of serialized sections in *Les Temps Modernes*, gives the lie to an old idea that she left such matters to Sartre. See also Sonia Kruks, "Ambiguity and Certitude in Simone de Beauvoir's Politics," on the forthright polemical style of some, though not all, of Beauvoir's political writing.

[12] That Adorno was a German Jew enduring exile rather than a French tourist only makes the parallels between their accounts more striking.

[13] "La jeune fille constipée sourit d'un sourire d'amoureuse au jus de citron qui relâche ses intestins" (*AJ* 39).

[14] "Il y a dans cette profusion inutile un arrière-goût de mystification. Voici mille possibilités ouvertes: mais c'est la même. Mille choix permis: mais tous équivalents. Ainsi le citoyen américain pourra consommer sa liberté à l'intérieur de la vie qui lui est imposée sans s'apercevoir que cette vie même n'est pas libre" (*AJ* 34).

[15] See Mary McCarthy, "Mlle. Gulliver en Amérique," and discussion in Chapter 4 below. See also Penelope Deutscher, *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Ambiguity, Conversion, Resistance*, 65–7.

> In the middle of the desert, the State Line was invisible. But when we got off the bus, we understood we had crossed a border. On the doors of the "rest rooms," we read on one side "white ladies, white gentlemen," on the

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[16] *AJ* 30–2.

[17] It's interesting to find echoes of the same attitude, as late as 1992, in the dismissive remarks of historian Tony Judt in *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals 1944–1956*. Judt was in many ways the heir of the so-called "New York Intellectuals," some of whom Beauvoir met on this visit; their instant mutual dislike is recorded in *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947* and elsewhere, as I'll discuss in Chapter 4 below. The failure of that group, including Hannah Arendt, to understand and support the emerging Civil Rights movement has been well documented. See Michael Barber, "Phenomenology and the Ethical Basis of Pluralism: Arendt and Beauvoir on Race in the US," and Kathryn T. Gines, *Arendt and the Negro Question*.

[18] *AJ* 49–54, 54–8, 83–4.

[19] "Ces noirs ne vont pas déferler soudain vers Wall Street, ils ne constituent aucune menace immédiate. La peur déraisonnable qu'ils inspirent ne peut être que l'envers d'une haine et d'une espèce de remords. Fiché au cœur de New York, Harlem pèse sur la bonne conscience des blancs comme le péché originel sur celle d'un chrétien" (*AJ* 53).

[20] *AJ* 262–83. The term "radical chic" would be anachronistic here, but only slightly.

> other "colored women," "colored men." Only whites were in the grand hall that served as a waiting-room; the Blacks were penned in a little adjoining cubbyhole; next to the spacious restaurant reserved for whites the tiny "lunch-room" for "colored people" could only hold four customers at a time. For the first time we see with our own eyes this segregation about which we have heard so much; being forewarned makes no difference; something falls on our shoulders which will stay there all across the South; it is our own skin, heavy and stifling, whose color burns us.[21]

In New Orleans, she and Sorokine go to the Black quarter to hear some jazz and then can't find a cab. "So we go on foot through this enemy city, this city where we are enemies in spite of ourselves, justly responsible for the color of our skins and for everything which, in spite of ourselves, it implies."[22]

But no European ever saw America for the first time.[23] McCarthy would complain that Beauvoir's expectations of America were shaped by what she'd seen in the movies, and McCarthy is right: Beauvoir says so herself. The vertigo of encountering in real life scenes and places she already "knew" from films brings a particular self-reflexivity to her project, especially when what she sees coincides with Hollywood images (and she feels, wait, this is "real life," so it *shouldn't*). The impressions which had formed her (and Sartre's) ideas of America were also highly literary: Hemingway, Steinbeck, Faulkner, John Dos Passos, and Richard Wright, whose works she had read before she met him.[24] When she came to sit down and write, she also drew heavily on non-fictional sources, especially Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma*, the comprehensive and interdisciplinary investigation of race in America that famously concludes (among many other things) that the problem of race is really a white problem. As Margaret Simons notes in her indispensable article, "Richard Wright, Simone de Beauvoir and *The Second Sex*," Beauvoir refers frequently to Myrdal's formulation of the contradiction between America's universalist claims about human rights and freedoms, and the manifest denial of those freedoms to those Americans who happened to be Black.[25] But Simons also sees Myrdal's influence on *The Second Sex* as limited by his "paternalistic liberalism.… Writing as an anti-Communist and a social engineer, Myrdal largely ignores the Black community and its leaders" and "finds nothing of value in African American culture and community, which he describes as 'pathological.'"[26]

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[21] "Au milieu du désert, la State Line était invisible. Mais quand nous descendons de l'autobus, nous comprenons que nous avons franchi une frontière. Sur les portes des *restrooms*, on lit d'un côté 'White ladies,' 'White gentlemen,' et de l'autre 'Coloured women,' 'Coloured men.' Il n'y a que des blancs dans le grand hall qui sert de salle d'attente: les noirs sont parqués dans un petit réduit attenant; à côté du restaurant spacieux réservé aux blancs le minuscule *lunch-room* pour *coloured people* ne peut accueillir que quatre clients à la fois. C'est la première fois que nous voyons de nos yeux cette ségrégation dont nous avons tant entendu parler; et nous avons beau être prévenues: quelque chose tombe sur nos épaules qui ne nous quittera plus à travers tout le Sud; c'est notre propre peau qui est devenue lourde et étouffante et dont la couleur nous brûle" (*AJ* 284).

[22] "Nous traversons donc à pied cette ville ennemie, cette ville où malgré nous nous sommes des ennemis, justement responsables de la couleur de notre peau et de tout ce que, en dépit de nous-mêmes, elle implique" (*AJ* 318).

[23] Ann Douglas made this remark many years ago in reference to early American literature.

[24] The influence of Dos Passos in particular on Sartre's and Beauvoir's fictional epistemologies would be difficult to overstate, though it has not received much attention. See Altman, "Beauvoir as Literary Writer," and Michael Lucey, "Simone de Beauvoir and Sexuality in the Third Person."

These problems with Myrdal are certainly glaring today. However, I also see a more positive influence on Beauvoir from Myrdal. His work builds a powerful case, not just that values must and ought to inform social investigations, but that social investigations should inform moral values. Myrdal's methods of inquiry are eclectic and comprehensive, in ways that might have, if not inspired, at least justified the encyclopedic way Beauvoir would go about writing *The Second Sex*.[27] Also, like Myrdal, Beauvoir went to see America for herself, and she wrote what she saw: the bad, the good (including martinis), the randomly weird, like a bowling alley in Queens where the pinboy is part of the machine, or an earnest, detailed explanation of how doughnuts are made.[28] Some of these seemingly gratuitous episodes, which McCarthy found naïve and gullible, don't point in any particular political direction; they simply contribute to the narrative texture, the creation of a plausibly "thick" narrated world, in the way Barthes describes as "l'effet de réel."[29]

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[25] Simons, "Richard Wright." In *Psychology Comes to Harlem: Rethinking the Race Question in Twentieth-Century America*, Jay Garcia explains why Richard Wright nonetheless staunchly supported Myrdal; for a balanced summary of Myrdal's view and contribution, see Richard H. King, *Race, Culture, and the Intellectuals, 1940–1970*.

[26] Simons, "Richard Wright," 171.

[27] See Deutscher, *Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir*, 80–1, for confirming details drawn from letters: apparently it was *after* being impressed by the size and scope of Myrdal's book that Beauvoir headed to the Bibliothèque nationale. Deutscher's view of the value of Myrdal's influence, and of Beauvoir's interdisciplinary approach more generally, is quite different from mine. See also Simons, "Richard Wright," 170–72.

[28] *AJ* 100, 128.

[29] Roland Barthes, "L'effet de réel" (1968). The term is sometimes translated as "reality effect" or "realist operator." Beauvoir herself articulates a similar idea in the introduction to *La force des choses*: "I don't dwell on the color of a sky, on the taste of a piece of fruit, for my own enjoyment; if I was telling the story of someone else's life, I would include these

Other incidents have greater significance. The segregated bus trip continues relentlessly, for pages and pages; trapped for a claustrophobic sixteen hours through Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida, we can taste the sandwiches and the Coca-Cola, hear the conductor's genial comments on the scenery, see the romantic Spanish moss on the trees, the tropical azaleas and cacti, sun sparkling on water "like a honeymoon dream," vast lawns and solitary shacks.[30] And we can feel the sweat on faces as tension mounts with the heat.

> And all through the long day the great Southern tragedy pursues us like an obsession.… Everywhere we go, a smell of hate is in the air, the arrogant hate of whites, the silent hate of Blacks. There's no room for American politeness here. The Blacks are pushed around as the line presses toward the exit. "You're not going to let that *négresse* pass in front of you," says a woman to a man, her voice shaking with fury.[31]

Eventually the pot boils over.

> The Blacks squeeze themselves humbly onto the back bench, trying to disappear. In mid-afternoon, with the heat and the bumps that are especially rough at the rear, a pregnant woman faints. With each jolt of the

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so-called trivial details just as copiously, if I happened to know them. It's not just that they convey the feeling of a time in history and a person of flesh and blood; but by their very lack of significance they are, in a true story, the mark of truth itself: they point to nothing but themselves and the only reason to include them is that they were there. That's enough." [La couleur d'un ciel, le goût d'un fruit, je ne les souligne pas par complaisance à moi-même: racontant la vie de quelqu'un d'autre, je noterais avec la même abondance, si je les connaissais, ces détails qu'on dit triviaux. Non seulement c'est par eux qu'on sent une époque et une personne en chair et en os: mais, par leur non-signifiance, ils sont dans une histoire vraie la touche même de la vérité; ils n'indiquent rien d'autre qu'eux-mêmes et la seule raison de les relever, c'est qu'ils se trouvaient là: elle suffit (*FCh* 1:8–9).]

Michael D. Barber's article convincingly describes the method of Beauvoir's text as *phenomenological*, and reminds me to mention that the "diary" format was a subsequent reconstruction (two visits to the US were collapsed into one, and the chronology was rearranged).

[30] "[C]omme un rêve pour lunes de miel" (*AJ* 322).

[31] The word Beauvoir uses in this sentence and the next, "négresse," is difficult to translate. It seems likely that the white passengers on the bus used a less polite term. "Et tout au long du jour la grande tragédie du Sud nous poursuit comme une obsession.… [P]artout où nous passons, il y a une odeur de haine dans l'air: haine arrogante des blancs, haine silencieuse des noirs.… La gentillesse américaine n'a plus de place ici; dans la queue qui se presse aux portes du bus, on bouscule les noirs: 'Vous n'allez pas laisser cette négresse passer devant vous,' dit une femme à un homme, avec une voix tremblante de fureur" (*AJ* 322).

> bus, her lifeless head bangs against the bus window. We hear the sniggering and scandalized voice of a *college-girl* shouting, the *négresse* has gone crazy! The driver stops the bus and goes to investigate, oh it's only a *négresse* who passed out, everybody jeers, these women always make such a fuss.... Someone shakes the sick woman a little to rouse her and the bus drives on; we don't dare to offer her our place at the front: the whole bus would be in an uproar and she would be the first victim of their indignation.[32]

The exaggerated courtesy of southern whites toward women is trumped by racism. White *women* are among the worst offenders. Individual gestures of ordinary humanity feel impossible.

> The bus continue to roll, the young woman continues to suffer, and, by the time we reach a town, she is unconscious again. The travellers head out regardless, in search of Coca-Cola; only one elderly American woman comes with N. and me to try and help her. She thanks us nervously and leaves as fast as she can, refusing any further assistance; she knows that white eyes are judging her harshly, and she is afraid.
>
> It's a minor incident. But it helps me understand why, when we stop in the crowded parts of town where the Blacks are allowed to live, the placid Greyhound draws such bitter looks.[33]

As Margaret Simons comments,

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[32] "Les noirs s'entassent humblement sur la banquette du fond, ils essaient de se faire oublier. Au milieu de l'après-midi, dans la chaleur et les cahots qui sont particulièrement rudes à l'arrière, une femme enceinte s'évanouit; sa tête abandonnée cogne contre la vitre à chaque sursaut; nous entendons la voix ricanante et scandalisée d'une *college-girl* qui crie: 'La négresse est folle!' Le conducteur arrête l'autobus et il va voir ce qui se passe; ce n'est qu'une négresse évanouie, et tout le monde ricane; il faut toujours que ces femmes fassent des embarras.... On secoue un peu la malade, on la réveille et l'autobus repart; nous n'osons pas lui offrir notre place à l'avant, tout le car s'y opposerait et elle serait la première victime de l'indignation provoquée" (*AJ* 322–23, ellipsis in original).

[33] "L'autobus continue à rouler, la jeune femme à souffrir et, quand on s'arrête en ville, elle est évanouie de nouveau; les gens vont boire des coca-cola sans s'occuper d'elle; il y a seulement une vieille Américaine qui vient avec N. et moi essayer de lui porter secours. Elle nous remercie, mais elle a l'air inquiet et elle s'en va au plus vite sans accepter que nous l'aidions davantage; elle se sent coupable aux yeux des blancs et elle a peur. Ce n'est qu'un petit incident. Mais il m'aide à comprendre pourquoi, quand nous traversons les faubourgs où s'entasse une population noire, ce sont des regards si farouches qui se posent sur le placide *Greyhound*" (*AJ* 323).

> Beauvoir's graphic descriptions in *America Day by Day* of the racism of white women show how she learns firsthand that white racist allegiances and privilege can motivate white women to deny the humanity of Black women.... Beauvoir leaves the South with few illusions about the possibilities of feminist sisterhood easily cutting across a racist divide.[34]

The trip also leaves her well aware that being a *well-meaning* white person is no defense when a problem is structural: what solidarity the white women do feel able to offer is rejected, and rightly. I am reminded of Robert's remark in *Les mandarins*: "one can't draw a straight line in a curved space." (Or as Adorno, writing around the same time, would put it, "wrong life cannot be lived rightly.")[35]

Another especially interesting episode, described in vivid detail, is a guided tour of a Chicago meat-packing factory, an "enormous concentration camp" reeking with "the wild and rancid smell of blood."[36] Just as in Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, the plant is set up for tourists, like a museum: "This country loses no opportunity to educate.... A sign warns, 'those with sensitive nerves should keep out.' Everyone goes in."[37] I will spare my reader the stomach-churning details, and simply note that—again as in Sinclair—the incident is framed by an analysis of inequality:

> Here raw meat and blood are converted into abstract numbers, written on perfectly clean paper, in a carefully filtered atmosphere; the offices on LaSalle Street and Wall Street don't smell of gasoline or sweat, either, but the gap that separates the world of profit from the world of labor is felt more keenly here than elsewhere, because of the smell, so close by, that besieges this dungeon.[38]

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[34] Simons, "Richard Wright," 179–80.

[35] "Dans un espace courbe, on ne peut pas tirer de ligne droite, dit Dubreuilh. On ne peut pas mener une vie correcte dans une société qui ne l'est pas" (*Les mandarins,* 2:343). Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 39.

[36] "[É]norme camp de concentration. Il y flotte une odeur de sang, fauve et rance, qui pénètre jusque dans les wagons du métro" (*AJ* 517).

[37] "[C]e pays est volontiers pédagogique.... [U]ne pancarte nous prévient: 'Que les personnes sensibles restent à la porte.' Tout le monde entre" (*AJ* 518).

[38] "[L]a viande et le sang sont convertis ici en chiffres abstraits qui s'inscrivent sur du papier bien propre, dans une atmosphère soigneusement conditionnée; les offices de Lassalle Street et de Wall Street ne sentent pas non plus le pétrole ni le sueur; mais le hiatus qui sépare le monde du profit de celui de travail est plus sensible ici qu'ailleurs, à cause de l'odeur si proche qui investit ce donjon" (*AJ* 517).

> There amid the hot smell of the blood, in the dimly-lit hall where steel knives flash, two dramas are superimposed: man against beast and man against man. It's no accident that the bloody arms dismembering the animal cadavers are almost all Black arms in red gloves.[39]

Beauvoir follows this with an analysis of labor history, of the way Blacks were used to break strikes, while white labor unions wouldn't accept them as members.

A similar analysis of the economics of sharecropping appears on pages 293–97: she begins by describing what she sees out the window of the bus as similar to what is described in James Agee's 1941 exposé, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, then notes that Agee's book "is dedicated to whites. But the vast majority of cotton workers are Black, and the system by which all of them are oppressed is a legacy of slavery."[40] Unlike Agee, she compares the sharecropping *system* explicitly to an internal colony, in an analysis documented with facts and figures that lasts for many pages.

So, to sum up Beauvoir's discussion of race in *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947*: first, she picks up on a mystification, a particular sickness, that entwines sex and race and rape and fear, and refuses to believe in it; second, she is encouraged to subordinate racial questions to national ones, and to issues of "national interest," and she refuses to put one before the other, while seeing how inextricable they are; third, she narrates racialized experience in an understated but dramatic way, as though we were reading a novel; and fourth, her attention to the question of race is an attention to the material conditions in which Americans of color were then living, and the systematic material reasons why.[41]

How likely does it seem that the person who saw these sights, recorded these feelings, produced these analyses, would have had "nothing to say about race and class" in the other book she was writing at exactly the same time? It is not likely, and it is not true.

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[39] "Dans l'odeur chaude du sang, dans la sourde lumière du hall où brille l'acier des couteaux, il y a deux drames qui se superposent: l'homme contre les bêtes, et les hommes entre eux. Ce n'est pas un hasard si les bras sanglants qui dépècent les cadavres sont presque tous sous leurs gants rouges des bras noirs" (*AJ* 519).

[40] "Ce livre est consacré aux blancs. Mais l'immense majorité des travailleurs du coton sont des noirs et le régime auquel tous sont soumis est un héritage du régime de l'esclavage" (*AJ* 294).

[41] We'd refer to this now as "institutional racism."

2 Materialist Analysis and Working Women's Lives in *The Second Sex*

Beauvoir's visit to the slaughterhouse would bear direct fruit in *The Second Sex*, in an analysis of the failure of solidarity between working class men and working class women, who are used by factory owners to undercut men's wages.

> While employers were eager to hire women because they accept lower wages, that same reason led to resistance from working-class men. Solidarity between the cause of women and the cause of the proletariat was not as quick and direct as Bebel and Engels would claim. The problem was similar to what happened with the Black labor force in the United States. The most oppressed minorities in a society are easily deployed by the ruling classes as a weapon against the class they belong to; thus they appear at first to be enemies, and a deeper consciousness of the situation is needed before Blacks and whites, women workers and working men, can work in coalition rather than fighting one another.[42]

She continues:

> That male workers at first viewed this cheap competition as a formidable threat, and met it with hostility, is understandable. It is only since women have joined the labor movement that they have been able to defend their own interests, without jeopardizing the cause of the working class as a whole.[43]

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[42] "Si les employeurs ont accueilli avec empressement les femmes à cause des bas salaires qu'elles acceptent, ce même fait a provoqué des résistances du côté des travailleurs masculins. Entre la cause du prolétariat et celle des femmes il n'y a pas eu une solidarité aussi immédiate que Bebel et Engels ne le prétendaient. Le problème s'est présenté un peu de la même manière qu'aux USA à propos de la main-d'œuvre noire. Les minorités les plus opprimées d'une société sont volontiers utilisées par les oppresseurs comme une arme contre l'ensemble de la classe à laquelle elles se rattachent; du même coup, elles apparaissent d'abord comme ennemies et il faut une conscience plus profonde de la situation pour que les intérêts des noirs et des blancs, des ouvrières et des ouvriers réussissent à se coaliser au lieu de s'opposer les uns aux autres" (*DS* 1:200).

[43] "On comprend que les travailleurs mâles aient d'abord vu dans cette concurrence à bon marché une menace redoutable et qu'ils se soient montrés hostiles. C'est seulement quand les femmes ont été intégrées à la vie syndicale qu'elles ont pu défendre leurs propres intérêts et cesser de mettre en danger ceux de la classe ouvrière dans son ensemble" (*DS* 1:200–1).

I checked to see whether Parshley might have cut this, but no, it's there.

Economic analysis of this sort is far from unusual in *The Second Sex*. However, that fact often escapes attention. Most commentators who discuss the topic have focused on Beauvoir's *criticisms* of Marx and Engels, in Chapter 3, "Le point de vue du matérialisme historique" (The Viewpoint of Historical Materialism). Simons says that "Wright's phenomenological descriptions of the Black experience of oppression provide a methodological alternative to both Myrdal's objectifying social science methodology and the economic reductionism of Marxist orthodoxy," associating the latter with Sartre's influence and setting it aside.[44] But I think a closer look is worthwhile. Beauvoir's own materialist analysis in the "Histoire" sections of *The Second Sex* includes a numbing proliferation of figures and facts drawn from historical sources, analyzing changes in women's labor force participation, the mutually reinforcing relationship between low salaries and labor market entry, the development of protective legislation, and so on. She may not have written from the *teleological* "point of view of historical materialism," but her book is nonetheless both materialist and historical.[45]

Most accounts do suggest that Beauvoir stood on the sidelines during her companion's complicated dance with the Communist Party, during this period and afterwards.[46] And yet I would not hesitate to call Beauvoir a Marxist in the sense in which I would not hesitate to call myself one. Here's what she had to say about it in *La force de l'âge*, looking back on the year after she passed the exams for the *agrégation* in philosophy, a year she largely spent reading a very long list of books (mostly British and American literature) the Sorbonne had not seen fit to assign:

> In winter by my fire, in summer on the balcony, awkwardly smoking English cigarettes, I filled in the gaps in my education.... Wanting to know something of Marx and Engels, I tackled *Capital* in the Bibliothèque Nationale. I approached it from the wrong angle, not seeing the difference between Marxism and the kind of philosophies I was used to, so that while it seemed very simple to understand in fact I grasped hardly anything. Even so, the labor theory of surplus value was a revelation to me,

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[44] Simons, "Richard Wright," 176.

[45] I hope it is clear from context that the "materialism" of which I speak is not the so-called "new materialism" proposed by Jane Bennett, Stacy Alaimo, Elizabeth Grosz, et al; Beauvoir would not have found the idea of "object-oriented ontology" at all compelling. See Sonia Kruks, "Beauvoir and the Marxism Question" and "Materiality and 'The Marxism Question' in the Work of Simone de Beauvoir."

[46] See Kruks, "Beauvoir and the Marxism Question."

> just as dazzling as the Cartesian cogito or the Kantian critique of time and space. I condemned exploitation with all my heart, and I felt an immense satisfaction at taking the mechanism apart and seeing how it worked. The world appeared in a new light from the moment I saw labor as the source and substance of all value. Nothing has ever made me renounce this truth, neither the criticisms that the end of *Capital* aroused in me, nor those I found in books, nor in the subtle doctrines of more recent economists.[47]

Anthony Dawahare makes a parallel point about Richard Wright: "To say Wright's disagreements and eventual break with the CPUSA were a rejection of Marxism would be as fallacious as saying that Martin Luther's break with the Catholic Church was a rejection of Christianity."[48]

In 1963, and again in the 1970s, she'd comment that "if I were writing [*The Second Sex*] today I would give the opposition of the One and the Other a more materialist grounding" based "not on the antagonism of consciousnesses, but on the economic base of scarcity."[49] But that, she says, wouldn't change the book's underlying "développement" or modify its conclusion. The retrospective comment does not really mark a shift in her actual analysis; she is placing her views, for a new audience, in dialogue with the French, British, and American feminist writers of that time, recording in particular her agreement with socialist-feminist Juliet Mitchell.[50] *The Second Sex* had already made quite clear that women's economic independence from men is a necessary, though not a sufficient, condition for her liberation.

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[47] "L'hiver au coin de mon feu, l'été sur mon balcon, fumant avec maladresse des cigarettes anglaises, je complétais ma culture.… Je voulus connaître Marx et Engels et, à la Nationale, je m'attaquai au *Capital*. Je m'y pris très mal; je ne faisais pas de différence entre le marxisme et les philosophies auxquelles j'étais habituée, si bien qu'il me parut très facile à comprendre et je n'en saisis, en fait, presque rien. Tout de même, la théorie de la plus-value fut pour moi une révélation, aussi éblouissante que le cogito cartésien, que la critique kantienne de l'espace et du temps. De tout mon cœur, je condamnais l'exploitation et j'éprouvai une immense satisfaction à en démonter le mécanisme. Le monde s'éclaira d'un jour neuf au moment où je vis dans le travail la source et comme la substance des valeurs. Rien ne me fit jamais renier cette vérité, ni les critiques que suscita en moi la fin du *Capital*, ni celles que je trouvai dans des livres, ni dans les doctrines subtiles d'économistes plus récents" (*FA* 62–3).

That was written at the end of the 1950s, but my analysis below of essays written before the trip to the United States confirms her early absorption of Marx's key insights.

[48] Anthony Dawahare, "Richard Wright's *Native Son* and the Dialectics of Black Experience," 65. In Sonia Kruks's formulation, "Beauvoir always affirmed socialism (albeit not in its Soviet version) as a regulative ideal: socialism remained for her, if not fully realizable, the guiding ideal for a human life together that would enable the realization of full freedom for all.… However, she took her Marxism so much for granted that it often remained unarticulated. This is evidenced in the surprise she expressed at the hostility of the Communists towards *The Second Sex* when it was published: 'my thesis owed so much to Marxism and showed it in such a favorable light that I did at least expect some impartiality from them!' she later wrote" ("Beauvoir and the Marxism Question," 190).

[49] She continues: "I've said also that this wouldn't change the development of the book: all masculine ideologies aim to justify the oppression of woman, and she is conditioned by society to consent." [Théoriquement, j'ai dit déjà que si j'écrivais aujourd'hui *Le deuxième*

Once one starts looking, economically grounded analysis is everywhere in *The Second Sex*. The intimate connection between the history of women and the history of private property is not simply asserted as per Engels, but demonstrated through specific historical situations. The picture she paints is not one of unbroken progress (either for women or for "l'homme"); rather she shows ups and downs, for which she gives specific social and economic explanations, and explores the always different, often contradictory, lived realities of bourgeois women and women from the working class. These analyses ground her book's underlying thesis: it is only through *work* that women can escape the

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sexe je donnerais des bases matérialistes et non idéalistes à l'opposition du Même et de l'Autre. Je fonderais le rejet et l'oppression de l'autre non sur l'antagonisme des consciences, mais sur la base économique de la rareté. J'ai dit aussi que le développement du livre n'en serais pas modifié: toutes les idéologies masculines visent à justifier l'oppression de la femme; elle est conditionnée par la société de manière à y consentir (*Tout compte fait*, 614).]

[50] "In short, I used to think that the class struggle should take precedence over the women's movement. Now I think we must carry on both together." [Bref, je pensais autrefois que la lutte des classes devait passer avant la lutte des sexes. J'estime maintenant qu'il faut mener les deux ensemble (*Tout compte fait*, 624).] She refers to Juliet Mitchell's *Women's Estate*, which listed differences between "féminisme radical" and "socialisme abstrait": "Some years ago I would have defended exactly the arguments she calls abstract socialism; now I think, as Mitchell does, that neither set of claims can stand alone, and they must be brought together." [Il y a quelques années j'aurais défendu exactement les thèses du socialisme abstrait; maintenant je pense comme Juliet Mitchell qu'aucune des deux séries d'affirmations ne se suffit: il faut les compléter les unes par les autres (*Tout compte fait*, 624–25).]

See also Sandrine Dauphin, "Du socialisme au féminisme radical: les fondements du militantisme chez Simone de Beauvoir," although Dauphin like most commentators concentrates on developments after *The Second Sex*, in particular, the strong anti-colonialist stand Beauvoir took during the French war against Algeria. Dauphin quotes from a talk Beauvoir gave in Japan in 1966: "Though socialism is not a sufficient condition, it is certainly a necessary one." [Si le socialisme n'est pas une condition suffisante, c'est certainement une condition nécessaire (Dauphin, 326, quoting Beauvoir, "Mon expérience d'écrivain," 438).] Dauphin notes that when Beauvoir says she hopes for the emergence of "une conscience de sexe," "[t]he choice of the term 'consciousness,' which comes from Marxist language, is not innocent. It refers to revolutionary action" [Le choix du terme "conscience," issu du langage marxiste, n'est pas innocent. Il renvoie à l'action révolutionnaire (327).]

curse of dependency to become full free adult human beings. This is simultaneously an ethical and a practical/political goal.

Moreover, sustained attention is paid to the lived experience of working women, both urban and rural. For instance, at the end of the history section, when she is drawing up a balance sheet of the position of women "today," the general statement that "la femme" still has difficulty reconciling work and family is followed *immediately* by a section beginning: "Let us consider, for example, the lot of peasant women. In France they constitute the majority of women who participate in production."[51] Two full pages then graphically describe how farm work turns women into beasts of burden.[52] A short paragraph notes that women who keep shops or run small businesses are better off, as they had been in the middle ages (when they were the only women whose "capacité civile" was recognized by the legal code), but that

> [i]t is quite different for the women workers, employees, secretaries, and salesgirls who work outside the home. They find it much more difficult to

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[51] "Considérons par exemple le sort des paysannes. En France elles constituent la majorité des femmes qui participent au travail producteur" (*DS* 1:228).

[52] "The care of the garden, barnyard, sheepfold, and pigpen falls on her alone; she takes part in the heavy work: cleaning the cowshed, spreading the manure, sowing, plowing, hoeing, and haymaking; she digs, pulls weeds, reaps, picks grapes, and sometimes helps load and unload wagons of straw, hay, wood and kindling, animal bedding, and so on. In addition, she prepares the meals and manages the household: washing, mending, and such. She undertakes the heavy burdens of motherhood and caring for children. She rises at dawn, feeds the chicken and the small animals, serves the men their first meal, attends to the children and goes out to work in the fields or the woods or the kitchen garden; she pumps water from the well, serves the second meal, does the washing up, works again in the fields until dinner; after the last meal she spends the evening mending, cleaning, shelling corn, etc. Since she has no time to take care of her health even during pregnancy, she is prematurely bent and withered, sapped by illness…. [M]ost of the time, rural work reduces women to the state of beasts of burden." [Les soins du jardinage, de la basse-cour, de la bergerie, de la porcherie lui incombent exclusivement; elle prend part aux gros travaux: soin des étables, épandage du fumier, semailles, labourage, sarclage, fenaison; elle bêche, arrache les mauvaises herbes, moissonne, vendange, et parfois aide à charger et décharger les chariots de paille, foin, bois et fagots, litières, etc. En outre, elle prépare les repas, tient le ménage; lessive, raccommodage, etc. Elle assure les dures charges de la maternité et du soin des enfants. Elle se lève à l'aube, nourrit la basse-cour et le petit bétail, sert le premier repas aux hommes, donne des soins aux enfants et s'en va travailler aux champs ou dans les bois ou au jardin potager; elle puise l'eau à la fontaine, sert le second repas, lave la vaisselle, travaille de nouveau aux champs jusqu'au dîner; après le dernier repas elle occupe la veillée à raccommoder, nettoyer, égrener le maïs, etc. Comme elle n'a pas loisir de s'occuper de sa santé même pendant les grossesses, elle se déforme vite, elle est prématurément flétrie et usée, rongée de maladies…. [L]a plupart du temps le travail rural réduit la femme à la condition de bête de somme (*DS* 1:229–30).]

> reconcile their job with household work: errands, cooking, cleaning, and looking after clothing require at least three and a half hours of work every day and six on Sunday, a considerable sum when added on to their factory or office hours.[53]

This material is reprised in the concluding fourth section, "Toward Liberation," in the chapter on "The Independent Woman."[54]

Another example: the chapter on "The Mother" famously begins with a long excoriation of the horrors of illegal abortion; from the start, Beauvoir makes clear that women workers and poor women feel the greatest impact of cruel and hypocritical laws, with detailed information explicitly drawn from a first-person account that had been published in the "Documents" section of *Les Temps Modernes*.[55]

> Abortion has sometimes been called a "class crime," and this is largely true. Contraceptive practices are more widespread in the bourgeoisie; the existence of bathrooms makes their use easier than for workers or farmers deprived of running water; … poverty, insufficient housing, and the need for the wife to work outside the home are the most common reasons for abortions.…
>
> The seriousness of this ordeal varies a great deal depending on the circumstances. The conventionally married woman or one comfortably provided for, supported by a man, having money and relations, is better off; first, she finds ways to have a "therapeutic" abortion much more eas-

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[53] "La commerçante, la patronne qui dirige une petite entreprise ont été de tout temps des privilégiées.… Elles ont la chance que leur travail s'exerce au lieu même où se trouve leur foyer et qu'il ne soit généralement pas trop absorbant.

Il en va tout autrement pour l'ouvrière, l'employée, la secrétaire, la vendeuse, qui travaillent au-dehors. Il leur est beaucoup plus difficile de concilier leur métier avec le soin du ménage (courses, préparation des repas, nettoyage, entretien des vêtements demandent au moins trois heures et demie de travail quotidien et six heures le dimanche; c'est un chiffre considérable quand il s'additionne à celui des heures d'usine ou de bureau)" (*DS* 1:230). She continues: "As for the professions, even when women lawyers, doctors, professors have some household help, home and children bring burdens and worries which are a heavy handicap for them too." [Quant aux professions libérales, même si avocates, médecins, professeurs se font un peu aider dans leur ménage, le foyer et les enfants représentent aussi pour elles des charges et des soucis qui sont un lourd handicap (*DS* 1:230).]

[54] *DS* 2:598–99, and see below.

[55] Geneviève Sarrau, "Salle commune." Beauvoir had already written a visceral account of the horrors of illegal abortion in *Le sang des autres*. See Altman, "Beauvoir as Literary Writer."

> ily; if necessary, she has the means to pay for a trip to Switzerland, where abortion is liberally tolerated; … she can find unofficial help that is just as safe; she has the right addresses, she has enough money to pay for conscientious care, without waiting until her pregnancy is advanced; she will be treated respectfully.… On the other hand, there is little distress more deserving of compassion than that of an isolated and penniless girl who sees herself ensnared in a "crime" to erase a "sin" that those around her consider unpardonable: in France this is the case of approximately 300,000 female employees, secretaries, students, workers, and peasants.… I was told about a typist who stayed in her room for four days, lying in her own blood, with no food or water, because she did not dare to call for help.[56]

The generalized psychological account of resistances to motherhood, and the lived experience of pregnancy and maternity under the (then) present state of education and morality (mœurs), *follows* this.

A third place where Beauvoir explores and analyzes "l'expérience vécue" of poor and working-class women is in the chapter on prostitution. After explaining the similarities between prostitution and marriage,[57] and how, hypocritically enough, bourgeois “morality” makes brothels necessary, she presents a complex discussion, again drawing on a first-person account that was published in *Les Temps Modernes*, as well as on other factual information.

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[56] "On a dit parfois que l'avortement était un 'crime de classe' et c'est en grande partie vrai. Les pratiques anti-conceptionnelles sont beaucoup plus répandues dans la bourgeoisie; l'existence du cabinet de toilette en rend l'application plus facile que chez les ouvriers ou les paysans privés d'eau courante; … la pauvreté, la crise du logement, la nécessité pour la femme de travailler hors de la maison sont parmi les causes les plus fréquentes de l'avortement.… La gravité de cette épreuve varie beaucoup selon les circonstances. La femme bourgeoisement mariée ou confortablement entretenue, appuyée par un homme, ayant argent et relations, est très avantagée: d'abord, elle obtient beaucoup plus facilement qu'une autre la licence d'un avortement 'thérapeutique'; au besoin, elle a les moyens de se payer un voyage en Suisse où l'avortement est libéralement toléré; … à défaut de complicité officielle, elle trouve des secours officieux qui sont aussi sûrs: elle connaît de bonnes adresses, elle a assez d'argent pour payer les soins consciencieux et sans attendre que sa grossesse soit avancée; on la traitera avec égard.… En revanche, il y a peu de détresses plus pitoyables que celle d'une jeune fille isolée, sans argent, qui se voit acculée à un 'crime' pour effacer une 'faute' que son entourage ne lui pardonnerait pas; c'est chaque année en France le cas d'environ trois cent mille employées, secrétaires, étudiantes, ouvrières, paysannes; la maternité illégitime est encore une tare si affreuse que beaucoup préfèrent le suicide ou l'infanticide à l'état de fille-mère" (*DS* 2:334–36). "On m'a parlé d'une dactylo qui est demeurée quatre jours dans sa chambre, baignant dans son sang, sans manger ni boire, parce qu'elle n'avait pas osé appeler" (*DS* 2:338–39).

[57] "The prostitute is a scapegoat; man unloads his turpitude onto her, and then he repudiates her.… From the economic point of view, her situation is similar to the married woman's.… For both, the sexual act is a service.… The main difference between them is that the legitimate wife, oppressed as a married woman, is regarded as a human person; this respect is beginning to work seriously toward defeating oppression. However, the prostitute

> It is naïve to wonder what motives drive a woman to prostitution.... No hereditary fate, no physiological defect, weighs on them. In reality, as soon as a profession opens in a world where misery and unemployment are rife, there are people to enter it; there will always be policemen and there will always be prostitutes, as long as these institutions exist.... “Of all the causes of prostitution,” wrote Parent-Duchâtelet in his study in 1857, “none is more active than the lack of work and the misery that is the inevitable consequence of inadequate salaries.” ... It has been noted that, among other things, many “girls” [filles] were once servants; this is what Parent-Duchâtelet established for all countries, what Lily Braun noted in Germany and Ryckère in Belgium. About fifty percent of prostitutes were domestic servants first. One look at “maid’s rooms” is enough to explain this fact. Exploited, enslaved, treated as an object rather than as a person, the maid or chambermaid cannot look forward to any improvement of her lot; sometimes she has to submit to the whims of the master of the house; from domestic slavery and sexual subordination to the master, she slides into a slavery that could not be more degrading and that she dreams will be better. In addition, women in domestic service are very often uprooted; it is estimated that eighty percent of Parisian prostitutes come from the provinces or the countryside.[58]

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does not have the rights of a person: she is the sum of all types of feminine slavery.” [La prostituée est un bouc émissaire; l’homme se délivre sur elle de sa turpitude et il la renie.... Du point du vue économique, sa situation est symétrique de celle de la femme mariée.... Pour toutes deux l’acte sexuel est un service.... La grande différence entre elles, c’est que la femme légitime, opprimée en tant que femme mariée, est respectée en tant que personne humaine; ce respect commence à faire sérieusement échec à l’oppression. Tandis que la prostituée n’a pas les droits d’une personne, en elle se résument toutes les figures à la fois de l’esclavage féminin (*DS* 2:430).]

[58] “Il est naïf de se demander quels motifs poussent la femme à la prostitution.... Aucune fatalité héréditaire, aucune tare physiologique ne pèse sur elles. En vérité, dans un monde où sévissent misère et chômage, dès qu’une profession est ouverte, il y a des gens pour l’embrasser; aussi longtemps qu’existeront la police, la prostitution, il y aura des policiers, des prostituées.... ‘De toutes les causes de la prostitution, écrivait en 1857 Parent-Duchâtelet au cours de son enquête, aucune n’est plus active que le manque de travail et la misère qui est la conséquence inévitable des salaires insuffisants.’ ... On a remarqué entre autres qu’une grande partie des ‘filles’ se rencontraient parmi les servantes; c’est ce qu’a établi pour tous les pays Parent-Duchâtelet, ce que Lily Braun notait en Allemagne et Ryckère pour la Belgique. Environ 50% des prostituées ont été d’abord domestiques. Un coup d’œil

Notice that the discussion broadens out from "prostitution" to other forms of highly exploitive (and class-specific) "women's work."

As she does generally in her phenomenological accounts of sexual experience (see Chapter 1 above), Beauvoir here draws on all sorts of fact-based sources, including the memoirs of a Dr. Bizard who reports stories of individual patients, sometimes in their own words.[59] The stories pile up in long lists and the stories vary, but even though individual stories point in different directions, Beauvoir's overall account has a cumulative collective force.

> [S]ometimes it is the lover—the first, the second—who suggests this way of earning money. There are also many girls who are prostituted by their families.... Among young female vagabonds, there are also many girls abandoned by their families who begin by begging and slip from there to the streets. In 1857, out of 5,000 prostitutes, Parent-Duchâtelet found that 1,441 were influenced by poverty, 1,425 seduced and abandoned, 1,255 abandoned and left penniless by their parents. Contemporary studies suggest approximately the same conclusions. Illness often leads to prostitution as the woman becomes unable to hold down a real job or loses her place; it destroys her precarious budget, and forces her to come up with new resources quickly. So it is with the birth of a child.[60]

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sur les 'chambres de bonnes' suffit à expliquer le fait. Exploitée, asservie, traitée en objet plutôt qu'en personne, la bonne à tout faire, la femme de chambre n'attend de l'avenir aucune amélioration de son sort; parfois, il lui faut subir les caprices du maître de la maison: de l'esclavage domestique, des amours ancillaires, elle glisse vers un esclavage qui ne saurait être plus dégradant et qu'elle rêve plus heureux. En outre, les femmes en service sont très souvent des déracinées; on estime que 80% des prostituées parisiennes viennent de la province ou de la campagne" (*DS* 2:430–32).

[59] Bizard, *Souvenirs d'un médecin*. One example should illustrate the style of these accounts: "S., deflowered at 15½ by a young man who enticed her to his home with the pretext of introducing her to his sister. He didn't have a sister, but he did have syphilis." [S ... déflorée à quinze ans et demi par un jeune homme qui l'attira chez lui sous prétexte de lui faire connaître sa sœur. Le jeune homme en réalité n'avait pas de sœur mais il avait la syphilis (*DS* 2:433).] Many of their stories deal with seduction, rape, or something in between; they parallel the accounts of "sexual initiation" I discussed in my first chapter, but Beauvoir additionally notes: "We can be sure that these girls who gave in passively nevertheless suffered the trauma of defloration; one would like to know what psychological influence this brutal influence had on their future; but 'whores' are not psychoanalyzed." [Ces jeunes filles qui ont cédé passivement n'en ont pas moins subi, on peut en être certain, le traumatisme de la défloration: on voudrait savoir quelle influence psychologique cette brutale expérience a eue sur leur avenir; mais on ne psychanalyse pas les "filles" (*DS* 2:434).]

[60] "Parfois c'est l'amant—le premier, le second—qui suggère ce moyen de gagner de l'argent. Il y a aussi beaucoup de jeunes filles qui sont prostituées par leur parents.... Parmi les

Like the analysis of abortion, Beauvoir's discussion of prostitution uses what we would now call a "mixed methodology," both quantitative and qualitative: statistics provide evidence for the *scope* of what she's describing, while first-person accounts help her attend to women's oppression (individual and/or systemic) without discounting their agency.[61] She gives the microphone over for long stretches to "the author of 'The Life of a Prostitute,'" published in part in *Les Temps Modernes* under the pseudonym "Marie-Thérèse."[62] (That the first-person accounts of abortion and prostitution were published there, and so early, is interesting in itself; what Sartre called "existentialist anthropology," especially manifest in the section called "Documents," clearly showed an attention to intersections of gender and class, even before Beauvoir's trip to America.) Marie-Thérèse's story is complex, and Beauvoir barely shapes it but rather responds to it; I'm not quoting from it here, because quoting selectively risks privileging one or two moments in a complex narrative, imposing a teleology that the account itself deliberately refuses. But Beauvoir's quotations add up to many pages; it's comparable to her two-page quotation from one of Stekel's "confessions" at the end of her chapter on Childhood.

Marie-Thérèse and the others are not sentimentalized pitiful victims, nor are they entirely free agents. All attention is paid to the situations in which the choice to become a prostitute is made and remade, and to the contingent relations, with other women and with men, that develop. It is made clear that whatever a woman's initial reasons for entering prostitution, economic pressure (money owed to a pimp or brothel keeper) is often what keeps women in that life. And if the causes are economic, so are the consequences.

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jeunes vagabondes, on compte aussi un grand nombre de fillettes abandonnées par leurs proches, qui commencent par la mendicité et glissent de là au trottoir. En 1857, Parent-Duchâtelet, sur 5,000 prostituées, avait trouvé que 1,441 avaient été influencées par la pauvreté, 1,425 séduites et abandonnées, 1,255 abandonnées et laissées sans ressources par leurs parents. Les enquêtes modernes suggèrent à peu près les mêmes conclusions. La maladie pousse souvent à la prostitution la femme devenue incapable d'un vrai travail, ou qui a perdu sa place; elle détruit l'équilibre précaire du budget, elle oblige la femme à s'inventer hâtivement des ressources neuves. De même, la naissance d'un enfant" (*DS* 2:434–35).

[61] It's difficult for a summary to convey Beauvoir's avidity for statistical *fact*, even where we'd least expect to see quantitative analysis: for instance, in the chapter on "La mystique": "Out of the 321 people with stigmata recognized by the Catholic Church, only 47 are men" [Sur les trois cent vingt et un stigmatisés que compte l'Église catholique, il y a quarante-sept hommes seulement (*DS* 2:591).]

[62] *DS* 2:435–43.

> It is not their moral or psychological situation that makes prostitutes' existence miserable. It is their material condition, which for the most part is deplorable. Exploited by pimps and hotel-keepers, they have no security, and three-quarters of them are penniless. After five years in the trade, around 75 percent have syphilis.… One in ten has tuberculosis, 60 percent become alcoholics or drug addicts; 40 percent die before forty.… Common prostitution is a hard job where the sexually and economically oppressed woman—subjected to the arbitrariness of the police, humiliating medical checkups, the whims of her clients, and the prospect of germs, sickness, and misery—is really reduced to the status of a thing.[63]

And she adds in a footnote:

> Obviously, it is not through negative and hypocritical measures that this situation can be changed. For prostitution to disappear, two conditions are necessary: a decent job must be guaranteed to all women; custom must not place any obstacles to free love. Prostitution will be suppressed only by suppressing the needs to which it responds.[64]

Notice that there is *both* an economic and a cultural/ideological piece of this solution—a recapitulation of her overall two-part argument about women's liberation.

It is only at this point, fifteen pages into the chapter, that Beauvoir turns to a group of higher-class women she calls "hétaïres": "I will use the word *hetaira* to designate women who use not just their body but also their whole person as a capital to be exploited."[65] This includes a discussion of Hollywood stars and the "kept woman" who "is a parasite of the rich bourgeoisie," and who comes in for the same vivid scorn as respectable married women of that class did in the previous chapter, "La vie de société."[66] The distinction, drawn from classical Athens, between the *hetaira* and her more down-to earth counterpart (whom the Greeks called the *pornē*) may seem rather strange, but it does permit Beauvoir to attend first to the gritty details of "survival sex" and then to also discuss women for whom selling themselves does appear to be a free choice (though she says it is a bad one), without conflating the two groups.

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[63] "Ce n'est pas leur situation morale ou psychologique qui rend pénible l'existence des prostituées. C'est leur condition matérielle qui est dans la plupart des cas déplorable. Exploitées par le souteneur, la taulière, elles vivent dans l'insécurité et les trois quarts d'entre elles sont sans argent. Au bout de cinq ans de métier, il y a environ 75% qui ont la syphilis.… Une sur vingt a la tuberculose, 60% deviennent alcooliques ou intoxiquées; 40% meurent avant quarante ans.… La basse prostitution est un pénible métier où la femme opprimée sexuellement et économiquement, soumise à l'arbitraire de la police, à une humiliante surveillance médicale, aux caprices des clients, promise aux microbes et à la maladie, à la misère, est vraiment ravalée au niveau d'une chose" (*DS* 2:443–44).

[64] "Ce n'est évidemment pas par des mesures négatives et hypocrites qu'on peut modifier la situation. Pour que la prostitution disparaisse il faudrait deux conditions: qu'un métier décent fût assuré à toutes les femmes; que les mœurs n'opposent aucun obstacle à la liberté de l'amour. C'est seulement en supprimant les besoins auxquels elle répond qu'on supprimera la prostitution" (*DS* 2:444N).

While to discuss this issue fully would require more space than I can give it here, it's interesting that some current feminist impasses are avoided. To put it anachronistically (since Beauvoir does not use our terminology), sometimes women are "trafficked," sometimes they see "sex work" as the best of a set of bad alternatives, often some combination of the two operates; yet others find (or think they find) self-expression in making such a choice. But drawing these distinctions does not preoccupy Beauvoir in the way it obsessed moralists of her day and perplexes many feminists now: she's against the exchange of sex for money *either way*, but her sympathies are clearly with the *pornai*.[67]

Now, in none of these examples are working women and poor women an add-on or an excursive afterthought to a main story about "Women." If anything, it is bourgeois women who appear second, as a kind of special case, partly exempt from the practical burdens of other women, but (for that very reason) peculiarly vulnerable to morally suspect temptations. Beauvoir uses the noun "parasite" and the adjective "parasitaires" no fewer than twenty-three times to describe such women.

Moreover, attention to the contradictions of class *drives* Beauvoir's analysis of the oppression of women. After summarizing the arguments of Saint-Simon, Fourier, Victor Hugo, and Jeanne Deroin, she notes that "[t]hese theoretical debates are not what influences the course of events, which they tend rather to mirror with some delay."[68] Economic factors such as the weakening of the aristocracy (which "caused the ruin of landed property" [ruine la propriété foncière]), and then the industrial revolution, advanced the cause of women's liberation.[69] Economic factors also explain men's resistance to women's cause. Attacks on women in the ideological and cultural sphere are heightened at historical moments when women's economic autonomy poses a threat to men's control. This happens, apparently independently, at different times and in different places: while Beauvoir sometimes speaks of "the march of history," and looks forward to a socialist future as a kind of culmination of the process begun by the entrance of women into factory work, the story she tells along the way is considerably lumpier and messier. One example from the ancient world is mentioned in the introduction:

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[65] "[J]e me servirai du mot d'hétaïre pour désigner toutes les femmes qui traitent, non leur corps seulement, mais leur personne entière comme un capital à exploiter" (*DS* 2:226).

[66] See below and also Chapter 1 above.

[67] For a different, but comparably provocative, philosophical synthesis, see Shay Welch, *Existential Eroticism: A Feminist Approach to Understanding Women's Oppression-Perpetuating Choices.*

[68] "Ce ne sont pas ces débats théoriques qui influent sur le cours des événements: plutôt ils les reflètent avec hésitation" (*DS* 1:195).

> It is striking, for example, that the Roman code limiting a wife's rights invokes "the imbecility and fragility of the sex" just when a weakening family structure makes her a threat to male heirs....[70]

This receives a longer discussion in the history chapter, where various ancient legal codes and sets of customs relating to dowry and inheritance are compared and contrasted. A parallel analysis is given of the relationship between feminist and anti-feminist *ideas* and the material changes brought by the industrial revolution:

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[69] "Woman regains her economic importance, lost since the prehistoric era, because she escapes from the home and takes up a new role in factory production. Machinery made this upheaval possible by canceling out the difference in physical force between male and female workers in many cases. Since the sudden boom in industry demands more labor than male workers can supply, women's contribution becomes necessary. This is the great revolution of the nineteenth century which transforms the lot of women and opens before her a new era. Marx and Engels take its full measure, and promise women a liberation bound up with that of the proletariat." [La femme reconquiert une importance économique qu'elle avait perdue depuis les époques préhistoriques parce qu'elle s'échappe du foyer et prend à l'usine une nouvelle part à la production. C'est la machine qui permet ce bouleversement car la différence de force physique entre travailleurs mâles et femelles se trouve en un grand nombre de cas annulée. Comme le brusque essor de l'industrie réclame une main-d'œuvre plus considérable que celle qui est fournie par les travailleurs mâles, la collaboration des femmes est nécessaire. C'est la grande révolution qui transforme au XIXᵉ le sort de la femme et qui ouvre pour elle une ère neuve. Marx et Engels en mesurent toute la portée et ils promettent aux femmes une libération impliquée par celle du prolétariat (*DS* 1:195–96).]

[70] "Il est frappant par exemple que le code romain pour limiter les droits de la femme invoque 'l'imbécillité, la fragilité du sexe' au moment où par l'affaiblissement de la famille elle devient un danger pour les héritiers mâles" (*DS* 1:23).

> In the nineteenth century the feminist question again becomes a partisan dispute. One consequence of the industrial revolution is women's participation in productive labor. At this point, feminist claims leave the domain of theory and find economic bases; their adversaries become that much more aggressive; landed property may have been partly dethroned, but the bourgeoisie clings to the old morality which sees in the solidity of the family the guarantee of private property, calling all the more bitterly for women to return to the home now that her emancipation has become a genuine threat; even within the working class, men tried to put a brake on this liberation because women appeared to them as dangerous competitors, all the more so since they were accustomed to work for low wages. To prove the inferiority of women, the antifeminists now drew, not just on the resources of religion, philosophy, and theology, but also science: biology, experimental psychology, and the like.[71]

You'll recall that in the introduction to her book Beauvoir refers programmatically to class (and race) divides, in explaining why "women do not say we": "Bourgeois women show solidarity with bourgeois men, not with women of the proletariat; white women ally themselves not with Black women but with white men…."[72] I'll discuss below how this fits in the logical structure of the introduction; what I want to note for now is that this point is made again and again, and more concretely, throughout the rest of the book. It is not simply that bourgeois women contribute to their *own* oppression because they are unwilling to give up their class privilege; the progress of feminism overall (as measured by legal reform and through struggles for suffrage) has been retarded by class divisions—and these are not superficial matters of ideology, but result from genuinely opposed material interests. For instance, in explaining a retreat from progressive thought with the victory of Napoleon and then the Restoration, she says:

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[71] "Au XIX^e^ siècle la querelle du féminisme devient à nouveau une querelle de partisans; une des conséquences de la révolution industrielle, c'est la participation de la femme au travail producteur: à ce moment les revendications féministes sortent du domaine théorique, elles trouvent des bases économiques; leurs adversaires deviennent d'autant plus agressifs; quoique la propriété foncière soit en partie détrônée, la bourgeoisie s'accroche à la vieille morale qui voit dans la solidité de la famille le garant de la propriété privée: elle réclame la femme au foyer d'autant plus âprement que son émancipation devient une véritable menace; à l'intérieur même de la classe ouvrière, les hommes ont essayé de freiner cette libération parce que les femmes leur apparaissaient comme de dangereuses concurrentes et d'autant plus qu'elles étaient habituées à travailler à de bas salaires. Pour prouver l'infériorité de la femme, les antiféministes ont alors mis à contribution non seulement comme naguère la religion, la philosophie, la théologie mais aussi la science: biologie, psychologie expérimentale, etc." (*DS* 1:24).

[72] "Bourgeoises elles sont solidaires des bourgeois et non des femmes prolétaires; blanches des hommes blancs et non des femmes noires" (*DS* 1:19).

> The fact is, most bourgeois women capitulate.... "It is easier to put people in chains than to remove them if chains bring prestige," George Bernard Shaw has said. The bourgeois woman clings to her chains because she clings to her class privilege. People have never tired of telling her, and she knows, that the emancipation of women will weaken bourgeois society; freed from male domination, she would be condemned to work. She might regret that her rights to private property are subordinated to those of her husband, she would regret the abolition of private property even more; she feels no solidarity with working-class women; she is much closer to her husband than to the women in the garment trades. She makes his interests hers.[73]

Throughout the history sections, Beauvoir carefully marks how the position of women differed greatly depending on whether the women were of the laboring classes or from elites, and highlights a paradoxical insight, that due to the link between women and private property, upper-class women are more restricted *by their gender* than peasant and working women are, which of course doesn't mean that the latter are freer or better off *over all.* For instance, in feudal times, she sees greater "reciprocity" between the serf and his wife, who gains "concrete autonomy because she finds a social and economic role,"[74] than between the lord of the manor and his lady.

> So many factors collude against woman's independence that they are never all abolished at the same time. Physical weakness no longer matters, but the subordination of women remains useful to society in the

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[73] "[L]e fait est que la plupart des femmes de la bourgeoisie capitulent.... 'Il est plus facile de charger les gens de chaînes que de les leur enlever si les chaînes donnent de la considération' a dit Bernard Shaw. La femme bourgeoise tient à ses chaînes parce qu'elle tient à ses privilèges de classe. On lui explique inlassablement, et elle sait que l'émancipation des femmes serait un affaiblissement de la société bourgeoise; libérée du mâle, elle serait condamnée au travail; elle peut regretter de n'avoir sur la propriété privée que des droits subordonnés à ceux de son mari, elle déplorerait encore davantage que cette propriété fût abolie; elle n'éprouve aucune solidarité avec les femmes des classes ouvrières: elle est beaucoup plus proche de son mari que des travailleuses du textile. Elle fait siens ses intérêts" (*DS* 1:192).

[74] "[D]ans le travail libre, la femme conquiert une autonomie concrète parce qu'elle retrouve un rôle économique et social" (*DS* 1:166).

> case of married women. Marital rights also survive the disappearance of feudalism. A paradox, one which still endures today, grows stronger: the more fully a woman is integrated into society, the fewer privileges she has.… It is not because she is judged constitutionally incompetent that the wife is subordinated to her husband; when no interests are opposed to it, the full range of women's capabilities is recognized. From feudalism to our own day the married woman is deliberately sacrificed to private property. It is important to note that the more substantial her husband's wealth is, the more severe this servitude will be.[75]

This does not mean that lower-class women are better off, however:

> [I]n the working classes, economic oppression cancels out the inequality of the sexes, but leaves the individual without opportunities.…[76]

Later historical events will give rise to the same sorts of comments and conclusions:

> We might expect the French Revolution would have changed women's lot, but nothing of the sort occurred. This bourgeois revolution was respectful of bourgeois institutions and values, and it was made almost entirely by men. It is important to underline that during the Ancien Régime it was working-class women who knew the greatest independence with respect to their sex.… [They] suffered oppression on the economic level, not on the level of sex.… [Meanwhile, t]he women of the bourgeoisie were too fully integrated into the family to find any concrete solidarity among themselves; they did not constitute a separate caste that could present demands; economically, their existence was parasitical. Thus the

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[75] "[T]ant de facteurs se conjuguent contre l'indépendance de la femme que jamais ils ne se trouvent tous abolis ensemble: la faiblesse physique ne joue plus; mais la subordination féminine demeure utile à la société au cas où la femme est mariée. Aussi la puissance maritale survit à la disparition du régime féodal. On voit s'affirmer le paradoxe qui se perpétue encore aujourd'hui: la femme la plus pleinement intégrée à la société est celle qui possède le moins de privilèges.… Ce n'est pas parce qu'elle est jugée foncièrement incapable qu'on subordonne l'épouse à son époux: quand rien n'y contredit on reconnaît à la femme la plénitude de ses capacités. De la féodalité à nos jours la femme mariée est délibérément sacrifiée à la propriété privée. Il est important de noter que cette servitude est d'autant plus rigoureuse que les biens détenus par le mari sont plus considérables" (*DS* 1:165–66).

[76] "[D]ans les classes travailleuses, l'oppression économique annule l'inégalité des sexes; mais elle enlève toutes chances à l'individu" (*DS* 1:172).

> women who, despite their sex, might have participated in events were prevented by their class, while those of the class that could have taken action were condemned to stand aside because they were women. Only when economic power falls into the hands of the workers will it become possible for the woman worker to win the rights that the parasitical woman, noble or bourgeoise, has never obtained.[77]

Beauvoir repeatedly uses "parasitaire" in this economic sense. Compare Virginia Woolf's insight in *Three Guineas*: if women factory workers went on strike, production for war would grind to a halt; if the women of Woolf's own class went on strike no one would notice.[78] Different vectors of oppression cross in paradoxical ways; generalizations about "women" as a class are shown to be false; and it is clearly impossible to understand how any of it works without looking at all of it simultaneously. If this is not an intersectional analysis, I have never seen one.

Moreover, while entrance into paid work with the industrial revolution would be an essential step toward women's liberation, the lot of the woman worker is hardly described as a picnic, then or "aujourd'hui":

> At the start of the nineteenth century, women were more shamefully exploited than workers of the other sex. Home-based work consisted of what the English call the "sweating system"; seamstresses worked continuously without earning enough to meet their needs. Jules Simon in *The Woman Worker* and even the conservative Leroy-Beaulieu in *Women's Work in the Nineteenth Century* published in 1873 denounced detestable

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[77] "On pourrait s'attendre que la Révolution eût changé le sort de la femme. Il n'en fut rien. Cette révolution bourgeoise fut respectueuse des institutions et des valeurs bourgeoises; et elle fut faite à peu près exclusivement par les hommes. Il est important de souligner que pendant tout l'Ancien Régime ce furent les femmes des classes travailleuses qui connurent en tant que sexe le plus d'indépendance.... C'est sur le plan économique et non sur le plan sexuel qu'elle subit l'oppression.... Les femmes de la bourgeoisie étaient trop intégrées à la famille pour connaître entre elles une solidarité concrète; elles ne constituaient pas une caste séparée susceptible d'imposer des revendications; économiquement, leur existence était parasitaire. Ainsi tandis que les femmes qui, malgré leur sexe, auraient pu participer aux événements en étaient empêchées en tant que classe, celles de la classe agissante étaient condamnées à demeurer à l'écart en tant que femmes. C'est quand le pouvoir économique tombera aux mains des travailleurs qu'il deviendra possible à la travailleuse de conquérir les capacités que la femme parasitaire, noble ou bourgeoise, n'a jamais obtenues" (*DS* 1:186–88). She reprises these arguments in her conclusion to the history section. See *DS* 1:222–25.

[78] Woolf, *Three Guineas*, 12–13.

> abuses; the latter avers that more than two hundred thousand working women in France earned less than fifty centimes per day. It's easy to understand how eagerly they rushed toward the factories; besides, there was soon little remaining outside the workshops except for sewing, laundry, and domestic work, all slave jobs for starvation wages.… Often the factory owners preferred women workers to men. "They do better work for less money." This cynical maxim clarifies the drama of women's work. For it is through work that woman has won her dignity as a human being, but it was a singularly hard and slow battle. Spinning and weaving took place in conditions of lamentable hygiene.…[79]

This section lasts for five and a half more pages, including graphic descriptions of horrendous conditions. (That Beauvoir talks about the deadening immanence of housework is well-known; do we remember that she knew, and said, that factory work was no less deadening, and far more dangerous?)[80] Numerous statistics document women's entry into the labor force, and provide evidence about what is now called the "wage gap" between men and women; a carefully dated sequence of protective legislation, up until 1913, is also included. When she gets to the question of *why* women's wages remain low, she provides an analysis which is still relevant and valuable: the reasons, she explains, include the lack of support from male trade unions (it is in this context that the comparison drawn from the visit to the Chicago slaughterhouse occurs), cynical exploitation of married women's need to work, the assumption of all concerned that women should be content with a "salaire d'appoint" (secondary income, or "pin money") since they were not supposed to be supporting families, and the "inertie resignée" (resigned inertia) of women workers, resulting from a "tradition de résignation et de soumission" (tradition of resignation and submission) which is "now" coming to an end through their union activism. Women workers are described as facing concrete difficulties, but they are not "othered" as passive victims of some abstract capitalist force, "helpless before the iron," in Tillie Olsen's resonant phrase.[81]

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[79] "Au début du XIX^{e} la femme était plus honteusement exploitée que les travailleurs de l'autre sexe. Le travail à domicile constituait ce que les Anglais appelent le 'sweating system'; malgré un travail continu, l'ouvrière ne gagnait pas assez pour subvenir à ses besoins. Jules Simon dans *L'ouvrière* et même le conservateur Leroy-Beaulieu dans *Le travail des femmes au XIX^{e}* publié en 1873 dénoncent des abus odieux; ce dernier déclare que plus de deux cent mille ouvrières françaises ne gagnaient pas cinquante centimes par jour. On comprend qu'elles se soient hâtées d'émigrer vers les manufactures; d'ailleurs il ne resta bientôt hors des ateliers que les métiers d'aiguille, le blanchissage et la domesticité, tous métiers d'esclaves payés à des salaires de famine.… Les patrons souvent les préfèrent aux hommes. 'Elles font du meilleur travail et moins payé.' Cette formule cynique éclaire le drame du travail féminin. Car c'est par le travail que la femme a conquis sa dignité d'être humain, mais ce fut une conquête singulièrement dure et lente. Filature et tissage s'accomplissent dans des conditions hygiéniques lamentables" (*DS* 1:196–97).

[80] She'd prepared this ground in *Le sang des autres,* and would return to it in *Les belles images*. See also the visit to her cousin's lampshade factory described in *La force de l'âge* (69–70).

Beauvoir would return to this theme in the concluding section, "Vers la libération," in the chapter on "La femme indépendante":

> It is through work that woman has been able, to a great extent, to bridge the gap separating her from the male; work alone can guarantee her concrete freedom.... Many women are conscious of these advantages, even those with the lowest-level jobs. I heard a cleaning woman say as she was scrubbing a hotel lobby floor, "I never asked anyone for anything. I made it on my own." She was as proud of being self-sufficient as a Rockefeller. However, one must not think that the simple combination of suffrage and a job means perfect liberation; work today is not freedom. Only in a socialist world would woman's access to work assure her of freedom. Today the majority of workers are exploited.[82]

She deepens the point by returning to a question similar to the one she refused to answer in the introduction—"isn't a housewife happier than a voter?"—and takes it up not just on the idealist terrain of existentialist ethics, but in practical material terms.

> An influential *bien pensante* recently carried out a survey of women workers at a Renault factory: she asserts that they would rather stay home than work in a factory. Without a doubt, they are economically independent only within an economically oppressed class; and besides,

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[81] Olsen, "I Stand Here Ironing," 12.

[82] "C'est par le travail que la femme a en grande partie franchi la distance qui la séparait du mâle; c'est le travail qui peut seul lui garantir une liberté concrète.... Beaucoup des femmes ont conscience de ces avantages, même parmi celles qui exercent les métiers les plus modestes. J'ai entendu une femme de journée, en train de laver le carreau d'un hall d'hôtel, qui déclarait: 'Je n'ai jamais rien demandé à personne. Je suis arrivée toute seule.' Elle était aussi fière de se suffire qu'un Rockefeller. Cependant il ne faudrait pas croire que la simple juxtaposition du droit de vote et d'un métier soit une parfaite libération: le travail aujourd'hui n'est pas la liberté. C'est seulement dans un monde socialiste que la femme en accédant à l'un s'assurerait l'autre. La majorité des travailleurs sont aujourd'hui des exploités" (*DS* 2:597–8).

> tasks carried out in a factory do not free them from household chores. If they had been able to choose between forty hours of weekly work in a factory *or* at home, they would undoubtedly have responded quite differently.[83]

As I discussed in Chapter 1, the "point of view of existentialist ethics" required Beauvoir to see women's struggle as not about happiness or "fulfillment," but about freedom; freedom however is not an abstraction, because freedom is always freedom *in situation*, and a primary feature of situation is economic. Differences between groups of women are not essentialized, but situated, rooted in different relations to the institutions of private property and to the means of production; but differences between women profoundly *matter*, to lived experience, to historical causation, and to the possibility of a better future, which will be the result of collective struggle.

3 Questions of Exclusion, Questions of Method

However, there are some very smart and knowledgeable feminists for whom the name "Beauvoir" is shorthand for exactly the *opposite* of this sort of analysis. A friend of my youth, who works on the history of Black women in the US, admitted she had never bothered to read *The Second Sex* "because Vicky Spelman's book says it doesn't take race and class into account." Elizabeth Spelman's book *Inessential Woman* actually doesn't say *exactly* that; but it is certainly scathing about Beauvoir's contribution to "the ways in which the attempt to treat gender in isolation from factors such as race and class has both reflected and perpetuated a choice to focus on the lives of some women rather than others" and has tended "to conflate 'woman' with a small group of women—namely, white middle-class heterosexual Christian women in Western countries."[84] A landmark book in feminist theory, *Inessential Woman* turned many away from Beauvoir's work; ritual denunciations of "white woman feminism" since that time routinely include her. Most recently, critiques have come from Black women philosophers, who have been investigating the convergences and the contestations between Beauvoir's work and other postcolonial and liberatory writing (Patricia Hill Collins, Audre Lorde, bell hooks, as well as Wright and Fanon). Many of their discussions point, as Spelman did, to the absence of a Black woman's standpoint from Beauvoir's work, and to the problem with thinking analogically about different oppressions as though they were discrete, the problem classically captured by the title of the groundbreaking anthology, *All the Women Were White, All The Blacks Were Men, But Some of Us Were Brave*.[85]

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[83] "Une dame importante et bien pensante a fait récemment une enquête auprès des ouvrières des usines Renault; elle affirme que celles-ci préféraient rester au foyer plutôt que de travailler à l'usine. Sans doute, elles n'accèdent à l'indépendance économique qu'au sein d'une classe économiquement opprimée; et d'autre part les tâches accomplies à l'usine ne les dispensent pas des corvées du foyer. Si on leur avait proposé de choisir entre quarante heures de travail hebdomadaire à l'usine *ou* dans la maison, elles auraient sans doute fourni de tout autres réponses" (*DS* 2:598).

[84] Elizabeth Spelman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought*, 58.

That is a serious conversation I hope to join. The continued relevance of Beauvoir's account of the lived experience of women, and her theorizing of that account, must surely stand or fall on the question of whether people who do not share her social location can relate to what she has written in helpful ways. The thing is, we have a fair amount of concrete evidence that some did, and still do. Whether that evidence should weigh more or less heavily than a theoretical explanation of why they really should *not* have is, I suppose, a question of method.[86]

Here's the kind of thing I mean. Several African feminists have written that Beauvoir's focus on the dynamics of "the family," without acknowledging that the sort of nuclear family she (and I) grew up in is only one of many possible forms, makes her work unsuitable to an analysis of Africa. This makes sense.[87] Oyeronke Oyewumi's criticism that Beauvoir consistently assumes a western kinship paradigm in which women appear as *wives* seems to me unanswerable: she's right that Beauvoir does this. She's also right that it's not quite satisfactory—even though the family Beauvoir describes, and the status of "wife" within it, is precisely what *The Second Sex* is *attacking*: as she would say in the 1970s, "[l]ike many feminists, I am opposed to the family, without knowing quite what to put in its place."[88] Maria Lugones, applying the principle that if a theory is unsuitable to an analysis of Africa, it is unsuitable, period, has used Oyewumi's account of the pre-colonial Yoruba to argue that "gender" is itself produced by colonization and modernity. This is a logic I can follow on the page; it would invalidate Beauvoir's work, along with a great deal else.[89]

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[85] The work of Kathryn T. Gines has been particularly helpful to me, as I encountered it first at the Diverse Lineages of Existentialism conference (St. Louis, June 19–21, 2014), and then in her article, "Sartre, Beauvoir, and The Race/Gender Analogy."

[86] The question of whether, and how, a text's *reception* constitutes its *meaning*, in whole or in part, has obviously been a huge topic within both philosophy and literary studies (though usually separately), too huge for me to tackle here.

[87] Oyeronke Oyewumi, "Family Bonds/Conceptual Binds: African Notes on Feminist Epistemologies." See also Signe Arnfred, "Simone de Beauvoir in Africa," and Nkiru Uwechia Nzegwu, *Family Matters: Feminist Concepts in African Philosophy of Culture.*

[88] "Comme beaucoup de féministes, je désire l'abolition de la famille, mais sans trop savoir par quoi la remplacer" (*Tout compte fait*, 626).

An abstract discussion of standpoint theory would be unhelpful here. What's really at issue, I think, might be called the shock of non-recognition, the way you can be reading along in a book, absorbed in a story or convinced by an analysis, making yourself at home, until it kicks you in the stomach with a distorted picture of yourself, and you feel like you're looking into a funhouse mirror. The more fully you'd trusted the text (and the teller), the stronger the vertigo and the feeling of betrayal. Fanon describes this experience of reading Sartre;[90] I think Beauvoir had the same experience with Hegel, although that's something of a conjecture.[91] Maria Lugones's essays describe something similar, leading her to conclude: "When I do not see plurality stressed in the very structure of a theory, I know that I will have to do lots of acrobatics—like a contortionist or a tightrope walker—to have this theory speak to me without allowing the theory to *distort me in my complexity.*"[92] The shock of non-recognition is the founding moment of feminist critique, perhaps of all cultural criticism. It should never be dismissed.

On the other hand, there is strong evidence for recognition, as well as non-recognition, when women of color have read Beauvoir. At the Cinquantenaire conference in 1999, Samia Issa spoke of being inspired by reading *The Second Sex* at the age of fifteen in a Palestinian refugee camp; Iranian Simine Nouri, of the clandestine circulation of Beauvoir's texts under both the reign of the Shah and the "dictature des mollahs" (dictatorship of the mullahs); Chinyere Grace Okafor, of the "non-restrictive character of Beauvoir's ideas" and the applicability of her concept of *altérité* to an analysis of relegation, resignation and resistance in the oral cultures of the Igbo (Nigeria) and the Shona (Zimbabwe), and to modern written literature by African women.[93] Gul Ozyegin has written of its usefulness in a Turkish context.[94] Most recently, Sharon Holland's experientially-rooted book, *The Erotic Life of Racism*, revalues Beauvoir and links her "feminist ethics of the erotic" to Audre Lorde's.[95] And the terrible miracle of internet procrastination uncovers a syllabus for a course called "Gender Studies and Feminist Praxis in Africa," taught by a Dr. Anneeth Kaur Hundle at the Makerere Institute of Social Research in Kampala, Uganda, which assigns Beauvoir's "Women's Situation and Character" along with Engels, Marx, Wollstonecraft, and Anna Julia Cooper.[96] Subalterns speak; and they say different things. (Who then is "*the* subaltern"?)

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[89] María Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System." There is much more to Lugones's very rich argument, and also to Oyewumi's, than I can take up here.

[90] "Quand je lus cette page, je sentis qu'on me volait ma dernière chance.... Jean-Paul Sartre ... a détruit l'enthousiasme noir" (*Peau noire masques blancs*, hereinafter *PNMB*, 108–109). This is rendered as "Sartre has destroyed Black zeal" in Charles Lam Markmann's translation, *Black Skin, White Masks*, hereinafter *BSWM* (103).

[91] Many Hegel scholars find it useful to conceive of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* as a novel, a *Bildungsroman* with Geist as the hero. My analysis of where Beauvoir follows Hegel and where she argues with him makes it plausible that she (and indeed other feminist readers) could read quite far into the book identifying with that hero, taking "Geist" as ungendered and universal, until we are unpleasantly thrown by the first mention of women, quite late in the book, in the rather same old same old discussion of "Sittlichkeit." "Oh, I wasn't really invited to this party after all: how embarrassing." Indeed, Beauvoir's first such experience may have been with the text of organized Catholicism, when it dawned on her that perhaps the God to whom she'd been avidly devoting her passionate reflections was none other than the God of the nuns at her school, concerned with rigid social proscriptions and petty faults: "perhaps God was small-minded and stupid!" [Peut-être Dieu était-il mesquin et tracassier comme une vieille dévote, peut-être que Dieu était bête! (*MJFR*, 187–88).]

[92] María Lugones, "On the Logic of Pluralist Feminism," 74.

Perhaps this is too obvious to even be interesting. It doesn't invalidate the critique of analogical thinking by philosophers of color, which is raised in a thoughtfully nuanced way by Kathryn T. Gines.[97] Like Margaret Simons, Gines notes the positive influence of Richard Wright on *The Second Sex* (as well as on Sartre's play, *La putain respectueuse* [The Respectable Whore]), and notes also that Beauvoir does not make the mistake of lumping race and gender together. She quotes two important passages from *The Second Sex*, the first from the conclusion and the second from the middle of the "Childhood" chapter.

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[93] "[C]aractère non-restrictif des idées de Beauvoir" (Chinyere Grace Okafor, "La littérature africaine et le beauvoirisme, exemples d'actions de femmes et d'écrivains" 259).

[94] Samia Issa, "La libération des femmes, plus qu'une priorité," Simine Nouri, "Face à une misogynie hors du temps," Okafor, "La littérature africaine," and Gul Ozyegin, "My Father, An Agent of State Feminism and Other Unrelatable Conversations." See also Leticia Illiana Underwood, "The Legacy of Simone de Beauvoir in Mexico: Rosario Castellanos," and now Chahla Chafiq, *Le rendez-vous iranien de Simone de Beauvoir*.

[95] Holland's uptake of Beauvoir, and of Beauvoir scholarship, is thoroughgoing. For a comparably complex next step "*à la* and *contra* Beauvoir" see Kyoo Lee, "(Un)naming the Third Sex After Beauvoir: Toward a Third-Dimensional Feminism," and "Asian Female Stereotypes Matter to All: Beyond Black and White, East and West." Now see also Linda Alcoff, *The Future of Whiteness*, 138–40. Alcoff uses Beauvoir's reflection on her American experience paradigmatically to explain white "double consciousness."

[96] "Gender Studies and Feminist Praxis in Africa."

[97] Gines, "The Race/Gender Analogy," 35–51.

> In *Black Boy* Richard Wright has shown how the ambitions of a young American Negro are blocked from the start and what a struggle he had merely in raising himself to the level where problems began to be posed for whites. Negroes coming to France from Africa also find difficulties—with themselves as well as around them—similar to those confronting women.[98]

> It is a strange experience for an individual who feels himself to be an autonomous and transcendent subject, an absolute, to discover inferiority in himself as a fixed and preordained essence: it is a strange experience for whoever regards himself as the One to be revealed to himself as otherness, alterity.... This situation is not unique. The American Negroes know it, being partially integrated in a civilization that nevertheless regards them as constituting an inferior caste; what Bigger Thomas, in Richard Wright's *Native Son*, feels with bitterness at the dawn of his life is this definitive inferiority, this accursed alterity, which is written in the color of his skin: he sees airplanes flying by and he knows that because he is Black the sky is forbidden to him. Because she is a woman, the little girl knows that she is forbidden the sea and the polar regions, a thousand adventures, a thousand joys: she was born on the wrong side of the line. There is a great difference: the Negroes submit with a feeling of revolt, no privileges compensating for their hard lot, whereas woman is offered inducements to complicity.[99]

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[98] Gines quotes Parshley's translation, but I'll provide the French for easy reference. "Richard Wright a montré dans *Black Boy* combien les ambitions d'un jeune Noir d'Amérique sont barrées dès le départ et quelle lutte il a à soutenir simplement pour s'élever au niveau où les problèmes commencent à se poser aux Blancs; les Noirs qui sont venus d'Afrique en France connaissent aussi—en eux-mêmes comme au-dehors—des difficultés analogues à celles que rencontrent les femmes" (*DS* 2:620).

[99] "C'est une étrange expérience pour un individu qui s'éprouve comme sujet, autonomie, transcendance, comme un absolu, de découvrir en soi à titre d'essence donnée l'infériorité; c'est une étrange expérience pour celui qui se pose pour soi comme l'Un d'être révélé à soi-même comme altérité. C'est là ce qui arrive à la petite fille quand faisant l'apprentissage du monde elle s'y saisit comme une femme. La sphère à laquelle elle appartient est de partout enfermée, limitée, dominée par l'univers mâle: si haut qu'elle se hisse, si loin qu'elle s'aventure, il y a toujours un plafond au-dessus de sa tête, des murs qui barreront son chemin. Les dieux de l'homme sont dans un ciel si lointain qu'en vérité, pour lui, il n'y a pas de dieux: la petite fille vit parmi des dieux à face humaine.

Cette situation n'est pas unique. C'est aussi celle que connaissent les Noirs d'Amérique, partiellement intégrés à une civilisation qui cependant les considère comme une caste inférieure; ce que Big Thomas éprouve avec tant de rancœur à l'aurore de sa vie, c'est cette

Gines says, "[w]ith this note, Beauvoir anticipates criticisms of white feminism and white feminist privilege by later Black feminists such as Audre Lorde, who declares that 'the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.'"[100] But Gines continues, I think rightly,

> Unfortunately, while Beauvoir and Sartre do recognize problems of white privilege, neither of them explicitly engages Black women intellectuals or a Black feminist analysis.… Consequently, their usage of the race/gender analogy results in the erasure of Black women who experience both racial and gender oppression.[101]

Kathy Glass, writing in the same anthology, similarly notes that while "remarkably progressive in her observation that both racist and sexist practices reinscribe white male power, [Beauvoir] fails to theorize a space for Black women, of any economic background, in her study" and thus "puts Black women under erasure."[102] But while I think Glass and Gines are correct that Beauvoir does not explicitly *make* a space, I would contend that she doesn't *foreclose* that space, either: my contention would be that she *leaves* a space where women of many races, or nationalities, or eras, may find or recognize themselves—*or may not*.

What I mean by "leaving a space" is something like Patricia Moynagh's idea of "exemplary validity," which she sees rooted in Beauvoir's recognition that "every concrete human being is always singularly situated,"[103] and her mobilization of a Kantian method by which "examples are the go-cart of judgment."

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définitive infériorité, cette altérité maudite qui est inscrite dans la couleur de sa peau: il regarde passer des avions et il sait que parce qu'il est noir le ciel lui est défendu. Parce qu'elle est femme, la fillette sait que la mer et les pôles, que mille aventures, mille joies lui sont défendues: elle est née du mauvais côté. La grande différence, c'est que les Noirs subissent leur sort dans la révolte: aucun privilège n'en compense la dureté; tandis que la femme est invitée à la complicité" (*DS* 2:52–3).

[100] Gines, "The Race/Gender Analogy," 43.

[101] Ibid., 43–4.

[102] Kathy Glass, "Calling All Sisters: Continental Philosophy and Black Feminist Thinkers," 226.

[103] "Assurément la femme est comme l'homme un être humain: mais une telle affirmation est abstraite; le fait est que tout être humain concret est toujours singulièrement situé. Refuser les notions d'éternel féminin, d'âme noire, de caractère juif, ce n'est pas nier qu'il y ait aujourd'hui des Juifs, des Noirs, des femmes: cette négation ne représente pas pour les intéressés une libération, mais une fuite inauthentique. Il est clair qu'aucune femme ne peut prétendre sans mauvaise foi se situer par-delà son sexe" (*DS* 1:13). See Chapter 1 above for discussion of this passage in a different context.

> This is Beauvoir's dialogic pitch to her audience: Do you see your life or other women's lived experiences depicted in the examples I present to you? Do you see something of yourself or others in my struggles even though we are worlds apart? If yes, then they have exemplary validity. To the extent that we see within any example she furnishes a similar pattern revealed about our own or other women's lives, her examples are well-chosen and valid.[104]

The wager would then be that there would be enough areas of overlap for women in very different situations, with different backgrounds, at different times, to "write themselves in." I don't mean "wager" in the sense of conscious intention, exactly—I am not sure Beauvoir really had a very clear idea, or any idea, about who she was speaking to or writing for.[105] But the wager seems to have paid off for many women, including many feminists of color. Moynagh's approach also has the advantage of valuing all of Beauvoir's book, as I do, and not reducing it to the introduction.[106]

Moynagh's idea of the examples as "dialogic" seems right to me. The method of piling example upon example requires that one supply one's own stories—"yes, that reminds me of the time that he"—and women in many walks of life and many countries had and have no difficulty coming up with examples of their own. But the other side of this coin is what feminist literary critics used to call "the resisting reader."[107] It may take only a sentence or two for someone to say "Not it!" and shut the book, like the narrator in Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy* when her well-meaning white employer tries to use *The Second Sex* to "help" her understand her hostility toward her mother, who had favored Lucy's brothers.[108]

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[104] Moynagh, "Beauvoir on Lived Reality," 26. See also Vintges, *Philosophy as Passion*. It seems to me that Patricia Hill Collins uses a similar method in *Black Feminist Thought*, where the long quotations from *Drylongso* speak for themselves and carry her argument forward in a powerful and convincing way. See also Diane Perpich, "Black Feminism," especially 24: "Collins makes it clear that there is no homogenous Black *woman's* standpoint just as there is no archetypal Black woman whose experiences stand as normal, normative, and thereby authentic."

[105] I believe it is Nancy Bauer who describes Beauvoir as writing to call into being the audience for her work that did not yet exist.

[106] Julien Murphy, Sonia Kruks, and others have sought to address this question by pointing to Beauvoir's vigorous public support of Djamila Boupacha, a victim of French torture during the Algerian war. Admirable as this was, I am setting Boupacha aside for now, in part because she has been thoroughly discussed, but also because my question here isn't whether Beauvoir was, or later became, a decent or admirable *person*, but what her feminist ideas are and whether they make sense, what sense different readers can or could make of them.

[107] The term was first coined by Judith Fetterley, in her 1978 book, *The Resisting Reader: Feminist Approaches to American Fiction*.

> I suddenly had to stop speaking; my mouth was empty, my tongue had collapsed into my throat. I thought I would turn to stone just then. Mariah wanted to rescue me. She spoke of women in society, women in history, women in culture, women everywhere. But I couldn't speak, so I couldn't tell her that my mother was my mother and that society and history and culture and other women in general were something else altogether.
>
> Mariah left the room and came back with a large book and opened it to the first chapter. I read the first sentence. "Woman? Very simple, say the fanciers of simple formulas: she is a womb, an ovary; she is a female—this word is sufficient to define her." I had to stop. Mariah had completely misinterpreted my situation. My life could not really be explained by this thick book that made my hands hurt as I tried to keep it open.[109]

Since I occupy the subject position of Mariah—the genius of Kincaid's book is to make this identification highly uncomfortable and yet inescapable—my first impulse is to say (as I have to many a student in more or less this situation), "No, she's quoting that because she disagrees with it as much as you do—keep reading." But of course it is Lucy's business what she wants to read, and she has had her fill of well-meaning schoolteacher types in the course of her impeccable colonial education. Moreover, if *The Second Sex* is *right*, if Beauvoir's analysis *does* apply to Lucy—and I can't help feeling, as Eleanore Holveck does, that Mariah is on to something[110]—reading it is also unnecessary. Lucy can figure out the truth just by looking around her, in much the same way that

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[108] I am indebted to Eleanore Holveck, *Simone de Beauvoir's Philosophy of Lived Experience: Literature and Metaphysics,* for this reference, though my reading is somewhat different from hers.

[109] Jamaica Kincaid, *Lucy*, 131–32.

[110] Holveck writes, "Kincaid agrees with Beauvoir more than she thinks" (*Simone de Beauvoir's Philosophy of Lived Experience*, 127). But *Lucy* is a novel, albeit an autobiographical one; so really we'd have to say that it's Lucy (the character), rather than Kincaid the author, who if she went back and read the book might have agreed with it, like many readers including myself (see Chapter 2 above) who initially disliked it or found it puzzling or irrelevant to our pressing emotional concerns, but felt differently later. Kincaid the author may have realized this, or may not, but that's a separate issue. In my view anyhow the issue of whether Lucy can or should "learn" from Mariah is separable from the question of whether Mariah is "right."

Chester Himes did not need to read French absurdist writers to discover that his life as a Black man in America was an absurd life.[111]

If people (of any color) had said to Beauvoir, why should we read this long strange book, why not start from our own experience here and now (it's always Year Zero for someone), I think she would have agreed, at least by the 1970s. Interviewed then by her friend John Gerassi, she said the US second wave had been set in motion by anti-imperialist activism (regarding the Vietnam war), not by her book. "They may have become feminists for the reasons I explain in *The Second Sex*; but they discovered those reasons in their life experiences, not in my book…." She added that if she were writing it now (then), it

> would have to be a collective effort. And then it should be rooted in practice rather than in theory…. What is really needed is that a whole group of women, from all sorts of countries, assemble their lived experiences, and that we derive from such experiences the patterns facing women everywhere. What's more, such information should be amassed from all classes…[112]

Perhaps she had in mind something like the 1975 collection, *Les femmes s'entêtent*, for which she had provided an introduction and other important support.[113]

But here's another thing. Kathryn Gines's presentation at Diverse Lineages of Existentialism sent me back to Beverly Guy-Sheftall's *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought* (I was looking for Anna Julia Cooper, about whom more later). And there, hidden in plain sight, was a fragment from an unfinished manuscript by Lorraine Hansberry, "Simone de Beauvoir and *The Second Sex*," which its editor, Margaret B. Wilkerson, dates to 1957, the year Hansberry completed her best-known play, *A Raisin in the Sun*. Hansberry greeted Beauvoir's book as a brilliant revelation. (There could be no clearer contrast to the defensive bewilderment Mary McCarthy's friend Elizabeth Hardwick expressed in her influential 1953 review.)[114] As Wilkerson observes, Hansberry's piece was "written for thinkers and readers on the left"; it praises

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[111] Chester Himes, *My Life of Absurdity*. See Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, 159, for a similar comment by Richard Wright (about Kierkegaard).

[112] "Interview by John Gerassi," 79. I am continuing to follow the thread of Holveck's discussion here.

[113] Nicole-Lise Bernheim, Ariane Bruneton, Claude Enjeu, and Joana Savé, *Les femmes s'entêtent*. The title, "Women Are Stubborn" (or "women insist") puns on "les femmes sans têtes," headless women.

[114] Elizabeth Hardwick, "The Subjection of Women."

Beauvoir for her lack of respect for marriage,[115] her depiction of looking after children as (in Hansberry's words) "not a proper experience for the adult mind"[116] and housework as "an indestructible contradiction to usefulness,"[117] and her analysis of the problems of "ornament" and "seduction":[118] one section is headed, "An American Myth: We Don't Wear No Veils."[119] And Hansberry follows Beauvoir in holding women responsible for their own complicity with the system: "Today in the United States our national attitude toward women and their place, or finding it, is one of frantic confusion. Women themselves are among the foremost promoters of the confusion." Frankly, I am finding it difficult not to quote the whole thing, not just because it supports my views about Beauvoir, but because it makes so painfully clear what a loss Hansberry's untimely death was for feminist theory as well as American dramatic literature. But since you already own *Words of Fire* (don't you?) you can go and look for yourself.

In short, the question of whether *The Second Sex* speaks to women of color cannot have a single answer. That women of color have more standing than I to answer it is undisputable. But when those who have greater standing to speak say opposite things, I must think for myself, white though I be. However, Gines and Glass are certainly correct to say that Beauvoir nowhere *quotes and cites* the word of a woman of color in *The Second Sex*, and this certainly does bear out Gines's general point about the exclusion of women of color from the philosophical canon. Rectifying that, and not providing a full and nuanced account of Beauvoir's own thought, is Gines's main project, and it is an unquestionably important one.

4 "Others" and Analogies: Rereading the Introduction after Anna Julia Cooper

Gines presented a version of her argument at the 2014 Diverse Lineages of Existentialism conference, where she was asked a historical question: who were the women thinkers of color Beauvoir, in 1948, could have but failed to cite? She replied that Beauvoir could and should have drawn on Anna Julia Cooper, "who after all had defended her dissertation at the Sorbonne." Gines's article in

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[115] Lorraine Hansberry, "Beauvoir and *The Second Sex*: An American Commentary," 26.

[116] Ibid., 141.

[117] Ibid., 138.

[118] Ibid., 131.

[119] Ibid., 137.

Convergences follows up her criticisms of Beauvoir with a strong case that continental philosophers should attend to Cooper, who is praised for her understanding of what would come to be called intersectionality, and also for "taking a strong stand against all forms of oppression" simultaneously and giving a general account of domination. Gines quotes a famous passage from Cooper's "Woman versus the Indian" (1891–92). There Cooper responded eloquently to a talk by suffragist Anna Howard Shaw, in which Shaw had done what we now call "ranking oppressions" and had put the cause of women ahead of other struggles. Cooper wrote:

> Woman should not even by inference, or for the sake of argument, seem to disparage what is weak. For woman's cause is the cause of the weak; and when all the weak shall have received their due consideration, then woman will have her "rights," and the Indian will have his rights, and the Negro will have his rights, and all the strong will have learned at last to deal justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly.… All prejudices, whether of race, sect, or sex, class pride, and caste distinctions are the belittling inheritance and badge of snobs and prigs.[120]

Now, if I wanted to be a jerk, I could point out that the second sentence of that magnificent paragraph follows the same "all the women were white, all the Negroes were men" structure that has been so fully criticized in the theorizing of white women, including Beauvoir. But that would be precisely the kind of decontextualized nitpicking I am writing this book to oppose. Looking at Cooper's argument, and her work and life as a whole, it's completely obvious that Cooper's generic "he" does not exclude women. And besides, that kind of thing is silly. Feminist history of philosophy, much less feminist theory *tout court*, shouldn't be a kind of duel where people defend "their author" by attacking someone else's. Still less do I want to resemble a certain sort of deconstructionist who used to delight in ironically cutting the ground from under everyone's feet, including her own, and retire triumphantly to the bar having demonstrated that everything contains the seeds of its own dissolution. My point is that *both* Beauvoir and Cooper can be right, or at least, right *enough* that we can keep moving.

More to the point, I do not think Beauvoir would have disagreed with the substantive purpose of this paragraph from Anna Julia Cooper's essay, because as I read Beauvoir's explanation of "the Other" in the introduction to *The Second Sex*, she is concerned to accomplish very much the same thing, though in a rather different way. This section of the introduction has been very fully discussed by many scholars; I ask my reader's patience for going over familiar ground, and especially for the long quotations: I want to emphasize aspects usually elided—especially the way Beauvoir populates her account with examples and illustrations.

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[120] Gines then goes on (45) to list other important Black feminist thinkers from Maria Stewart to Patricia Hill Collins and to call on the community of continental philosophers to take their work into account.

To give a general and inclusive account of domination and oppression that does not see one form as "worse" than another is her own first "move."

> The category of the Other is *as primeval as consciousness itself.* In the most primitive societies, the most ancient mythologies, there is always a duality of Same and Other; *this division at first was not placed under the sign of the division of the sexes*, it was not based on any empirical given:[121] this emerges from the research of Granet on Chinese thought, from Dumézil's work on Rome and India, among others. In the couples Varuna-Mitra, Uranos-Zeus, Sun-Moon, Day-Night, no feminine element is at first implied; nor in the opposition between Good and Evil, auspicious and inauspicious, right and left, God and Lucifer; alterity is a fundamental category of human thought. No human group ever sets itself up as the One without immediately setting up the Other as its opposite [emphasis added].[122]

To anticipate a later moment in my discussion: please note that in her opening exposition of the basic human structure of domination, Beauvoir draws on evidence from non-Western and Western cultures alike, without making any distinction or hierarchy between them.

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[121] It is hard to know how to translate Beauvoir's word "données," which means things that are "given" or "pre-given," as well as meaning *data*, the result of empirical observation. I've chosen to keep the word "givens" throughout, awkward as this is in English, to indicate that both meanings are often implicit in this key philosophical term.

[122] "La catégorie de l'*Autre* [emphasis in original] est *aussi originelle que la conscience elle-même*. Dans les sociétés les plus primitives, dans les mythologies les plus antiques on trouve toujours une dualité qui est celle du Même et de l'Autre; *cette division n'a pas d'abord été placée sous le signe de la division des sexes*, elle ne dépend d'aucune donnée empirique: c'est ce qui ressort entre autres des travaux de Granet sur la pensée chinoise, de ceux de Dumézil sur les Indes et Rome. Dans les couples Varuna-Mitra, Ouranos-Zeus, Soleil-Lune, Jour-Nuit, aucun élément féminin n'est d'abord impliqué; non plus que dans l'opposition du Bien au Mal, des principes fastes et néfastes, de la droite et de la gauche, de Dieu et de Lucifer; l'altérité est une catégorie fondamentale de la pensée humaine. Aucune collectivité ne se définit jamais comme Une sans immédiatement poser l'Autre en face de soi" (*DS* 1:16, emphasis added).

The next bit roots her general point in the everyday experience of everyone, then segues into a list of examples of the oppression of one group by another—examples she assumes her readers will be familiar with, and will agree in finding unjust.

> No human group ever sets itself up as the One without at once setting up the Other as its opposite. If three travelers happen to occupy the same compartment, that is enough to turn the rest of the passengers on the train into vaguely hostile "others." For the village-dweller, all those not from his village are suspicious outsiders; for the native of a country, those who live in countries not his own seem like foreigners; Jews are "the others" for the anti-semite, Blacks for American racists, indigenous peoples for the colonizers, proletarians for the property-owning class.[123]

Then she moves back to the account, drawn from structural anthropology, that undergirds all the examples.

> At the end of an in-depth study on the various forms of primitive societies, Lévi-Strauss could conclude: "The passage from the state of Nature to the state of Culture is defined by man's ability to conceive biological relationships as systems of opposites: duality, alternation, opposition and symmetry, whether they appear in well-defined or more fluid forms, are not phenomena to be explained, but rather the fundamental and immediate givens of social reality."[124]

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[123] Parshley made a smoother sentence here: "Jews are 'different' for the anti-Semite, Negroes are 'inferior' for American racists, aborigines are 'natives' for colonists, proletarians are 'the lower class' for the privileged." I see why he did this, actually, but it mutes the degree to which all these oppressions are being described as fully equivalent.

[124] "Aucune collectivité ne se définit jamais comme Une sans immédiatement poser l'Autre en face de soi. Il suffit de trois voyageurs réunis par hasard dans un même compartiment pour que tout le reste des voyageurs deviennent des 'autres' vaguement hostiles. Pour le villageois, tous les gens qui n'appartiennent pas à son village sont des 'autres' suspects; pour le natif d'un pays, les habitants des pays qui ne sont pas le sien apparaissent comme des 'étrangers'; les Juifs sont 'des autres' pour l'antisémite, les Noirs pour les racistes américains, les indigènes pour les colons, les prolétaires pour les classes possédantes. À la fin d'une étude approfondie sur les diverses figures des sociétés primitives Lévi-Strauss a pu conclure: 'Le passage de l'état de Nature à l'état de Culture se définit par l'aptitude de la part de l'homme à penser les relations biologiques sous la forme de systèmes d'oppositions: la dualité, l'alternance, l'opposition et la symétrie, qu'elles se présentent sous des formes

At this point, a footnote thanks Claude Lévi-Strauss for sharing the manuscript of *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté* (*The Elementary Structures of Kinship*) with her before its publication, acknowledging that she used his work "largement" in the second section of the book.[125] (Notice, by the way, what a hash this makes of the Sparknotes version of French intellectual history: "first there was existentialism, and then structuralism sprang up and killed it." Lévi-Strauss had been a classmate of Beauvoir's in their first year of supervised teaching, and Lacan was older than Sartre.) But Lévi-Strauss's theory on its own is not quite enough:

> These phenomena would be impossible to understand if human reality was exclusively a *Mitsein* based on solidarity and friendship. But things become clear if, following Hegel, we discern in consciousness itself a fundamental hostility toward every other consciousness; the subject sets himself up only by setting himself in opposition, affirming his claim as essential and constituting the other as inessential, as an object.[126]

Enter Hegel, to amplify and correct what she sees as the overly static nature of the structuralist account (a reproach that has often been made): what she needs from Hegel is a *dynamic* account of consciousness as conflictual.[127]

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définies ou des formes floues constituent moins des phénomènes qu'il s'agit d'expliquer que les données fondamentales et immédiates de la réalité sociale'" (*DS* 1:16–17).

[125] "See C. Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*. I thank C. Lévi-Strauss for having shown me the printer's proofs of his thesis, which I have used extensively in the second part of this work." [Voir C. Lévi-Strauss, *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté*. Je remercie C. Lévi-Strauss d'avoir bien voulu me communiquer les épreuves de sa thèse que j'ai entre autres largement utilisée dans la 2e partie (*DS* 1:17N).]

[126] "Ces phénomènes ne sauraient se comprendre si la réalité humaine était exclusivement un *mitsein* basé sur la solidarité et l'amitié. Il s'éclaire au contraire si suivant Hegel on découvre dans la conscience elle-même une fondamentale hostilité à l'égard de toute autre conscience; le sujet ne se pose qu'en s'opposant: il prétend s'affirmer comme l'essentiel et constituer l'autre en inessentiel, en objet" (*DS* 1:17).

[127] This deployment of Hegel's account of *consciousness* in no way implies an agreement with Hegel's theory of *history*: see Chapter 2 above, and see Altman, "Beauvoir, Hegel, War." It is worth noting that Hegel scholars often puzzle over the relationship between these two parts of the *Phenomenology*, and point to a logical break or jump between the early sections which deal with the struggle between master and slave in a seemingly a-temporal way, and the later parts which sketch a set of progressive "historical" stages in a highly problematic and ethnocentric way. See Robert Pippin, "You Can't Get There from Here: Transition Problems in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*."

Beauvoir is unquestionably drawing on Hegel's account of the "master" and "slave" (or, as Hegel scholars prefer, the "lord" and the "bondsman") in this account, but (rather interestingly) she does not use the words "master" and "slave" until a few pages later. To call

Part two: Beauvoir follows this general account of domination by acknowledging that, foundational as the "One/Other" structure is, it does not always operate in the same way. Sometimes the opposition is reciprocal, reversible, relative. This is, or should logically be, the ordinary case.

> But the other consciousness opposes him with a reciprocal claim: the native traveling abroad sees with a shock that natives of nearby countries regard him, in turn, as a foreigner;[128] between villages, clans, nations, classes, there are wars, potlatches, markets, treaties, conflicts which reveal that Otherness has a relative, rather than an absolute, meaning; whether they like it or not, individuals and groups are still obligated to recognize that their relationship is a reciprocal one.[129]

But strangely enough, the reversibility of "Othering" is not *always* the case. Relations between men and women do not seem to follow the logical pattern whereby "you're the other, get down" is answered by, "no, dummy, look in the mirror: *I'm* the one: the Other is you. Hah! I spit in your general direction" (or whatever), or even by a less aggressive form of reciprocity: "yeah, but you need me as much as I need you, so let's make a deal." Why don't they?

> How does it happen, then, that between the sexes this reciprocity has not been put forward, that one of the two terms asserts itself as the sole essential, denying any relativity with respect to its counterpart, which it defines as pure alterity? Why do women not contest male sovereignty? No subject sets itself up spontaneously and from the start as inessential; it is not the Other which, by defining itself as Other, defines the One; the

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this account "Hegelian" probably confuses as much as it clarifies; she'll reprise the story at least three times, once in an anthropological register, again at the beginning of "Mythes" (*DS* 1:237–39), yet again as part of the (mainly) psychoanalytic account of childhood. Whether one agrees or disagrees with the overall theory, it seems better to me to regard it as Beauvoir's own.

[128] Bauer (*Beauvoir, Philosophy, & Feminism*, 179) translates "scandale" as "shame," which seems like an interpretive leap too far: she or I might well feel shame in this circumstance, as culturally sensitive Americans travelers often do. But the traveler Beauvoir posits here is just as likely to be right-wing, and angered rather than educated.

[129] "Seulement l'autre conscience lui oppose une prétention réciproque: en voyage le natif s'aperçoit avec scandale qu'il y a dans les pays voisins des natifs qui le regardent à son tour comme étranger; entre villages, clans, nations, classes, il y a des guerres, des potlatchs, des marchés, des traités, des luttes qui ôtent à l'idée de l'*Autre* son sens absolu et en découvrent la relativité; bon gré, mal gré, individus et groupes sont bien obligés de reconnaître la réciprocité de leur rapport" (*DS* 1:17).

> Other is put in its place as Other by the One setting itself up as One. But in order for the reversal from Other to One to be blocked, the Other must submit to this alien point of view. Where does this submission in women come from?[130]

Attempting to answer this question, Beauvoir next looks more broadly, to compare and contrast other "Other-ing" situations that involve longstanding structural oppressions. In exploring *how* these oppressions come about, she finds a series of disanalogies to the submission of women.

> There are other cases where one category has succeeded in absolutely dominating another, in the short run or for a longer time. Often this privilege is due to uneven numbers: the majority persecutes or imposes its law on the minority. But women, unlike Jews or American Blacks, are not a minority. There are as many women on earth as there are men.[131]

So, smaller numbers aren't the reason. What else could it be?

> Often, too, the two groups concerned were originally independent: either they were unaware of each other's existence, or each respected the other's autonomy, until a historical event subordinated the weaker to the stronger. The Jewish diaspora, the introduction of slavery to America, the colonial conquests are facts, with dates.[132] In these cases, for the oppressed there was a *time before* [emphasis in original]; they have a common past, a tradition, sometimes a religion or a culture. Along these lines the parallel Bebel makes between women and the proletariat

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[130] "Comment donc se fait-il qu'entre les sexes cette réciprocité n'ait pas été posée, que l'un des termes se soit affirmé comme le seul essentiel, niant toute relativité par rapport à son corrélatif, définissant celui-ci comme l'altérité pure? Pourquoi les femmes ne contestent-elles pas la souveraineté mâle? Aucun sujet ne se pose d'emblée et spontanément comme l'inessentiel; ce n'est pas l'Autre qui se définissant comme Autre définit l'Un; il est posé comme Autre par l'Un se posant comme Un. Mais pour que le retournement de l'Autre à l'Un ne s'opère pas, il faut qu'il se soumette à ce point de vue étranger. D'où vient en la femme cette soumission?" (*DS* 1:17).

[131] "Il existe d'autres cas où, pendant un temps plus ou moins long, une catégorie a réussi à en dominer absolument une autre. C'est souvent l'inégalité numérique qui confère ce privilège: la majorité impose sa loi à la minorité ou la persécute. Mais les femmes ne sont pas comme les Noirs d'Amérique, comme les Juifs, une minorité: il y a autant de femmes que d'hommes sur terre" (*DS* 1:18).

[132] Parshley weakens the sense of concrete history here, rendering "des faits datés" simply as "examples in point"; he also changes "the Jewish diaspora" to "the scattering of the Jews."

> seems well-founded: proletarians also are not inferior in numbers, and they never constituted a separate group. However, a historical development explains their existence as a class, and accounts for the distribution of the individuals within it, even if we cannot pinpoint a singular historical event. There have not always been proletarians: there have always been women.[133]

Smaller numbers? No. Geographical separation? No. Historical event, or development over historical time? No. What's left? It would *seem* that the oppression of women was a natural fact and therefore inescapable.

> There have not always been proletarians: there have always been women. They are women by their physiological structure. As far back as history can be traced, they have always been subordinated to man. Their dependence is not the consequence of an event or a becoming, it isn't something that *happened* [emphasis in original]. It's partly because it lacks the accidental character of historical fact that women's alterity appears to be absolute.[134] A situation which came about in time can be undone in another time: the Blacks of Haiti, among others, have proved this very well. A natural condition, however, would seem to defy the possibility of change.[135]

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[133] "Souvent aussi les deux groupes en présence ont d'abord été indépendants: ils s'ignoraient autrefois, ou chacun admettait l'autonomie de l'autre, et c'est un événement historique qui a subordonné le plus faible au plus fort: la diaspora juive, l'introduction de l'esclavage en Amérique, les conquêtes coloniales sont des faits datés. Dans ces cas, pour les opprimés il y a eu un *avant*; ils ont en commun un passé, une tradition, parfois une religion, une culture. En ce sens le rapprochement établi par Bebel entre les femmes et le prolétariat serait le mieux fondé: les prolétaires non plus ne sont pas en infériorité numérique et ils n'ont jamais constitué une collectivité séparée. Cependant à défaut d'*un* événement, c'est un développement historique qui explique leur existence en tant que classe et qui rend compte de la distribution de *ces* individus dans cette classe. Il n'y a pas toujours eu des prolétaires: il y a toujours eu des femmes" (*DS* 1:18, emphasis in original).

[134] "Accidental" here has the flavor of the philosophical distinction between "substance" and "accidents."

[135] "Il n'y a pas toujours eu des prolétaires: il y a toujours eu des femmes; elles sont femmes par leur structure physiologique; aussi loin que l'histoire remonte, elles ont toujours été subordonnées à l'homme: leur dépendance n'est pas la conséquence d'un événement ou d'un devenir, elle n'est pas *arrivée*. C'est en partie parce qu'elle échappe au caractère accidentel du fait historique que l'altérité apparaît ici comme un absolu. Une situation qui s'est créée à travers le temps peut se défaire en un autre temps: les Noirs de l'Haïti entre autres l'ont bien prouvé; il semble, au contraire, qu'une condition naturelle défie le changement" (*DS* 1:18, emphasis in original).

If it's not historical, must it be natural, inevitable? Not so fast, she continues: that belief helps explain why women have *appeared* as, and been *treated* as, an Absolute Other; but that's no excuse. "In truth, nature is no more an unchangeable given than historical reality is."[136] The problem is that unlike Blacks and proletarians, women have not formed themselves into a collectivity; they have not resisted. (We may well find this unfair to the suffragists, and other earlier feminists—I do—but that's not the point right now.)[137]

> If woman perceives herself as the inessential which never returns to being the essential, it's because she herself does not put that return into motion. Proletarians say "we"; so do Blacks. Setting themselves up as subjects, they turn the bourgeois, the whites, into "others." Women—except at certain congresses which remain abstract manifestations—do not say "we"; men say "women" and women adopt their words to refer to themselves; but women don't set themselves up authentically as Subject. The proletarians made the revolution in Russia, the Blacks in Haiti, the Indochinese are fighting in Indochina: women's activism has never been more than a symbolic agitation; they have only gained what men were willing to grant them, they received rather than taking.[138]

It appears that the failure of women to resist male domination is itself an odd fact of history that needs to be explained. And she explains it precisely by recognizing the kinds of divisions and differences between women that she is often said to overlook.

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[136] "En vérité pas plus que la réalité historique la nature n'est un donné immuable" (*DS* 1:18). It will be the task of the chapter on "Les données de la biologie" (the givens, or data, of biology) to explain why this is so.

[137] Interestingly, this claim in the introduction does not prevent inclusion of a positive account of feminist movements in the later history chapter, where Beauvoir directs us in a footnote from this.

[138] "Si la femme se découvre comme l'inessentiel qui jamais ne retourne à l'essentiel, c'est qu'elle n'opère pas elle-même ce retour. Les prolétaires disent 'nous.' Les Noirs aussi. Se posant comme sujets ils changent en 'autres' les bourgeois, les Blancs. Les femmes—sauf en certains congrès qui restent des manifestations abstraites—ne disent pas 'nous'; les hommes disent 'les femmes' et elles reprennent ces mots pour se désigner elles-mêmes; mais elles ne se posent pas authentiquement comme Sujet. Les prolétaires ont fait la révolution en Russie, les Noirs à Haïti, les Indochinois se battent en Indochine: l'action des femmes n'a jamais été qu'une agitation symbolique; elles n'ont gagné que ce que les hommes ont bien voulu leur concéder; elles n'ont rien pris: elles ont reçu" (*DS* 1:18–19).

> The reason is that they lack the *concrete means* to join together and stand as a unity by opposing the Other. They have no past, no history, no religion which belongs to them; and unlike the proletarians they have no solidarity of work and interests; they are not even crowded together spatially, in the way that makes a community of American Blacks, ghetto Jews, or the workers at Saint-Denis or Renault. They live dispersed among men, attached through residence, work, economic interest, social standing to certain men—father or husband—more closely than to other women. *Bourgeois women feel solidarity with bourgeois men, not with women of the proletariat; white women ally themselves not with Black women but with white men* [emphasis added].[139]

This difference, this failure really, of solidarity is further explained by several factors which are not mutually exclusive. One factor is the "fundamental unity" of the male-female couple. "The tie which binds her to her oppressors cannot be compared to any other. The division of the sexes is in effect a biological given, not a moment in human history … she is the Other at the heart of a totality whose two terms are necessary to one another."[140] But other reasons women fail to resist include (1) simply the self-reinforcing effects of oppression itself: women's lack of power to do so (economic, material, public presence, political status) and (2) women's further complicity with an oppression that some of them find to their advantage, because of "economic interests and social condition." In the context of my discussion above, I hope my readers can understand this, not as a pure philosophical claim, but also as *a summary of the research findings her book will go on to present.*

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[139] "C'est qu'elles n'ont pas *les moyens concrets* de se rassembler en une unité qui se poserait en s'opposant. Elles n'ont pas de passé, d'histoire, de religion qui leur soit propre; et elles n'ont pas comme les prolétaires une solidarité de travail et d'intérêts; il n'y a même pas entre elles cette promiscuité spatiale qui fait des Noirs d'Amérique, des Juifs des ghettos, des ouvriers de Saint-Denis ou des usines Renault une communauté. Elles vivent dispersées parmi les hommes, rattachées par l'habitat, le travail, les intérêts économiques, la condition sociale à certains hommes—père ou mari—plus étroitement qu'aux autres femmes. *Bourgeoises elles sont solidaires des bourgeois et non des femmes prolétaires; blanches des hommes blancs et non des femmes noires"* (*DS* 1:19, emphasis added).

[140] "Le lien qui l'unit à ses oppresseurs n'est comparable à aucun autre. La division des sexes est en effet un donné biologique, non un moment de l'histoire humaine … elle est l'Autre au cœur d'une totalité dont les deux termes sont nécessaires l'un à l'autre" (*DS* 1:19–20). Again, we might want to contest that word "necessary," especially in the age of mechanical sexual reproduction; but if we remember that for Beauvoir a biological *given* never implies an immutably determined eternal meaning or destiny, this may still stand as a reasonable characterization of women's *past* situation, which retains a substantial hold on our *present* condition (either because we are heterosexually reproductive, or because social norms exert pressure that we *ought* to be, whether we agree with those norms or not).

So to recap: The "One and the Other" is a basic structure of human consciousness; sometimes it is simple and easy to reverse, as when the traveler to another country realizes that she is not a "native" everywhere; sometimes it describes a sedimented power relationship, which can't be reversed simply by taking thought or by an act of will. In that case a situation of oppression exists, and that is bad; examples of oppression include Blacks, the colonized, the proletariat, and also women. But there are certain special features about the situation of women, including their tendency to complicity, and the particular interdependence of men and women given sexual reproduction. She doesn't say women's oppression is worse, and she doesn't say it's better or easier; she says it's not quite the same thing, and that it's worth wondering why. Her concern here is not to rank oppressions, but to explain women's lack of the resistance they should logically have shown. When she describes the impediments to the solidarity of all women that are created by race and class—"bourgeois women show solidarity with bourgeois men, not with proletarian women, and white women with white men, not Black women"—it seems to me she is placing what we'd now call an intersectional analysis right at the heart of her theory. (It also seems to me that she is clearly right.)

Now, this argument does rely, in part, on seeing analogies between the situation of women and girls and the situation of American Blacks. Nobody likes to be anybody else's metaphor. But our evaluation of this particular analogy should turn in part on what Beauvoir is using the mention of other oppressions to *do*. Beauvoir draws analogies in the course of trying to understand what women's oppression is, trying to establish that there can even be such a thing. But analogical thinking is not where she finally comes to rest. Banal as it may seem, one could diagram her argument using that formula we wish students would give up: "there are many similarities, but also some differences." The similarities result from the general theory of domination which she adapts (more or less) from Hegel; the differences, from what *appear* to be natural causes, which are then however revealed to be historically and culturally conditioned, and thus reversible, in principle if not (yet) in fact. Analogy doesn't mean one can assume solidarity, much less that the boundaries between oppressed groups are seamless or invisible or "under erasure."

A few pages later Beauvoir *will* make an extended specific analogy between the situation of modern women and the situation of Blacks in the Jim Crow South. Just when the material situation of women seemed to be improving, with the decline of landed property and the entrance of women into the workforce as cheap competition, antifeminists responded to the threat by adding new arguments to their arsenal (see discussion above); “[a]t best, they agreed to grant the *other* sex ‘equality in difference.’ This well-worn slogan is very meaningful: it is exactly the one that Jim Crow laws use with respect to American Blacks; but this so-called ‘separate but equal’ segregation has only served to introduce the most glaring discrimination.”[141] Unlike in the case of the Jews (who the anti-Semite sees as “more an enemy than an inferior”), both Blacks and women are said to have a “character,” for which they are both praised (the “good Black,” the “true Woman”)—but also thereby kept in their place. “In both cases, the ruling caste bases its argument on the state of affairs it created itself,” a “vicious circle” of bad faith. This leads to the familiar point about the verb “to be”:

> bad faith means giving it a substantive value, when in fact it has the sense of the Hegelian dynamic: to be is to have become, to have been made as one manifests oneself. Yes, women in general *are* today inferior to men; that is, their situation provides them with fewer possibilities: the question is whether this state of affairs should be perpetuated.[142]

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[141] “Tout au plus consentait-on à accorder à l’*autre* sexe ‘l’égalité dans la différence.’ Cette formule qui a fait fortune est très significative: c’est exactement celle qu’utilisaient à propos des Noirs d’Amérique les lois Jim Crow; or, cette ségrégation soi-disant égalitaire n’a servi qu’à introduire les plus extrêmes discriminations” (*DS* 1:24).

[142] “Cette rencontre n’a rien d’un hasard: qu’il s’agisse d’une race, d’une caste, d’une classe, d’un sexe réduits à une condition inférieure, les processus de justification sont les mêmes. ‘L’éternel féminin’ c’est l’homologue de ‘l’âme noire’ et du ‘caractère juif.’ Le problème juif est d’ailleurs dans son ensemble très différent des deux autres: le Juif pour l’anti-sémite n’est pas tant un inférieur qu’un ennemi et on ne lui reconnaît en ce monde aucune place qui soit sienne; on souhaite plutôt l’anéantir. Mais il y a de profondes analogies entre la situation des femmes et celle des Noirs: les unes et les autres s’émancipent aujourd’hui d’un même paternalisme et la caste naguère maîtresse veut les maintenir à ‘leur place,’ c’est-à-dire à la place qu’elle a choisie pour eux; dans les deux cas elle se répand en éloges plus ou moins sincères sur les vertus du ‘bon Noir’ à l’âme inconsciente, enfantine, rieuse, du Noir resigné, et de la femme ‘vraiment femme,’ c’est-à-dire frivole, puérile, irresponsable, la femme soumise à l’homme. Dans les deux cas elle tire argument de l’état de fait qu’elle a créé. On connaît le boutade de Bernard Shaw: ‘L’Américain blanc, dit-il, en substance, relègue le Noir au rang des cireur de souliers: et il en conclut qu’il n’est bon qu’à cirer des souliers.’ On retrouve ce cercle vicieux en toutes circonstances analogues: quand un individu ou un groupe d’individus est maintenu en situation d’infériorité, le fait est qu’il *est* inférieur; mais c’est sur la portée du mot *être* qu’il faudrait s’entendre; la mauvaise foi consiste à lui donner une valeur substantielle alors qu’il a le sens dynamique hégélien; être c’est être devenu, c’est avoir été fait tel qu’on se manifeste; oui, les femmes dans l’ensemble *sont* aujourd’hui inférieures aux hommes, c’est-à-dire que leur situation leur ouvre de moindres possibilités: le problème c’est de savoir si cet état de choses doit se perpétuer” (*DS* 1:24–5).

This is not the first time Beauvoir has made the point about Jim Crow. As Doris Ruhe points out, the language about *être* occurs almost identically in *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947*, minus the Hegel, and also (this is my point here) minus the analogy to women.

> But many racists, disregarding scientific precision, stubbornly insist that even if the physiological reasons have not been discovered, the fact is that Blacks are below whites. A trip through America is enough to convince one of this. But what is meant by the verb "to be"? Does it define an unchangeable nature, like that of oxygen? Or does it describe the point in time of a situation that, like every human situation, has come to be?[143]

What this shows, I think, particularly in the context of her "trip through America," is that Beauvoir cared about racial injustice in itself, and first. (And not all the Blacks on that bus were men.)

The analogy between the "separate but equal" claim of Jim Crow racists and the ideologies of "separate spheres" that mask gender oppression isn't the only use Beauvoir makes in *The Second Sex* of what she learned about race in the US. She draws on this also when exposing the hypocrisy of attitudes toward prostitution, toward the beginning of that chapter:

> One of the arguments of American slaveholders and defenders of slavery is that, released from slavish drudgery, Southern whites could establish the most democratic and refined relations with each other; likewise, the existence of a caste of "lost women" makes it possible to treat the "virtuous woman" with the most chivalric respect. The prostitute is a scapegoat…[144]

And again, in the chapter on "Situation et caractère de la femme" (Women's Situation and Character), when explaining why men (again hypocritically) actually *prefer* women to behave stupidly or badly, because it justifies treating them as inferior:

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[143] "Mais beaucoup de racistes, passant outre les rigueurs de la science, s'entêtent à déclarer que même si on n'en a pas établi les raisons physiologiques, le fait est que les noirs *sont* inférieurs aux blancs. Il suffit de traverser l'Amérique pour en être convaincu. Mais que signifie le verbe *être*: définit-il une nature immuable comme celle de l'oxygène? ou décrit-il le moment d'une situation qui *est devenue*, comme toute situation humaine?" (*AJ* 331).

[144] "Un des arguments des esclavagistes américains en faveur de l'esclavage, c'est que les Blancs du Sud étant tous déchargés des besognes serviles pouvaient entretenir entre eux les relations les plus démocratiques, les plus raffinées; de même, l'existence d'une caste de 'filles perdues' permet de traiter 'l'honnête femme' avec le respect le plus chevaleresque. La prostituée est un bouc émissaire" (*DS* 2:429–30).

> In *A Doll's House*, Helmer explains how fair, strong, understanding, and indulgent a man feels when he forgives his weak wife her childish mistakes. So the husbands in Bernstein's novels wax tender—with the complicity of their author—about flighty, naughty, adulterous woman; they measure their own manly wisdom by bending indulgently over her. American racists, French colonizers also want the Black to show himself as a petty thief, a liar, a layabout; in that way he proves his unworthiness. If he persists in being honest and loyal, he is seen as a troublemaker. Women's faults become even more exaggerated, then, because rather than fighting to overcome them, she counts them among her adornments.[145]

Note that French, as well as American, racism is indicted here.

Toward the beginning of the chapter on "L'initiation sexuelle," Beauvoir is explaining the "double standard" that affects how differently men and women experience sex: since going to bed with a man has always been considered a "service" (and remunerated as such), since the woman "gives herself" while the man "takes," no reciprocity is possible. In support of her point, she notes that men's "secondary loves" for their social inferiors have always been socially tolerated, while "the bourgeois woman who gives herself to a chauffeur or a gardener is socially shunned." She illustrates this further by noting the hypocritically different attitude taken to interracial sex in the US, depending on which partner was which:

> The ferociously racist American Southerners have always been allowed by custom to sleep with Black women, before the War between the States and still today, and they make arrogant use of this *droit de seigneur*: a white woman who had relations with a Black man in slavery times would have been put to death; today she would be lynched.[146]

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[145] "Dans *Maison de poupée*, Helmer explique combien l'homme se sent juste, fort, compréhensif, indulgent, quand il pardonne à la faible femme ses fautes puériles. Ainsi les maris de Bernstein s'attendrissent—avec la complicité de l'auteur—sur la femme voleuse, méchante, adultère; ils mesurent, en se penchant sur elle avec indulgence, leur sagesse virile. Les racistes américains, les colons français souhaitent aussi que le Noir se montre chapardeur, paresseux, menteur: il prouve par là son indignité: il met le bon droit du côté des oppresseurs: s'il s'obstine à être honnête, loyal, on le regarde comme une mauvaise tête. Les défauts de la femme s'exagèrent donc d'autant plus qu'elle n'essaiera pas de les combattre mais qu'au contraire elle s'en fera une parure" (*DS* 2:507).

[146] "Rien n'interdit au mâle de maîtriser, de prendre des créatures inférieures: les amours ancillaires ont toujours été tolérées, tandis que la bourgeoise qui se livre à un chauffeur, à un jardinier, est socialement dégradée. Les Américains du Sud si farouchement racistes

This seems to go beyond analogy, and make a very intersectional point, in that the story cannot be understood without grasping both sets of oppression at the same time. And overall, it might seem fairer to complain that Beauvoir had blithely "appropriated" Wright's story as an analogy for her "first world problems" if she had never done or said anything *else* to support people of color, or to show that she fully understood the stories she was using *in themselves.* Which is far from true.

5 Imaginary Dialogues: Anna Julia Cooper, Other Black Women Writers

But I am getting ahead of myself. Going back to her first move, the elaboration of a general theory of domination whose explanatory scope embraced all the Others, Beauvoir's idiom is Hegelian where Cooper's was Christian, but the underlying structure of the reasoning seems very similar. Oppression *of anyone* is wrong; that affirmation precedes, and undergirds, all other protest on behalf of any group; what is needed is a view of a world beyond that, of values alternative to that. The choice of Hegel may not seem obvious to us today, but Cooper's choice of the Bible is hardly more so. *Both* require fairly selective reading of the source, in fact require the kind of contortions of which Lugones speaks.

That Beauvoir ever heard the name of Anna Julia Cooper seems unlikely to me. The mention of the Sorbonne makes an excellent point: just because we tend to study different authors in different courses (or different departments), we shouldn't forget that they inhabited the same world at the same time. (Susan Buck-Morss: "Disciplinary boundaries allow counterevidence to belong to someone else's story.)"[147] But in 1925, the year of Cooper's brief transit through Paris to defend her thesis, Beauvoir was a high school student, mooning over her cousin Jacques, wondering whether her intellectual ambitions could be reconciled with marriage, working her way out from under the stifling Catholic ontology of her early teachers, discovering the emptiness of Lady Bountiful service work by participating in the Équipes sociales, and beginning to formulate her own views. The regally dignified sixty-year-old Cooper could conceivably have passed her on the street, on the way to courageously defend the PhD that vindicated the honor of her race as well as demonstrating her own intellectual eminence; but Cooper was only in Paris for a few weeks, weeks of leave

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ont toujours été autorisés par les mœurs à coucher avec des femmes noires, avant la Guerre de Sécession comme aujourd'hui, et ils usent de ce droit avec une arrogance seigneuriale: une Blanche qui aurait eu un commerce avec un Noir au temps de l'esclavage aurait été mise à mort, elle serait lynchée aujourd'hui" (*DS* 2:150–51).

[147] Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, 22.

from her teaching job that she'd had to fight for. This was the culmination of a life's work for Cooper. Beauvoir's intellectual life was just beginning.

And once Beauvoir did begin her own studies of philosophy at the Sorbonne, did any memory of Cooper's triumph persist there? One can't be sure. But Vivian May says Cooper's major advisor, Célestin Bouglé, did not fully share Cooper's views, and in fact one of Cooper's strongest anti-racist essays takes off from a criticism of something he wrote. Would he have championed her work after he became the head of the École Normale Supérieure? Beauvoir's main philosophy teacher, Léon Brunschvicg, did not even approve of Hegel; would he have suggested this interdisciplinary, not to mention intercultural, stretch of mind? Race was certainly not a topic on the exam for the *agrégation*.... Judging from Vivian May's summary, Cooper's arguments in her PhD thesis are indeed brilliant: the "highlight[ing of] Europe's economic reliance on human exploitation," the emphasis on the agency of slaves and free Blacks of color and on the tension between French universalist claims and the brutality of actual colonial practices, the careful sifting of available documentation, reading much against the grain and reading silences.[148] If Beauvoir had somehow read the thesis, she would have found fuel for her argument that people of color had risen to consciousness and taken their liberation into their own hands, "as the Blacks of Haiti have proved," and much else in line with what Beauvoir herself would say later, in the period of her anti-colonial activism, when her interlocutors were Césaire and Fanon. But as far as I can tell from excerpts, Cooper's Sorbonne thesis does not foreground Black *women's* experience. Certainly none of the summaries I have seen mention that. And surely this was the right choice: *one thing at a time*.[149]

However, if in 1948 Beauvoir had somehow chanced upon a copy of Cooper's major work, *A Voice from the South*, in the Bibliothèque nationale, it would probably not have struck her as helpful to include for other reasons: because its language and its underlying assumptions are so thoroughly Christian, and because Cooper's argument is rooted in the difference, and superiority, of women's perspective, due in part to women's exclusion from public life. As the introduction to the excerpt in *Words of Fire* summarizes, "*A Voice from the South* espouses a cultural feminist position which posits that women, because of their inherent moral superiority, have the responsibility and capacity to reform the human race."[150] Feminist readers today, especially if they know their US history, may be tolerant of a passage like the following:

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[148] Vivian S. May, "'It Is Never a Question of the Slaves': Anna Julia Cooper's Challenge to History's Silences in Her 1925 Sorbonne Thesis."

[149] As people are always telling me.

> There is to my mind no grander and surer prophecy of the new era and of women's place in it, than the work already begun … by the WCTU [Women's Christian Temperance Union] in America, an organization which…. seems destined to permeate and purify the whole civilized world. It is the living embodiment of woman's activities and woman's ideas, and its extent and strength rightly prefigure her increasing power as a moral factor.[151]

Whether or not we are Christians or teetotallers ourselves, we can recognize this as a strong and meaningful part of feminist tradition, a prime example of Cora Kaplan's point about Mary Wollstonecraft. But to have expected Beauvoir (who did not even realize yet that she was writing something called feminist theory) to have grasped that point seems to require an unreasonable, or at least an implausible, stretch.[152] In Cooper's "Equality of Races and the Democratic Movement" (1925), a powerful response to Bouglé and other racists who proclaim human rights but would deny them to the colonized, I find the following: "Surely we are intelligent enough to ride in common buses without flying into one another's arms for a mongrel progeny. Why not preach self-control and practice the principles of the Christian religion?"[153] Cooper's justly famous text is an extremely powerful sermon, but a sermon is what it is. Beauvoir's indictment of the identical scandal in *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947* would be no less scathing, and no less rooted in the gut assumption that all human races are one; but her humanism would be ruthlessly secular.

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[150] Beverly Guy-Sheftall, ed., *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, 43.

[151] Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South*, 44. See also Karen A. Johnson, "Gender and Race: Exploring Anna Julia Cooper's Thoughts For Socially Just Educational Opportunities," for an account of Cooper's views on the complementarity-in-difference of masculine and feminine, which Johnson sees as rooted in the language of Romantic and Transcendentalist writers about the organic oneness of Nature's unfolding. Again, Beauvoir would not have found this language congenial.

[152] Beauvoir specifically denounces the attempt of both American and French women to ban alcohol (as well as prostitution and pornography): "they are always forming coalitions against something … they do not understand that a purely negative effort is doomed to be unsuccessful…. As long as woman remains a parasite, she cannot effectively participate in the building of a better world." [Toujours elles se coalisent contre quelque chose: contre l'alcool, la prostitution, la pornographie: elles ne comprennent pas qu'un effort purement négatif est voué à l'insuccès, comme l'a prouvé en Amérique l'échec de la prohibition, en France celui de la loi qu'a fait voter Marthe Richard. Tant que la femme demeure une parasite, elle ne peut pas efficacement participer à l'élaboration d'un monde meilleur (*DS* 2:480).] See also her attacks on the opportunism of "Christian feminism" (*DS* 1:211) and on the effect of religious "mystifications" on women's "Situation and Character" (*DS* 2:514–17).

Alongside its scorn for masculinist ideas of the "eternal feminine" and the "real Woman," *The Second Sex* takes a clear position against feminist arguments that are rooted in the specialness and superiority of Woman.[154] Beauvoir's dislike of arguments based on the supposed moral magic of feminine influence permeates the chapters on the society woman and the mystic. I think she had had her fill of this kind of gush from the nuns growing up; her distaste for such arguments would also inform her aversion to the resuscitation of a woolly mystique of difference by Cixous and Kristeva in the 1970s.[155]

In a way, the distinction Beauvoir describes between those oppressed groups that resist their oppression (American Blacks, proletarians, the Indochinese) and women, who mostly fail to resist, makes the opposite point to Cooper's. Women are not morally superior, they are (or at least can be) worse, since failure to resist, complicity with one's oppression, is at least sometimes (though not always) a moral failure.

> Whenever transcendence falls back into immanence, there is a degradation from existence to the "in-itself," from freedom to facticity; this fall is a moral fault if the subject consents to it; if it is inflicted on him, it takes the form of frustration and oppression: *in both cases it is an absolute evil* [emphasis added].[156]

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[153] *Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 295–96.

[154] "We will not let ourselves be intimidated by the number and violence of the attacks directed against women; nor can we be got round by the self-interested praise awarded to 'the Real Woman,' or touched by the enthusiasm which her destiny arouses on the part of men who would not share it for anything in the world."

[Nous ne nous laisserons donc pas intimider par le nombre et la violence des attaques dirigées contre les femmes; ni circonvenir par les éloges intéressés qui sont décernés à la "vraie femme"; ni gagner par l'enthousiasme que suscite sa destinée chez des hommes qui ne voudraient pour rien au monde la partager (*DS* 1:28–9).]

[155] Claims that Beauvoir "anticipated" some of those later ideas, such as Hélène Cixous's utopian call for an "écriture féminine" that would "write the body," ignore Beauvoir's explicit and lucid rejection of that strand of feminism in favor of a more materialist, more activist approach. See Altman, "Beauvoir as Literary Writer."

[156] "Chaque fois que la transcendance retombe en immanence il y a dégradation de l'existence en 'en soi,' de la liberté en facticité; cette chute est une faute morale si elle est consentie par le sujet; si elle lui est infligée, elle prend la figure d'une frustration et d'une oppression; *elle est dans les deux cas un mal absolu*" (*DS* 1:31, emphasis added).

Beauvoir makes the distinction between women whose oppressed condition makes resistance impossible, and women whose position of privilege means they could resist, but also explains why they don't resist: they have too much to lose. *Either way*, she says, it is an absolute evil; but throughout *The Second Sex* she reserves her sympathy for the former, and treats the latter with scorn.

So despite their shared political goals, Beauvoir's strong intellectual commitments would have left little room for uptake of Anna Julia Cooper, whose commitments were very different. However, if one broadens one's lens beyond philosophy, Beauvoir is not really "off the hook" for her failure to quote and cite Black women, because within American literature there was by 1948 a pretty decent canon of Black women writing about Black women's lives, of which she seems to have remained unaware. (If Gines had not been so concerned to establish Cooper's rightful place *as a philosopher*, within the genealogy of that tradition, she could have made a much more damning riposte.)

Actually, the person who may not be off the hook here could be Richard Wright. A year before his *Native Son* became a bestseller, another novel, Ann Petry's *The Street* (1946), had provided an absolutely intersectional and completely gripping account of how racism, sexism, and poverty twine an unrelenting noose around a talented young woman trapped in Harlem. Petry's stunningly claustrophobic account of the way the lustful eyes of her apartment building's superintendent turn Lutie into a soiled, trapped, lifeless *thing* would fit seamlessly into Beauvoir's account of the male Look, and she could have drawn on the account of Lutie's young white employer to fill out her picture of the shallow, idle society woman. Or: the ending of Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* (1928) is as good an example as any I know of the deadening immanent drudgery of a life condemned to childbearing and housework. The unreasonable constrictions on a young girl's sexuality imposed by a Christian regime fearful of sex, and the criticisms of arranged marriage, could have been illustrated from Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). Along with Nelson Algren, Wright was Beauvoir's main source for books from the US at this period; given his vitriolic exchanges with Hurston, and his view of Harlem Renaissance writers like Larsen as dated, it may be unsurprising that these books weren't on his syllabus for her, but it's a shame.[157]

What this rather strange thought experiment is not finding, however, is an example that would have required Beauvoir *to alter her argument*. Wright famously detested Hurston's eye-rhymes, but suppose he, and then Beauvoir, had gotten past them to read "Janie's first dream was dead, so she became a woman"[158]—would adding this have changed Beauvoir's account of female adolescence as a work of mourning? Well, maybe it would. (That I haven't found an example doesn't mean that there aren't any.) But perhaps this counterfactual exercise might suggest areas of experiential overlap, and overlapping concern, that explain why a reader like Lorraine Hansberry did not have trouble reading herself into Beauvoir's pages and appreciating her analysis.

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[157] See Wright, "Between Laughter and Tears," 22–3: "Miss Hurston can write, but her prose is cloaked in that facile sensuality that has dogged Negro expression since the days of Phillis Wheatley … [she] *voluntarily* continues in her novel the tradition which was *forced* upon the Negro in the theatre, that is, the minstrel technique that makes the white folks laugh."

To sum up: on the level of the politics of citation, Gines is right. And that's not unimportant. But there is more to "standpoint" than the politics of citation. As I've said about the question of influence and priorities with respect to Beauvoir and Sartre, if an idea is a good one, more than one person will have it. Surely our main concern should be with the value of the idea itself. For that matter, the question of "standpoint" does not exhaust the question of intersectionality, which requires us to account for people who are simultaneously oppressed in one way, oppressors in another, like the Southern white women described by Beauvoir (and described much better by Gwendolyn Brooks's poem about Emmett Till, "A Bronzeville Mother Loiters in Mississippi. Meanwhile a Mississippi Mother Burns Bacon"). And yet the idea of "standpoint" is one without which we cannot do *anything* political, it seems to me: there needs to be someone *there* to say, you are describing me/us in such a way that I/we do not recognize ourselves, there needs to be a *place from which* to say this. A view faithful to Beauvoir's idea of "situation" might suggest that "standpoint" can be morally authentic and yet can, maybe must, *keep moving*: different people will "assume" the situation, or take it up, in different ways at various times.

6 Spelman in Time: What Got Lost, and What Was Needed

But since I am also partly doing reception history here, I want to return to the 1980s and "think with" Elizabeth Spelman a bit more deeply than is now typical. Because if the people who say "Beauvoir didn't say anything about race and class" are relying on Spelman for that view, they have not been very careful readers of *Inessential Woman*, either. Spelman's argument was not that Beauvoir had nothing to say about race and class; it's that what Beauvoir actually says about race and class (which Spelman notes, agrees with, and thinks is good) *doesn't matter*, because there's something else she should have said that she didn't say.

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[158] Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 25.

Spelman notes the power of Beauvoir's explanations that, at many historical points, women have experienced oppression differently due to differences of class and situation (and place, and time) and have failed to show solidarity with other women, or have even been oppressive to other women by identifying more directly with the men of their own race and/or class, because it is to their pragmatic advantage to do so. But the fact that Beauvoir actually wrote quite a lot about people of color and poor women in *The Second Sex* and elsewhere, and that she explicitly took on and took apart class privilege and race privilege, gets less weight in Spelman's assessment than the fact that she sometimes talks about "women" without mentioning color or class, the default assumption being (Spelman thinks) that the "women" she is talking about are white and middle-class. The problem as Spelman sees it is that Beauvoir does not *specify* this at every turn.

> De Beauvoir explicitly recognized that we live in a world in which there are a number of forms of oppression, and she tried to locate sexism in that context.… I think that in de Beauvoir's work, we have all the essential ingredients of a feminist account of "women's lives" that would not conflate "woman" with a small group of women—namely, white middle-class heterosexual Christian women in Western countries. Yet de Beauvoir ends up producing an account which does just that.[159]

Beauvoir fails to "embrace the implications of her own views," "does not heed her own insights," "sabotages her own insights" by comparing women to other groups as if those other groups were not themselves half women, and so "fails to pay attention to her own significant insights."[160]

Spelman argues that (A) by claiming that sexism only obtains where men and women are of the same class, or where racism and classism are absent (B) "she herself leads us to the conclusion that the sexism she is concerned with in *The Second Sex* is that experienced by white middle-class women in Western countries."[161] There are three problems here.

—First, Beauvoir does not make the *general* claim given in (A). Spelman's citation leads to the middle of a long paragraph in the chapter on "L'amoureuse" (The Woman in Love), where Beauvoir is describing the fantasy of an adolescent girl about the man she vaguely hopes will eventually seduce her:

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[159] Spelman, *Inessential Woman*, 58.

[160] Ibid., 62–6.

[161] Ibid., 66.

> As we've seen, the adolescent girl begins by wanting to identify with males; when she gives this up she tries to participate in their virility by making one of them love her; it is not the individuality of one man or another that seduces her, she falls in love with man in general.… Of course, the man must belong to the same class and the same race as her own: the privilege of sex works only within this framework; for him to be a demi-god, he must obviously be a human being first; for the daughter of a colonial officer, the native is not a man; if the young girl gives herself to an 'inferior,' she is trying to degrade herself because she does not think she is worthy of love. Normally, she looks for the man who represents male superiority.[162]

This strikes me as a plausible phenomenological account of the influence of racism on the sexual imaginary of a young white girl in a colonial culture, and could be taken as a sign of Beauvoir's steady attention to intersections of race and sexuality; others may find the account less plausible, but the context hardly seems to support taking it as a general claim about "sexism" on Beauvoir's part. (This is the only example Spelman gives, and I do not know any other place in *The Second Sex* where Beauvoir says anything that bears directly on this claim of Spelman's, in any way. I cannot help seeing in this another instance of the unfortunate habit of decontextualized reading cultivated by an education in American analytic philosophy.)[163]

—Second, it is not obvious how (A) leads logically to (B): I can imagine a writer who might claim A and still go on to discuss the sexism of Black men toward Black women *as well as* the sexism of white men toward white women, but separately. That would be a strange thing to do, but I've seen stranger …

—And actually, third, does it really make sense to use the term "sexism" in summarizing Beauvoir's view, since she never uses the term, and it was not available to her (or to anyone else) in 1948?

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[162] "On a vu que l'adolescente commence par vouloir s'identifier aux mâles; quand elle y renonce elle cherche alors à participer à leur virilité en se faisant aimer par l'un d'eux; ce n'est pas l'individualité de cet homme-ci ou de celui-là qui la séduit; elle est amoureuse de l'homme en général.… Il faut, bien entendu, que le mâle appartienne à la même classe, à la même race que la sienne: le privilège du sexe ne joue que dans ce cadre; pour qu'il soit un demi-dieu, il doit évidemment être d'abord un être humain; pour la fille de l'officier colonial, l'indigène n'est pas un homme; si la jeune fille se donne à un "inférieur," c'est qu'elle cherche à se dégrader parce qu'elle ne se croit pas digne de l'amour. Normalement, elle recherche l'homme en qui s'affirme la supériorité mâle" (*DS* 2:548).

[163] See Chapter 2.

For Spelman, none of Beauvoir's actual real world examples of the contradictions of gender, race, and class, none of her demonstration that she understood the paradoxical workings of power and oppression, none of this *matters*: what matters is that she does not theorize race and gender *as abstractions* in a particular correct way.[164] "I bring up these comparisons not in order to assess their historical accuracy…."[165] "The point … is to see where white middle-class privilege has to lodge in order to make itself resistant to observations and theoretical perspectives that tell against it."[166] Spelman also dismisses what Beauvoir herself had to say about privilege, a problem of which Beauvoir was well aware, as Sonia Kruks has pointed out.[167]

At this point, I start to ask myself who, in fact, is putting race (and class) "under erasure." Spelman refers to a "truism: that the nineteenth- and twentieth-century women's movements in England, Europe, and the United States were founded and maintained by white middle-class women."[168] This is indeed a truism, but it wasn't true, as Kathryn Gines, Beverly Guy-Sheftall, Paula Giddings, Annelise Orleck, and many others have shown.[169] It became a truism in part because the movement forgot about, or didn't count, women's labor movement activism and Black women's organizing on behalf of their own communities. (There's a long list of Black feminist precursors in *Some of Us Were Brave*, which is out of print….) Something similar happens in many overview histories of the so-called Second Wave; the women of color whose writing *did* appear in the 1970s anthologies are dismissed as "tokens," which isn't wrong exactly; but if we just read those overview summaries, we could forget that those women of color were even there. As Linda Garber remarked in *Identity Poetics*, scholars who are over-invested in the idea of distinct "waves" tend to forget that Audre Lorde belongs to the same generation as Adrienne Rich.[170] I am starting to ask myself whether white women beating their breasts (or beating other white women over the head) about the fact that "feminist history" is really "white feminist history," is helping to solve the problem of "exclusion," or helping to perpetuate it.

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[164] And indeed she didn't, couldn't have, since our abstract coinage of "gender" had not yet entered the theoretical lexicon. But my point is that while *The Second Sex* did not *do* what Spelman wishes it had done, it didn't prevent or preclude it, either.

[165] Spelman, *Inessential Woman*, 65.

[166] Ibid., 75.

[167] Sonia Kruks, "Simone de Beauvoir and the Politics of Privilege." Kruks cautions that well-meaning American attempts to explore and unpack "white privilege" risk becoming purely individualist "care of the self" or navel-gazing, or alternatively can lead to guilty self-silencing which is not productive. Kruks writes, "the project of overcoming one's privilege through a politics of self-transformation presupposes … a conception of the self as more autonomous than is plausible" (184). And Kruks sees Beauvoir's movement toward both feminist commitments, and commitments (which were serious and sincere) to the anti-colonialist struggle, as moving in the better direction of recognizing one's own privilege and using it as a positive force. These are ideas we might certainly debate. But the unfortunate effect of Spelman's book was that people felt free, or even smug and up-to-date, in dismissing (and not reading) Beauvoir, and thus did not have access to her insights on these and many other matters.

[168] Spelman, *Inessential Woman*, 202n9.

[169] See Guy-Sheftall, *Words of Fire*, and Annelise Orleck, *Rethinking American Women's Activism*.

Sometimes I think that by repeating (to ourselves and our students) that "we" have forgotten Black women, we simply re-forget them. It is striking how often one does stumble upon evidence of the alliances and intersectionalities that were supposedly impossible in the 1970s. For instance, I happened upon a 1971 article by Phyllis Chesler, "Women as Psychiatric and Psychotherapeutic Patients." Citing Foucault as her inspiration, Chesler surveys the situation with facts and figures and charts, followed by an analysis which concludes that both white and Black women are oppressed by the institutions of American psychology and psychiatry, but in different and somewhat paradoxical ways. Or: parts of Ntozake Shange's "For Colored Girls," which had a successful Broadway run in 1977, were first workshopped in a women's studies program. Kathie Sarachild's instructions for consciousness raising, which Robin Morgan includes in the introduction to *Sisterhood is Powerful*, include a step for examining "whatever privilege we have." (Of course this last example cuts both ways: if that approach really had any traction, surely it would have worked by now?)[171]

Either way, it seems to me a highly curious reading strategy to set aside what a writer actually said about a question, because she did not say precisely what (thirty years on) that question seemed to require. The title of Spelman's chapter, "Just Who Does She Think *We* Is?" suggests how completely she read *The Second Sex* through the veil of 1980s American intrafeminist debates. Beauvoir did not think *anything* about the question of who "we" refers to; one of her key points, in the Introduction and throughout, is precisely that, unlike

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170 Linda Garber, *Identity Poetics: Race, Class, and the Lesbian-Feminist Roots of Queer Theory.* "Contemporary theory adores a vacuum.... I want to resist, kicking and screaming, the Oedipal story of generational overthrow—the baby with the bath water—that is the heart and twisted soul of the academic conference circuit and the dissertation proposal process" (2, 5).

171 Phyllis Chesler, "Women as Psychiatric and Therapeutic Patients"; Ntozake Shange, "a history: for colored girls who have considered suicide/ when the rainbow is enuf," 7–8 and 10; Robin Morgan, "Introduction," *Sisterhood is Powerful*, xxvii. See also Brian Norman, "The Consciousness-Raising Document: Feminist Anthologies and Black Women in *Sisterhood is Powerful.*"

groups that have achieved consciousness of the need to fight oppression on the basis of class, race, or resistance to colonization, "women do not say 'we.'" And, while Beauvoir's conclusion does assert clearly that the liberation of women will have to be collective,[172] she speaks of women throughout as "they," not "we,"—and for that matter, of "la femme" as "she" and not "I." Toril Moi has made the point that Beauvoir's questions simply were not "ours": for her, identity would be an outcome of liberation, not a precondition, for the good existentialist reason that existence precedes essence.[173] So it seems quite odd to criticize Beauvoir for speaking of different *identities* as discrete when she was not talking about "identities," or identity, to begin with. (Who Did "We" Think *She* Was?) In her own introduction Spelman says, "I have come to think even of the phrase 'as a woman' as the Trojan horse of feminist ethnocentrism."[174] Whether one agrees with this or not, one can note that "As a woman, I" is a phrase Beauvoir does not use in *The Second Sex*, and that her assertion that "every human being is always *singularly* situated"[175] also avoids the *next* set of booby traps: a simple proliferation of identity *categories* ("as a Black/ Jewish/disabled/lesbian/woman comma I") would not get us closer to a non-deterministic idea of how subjectivity can ground activist projects. I suspect Spelman actually knew this. The last sentence of her book reads, "there are no short cuts through women's lives."[176]

Decades later Beauvoir *would* use the word "we," but (as she emphasized to Alice Schwarzer in 1982) she meant "we feminists" and not "we women."[177] She also tended to mention that her experience "as a woman" was not everyone's. For instance, in talking with John Gerassi in that interview on the occasion of the book's twentieth anniversary:

> In writing *The Second Sex* I became aware, for the first time, that I myself was leading a false life, or rather, that I was profiting from this male-oriented society without even knowing it.… I had the luck to come from a sector of society, the bourgeoisie, which could afford not only to send me to the best schools but also to allow me to play leisurely with ideas.…

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[172] "This liberation can only be collective, and it will require above all that the economic evolution of woman's condition be accomplished." [Cette libération ne saurait être que collective, et elle exige avant tout que s'achève l'évolution économique de la condition féminine (*DS* 2:522).]

[173] Moi, *What is a Woman?*, viii.

[174] Spelman, *Inessential Woman*, x.

[175] See above for Patricia Moynagh's analysis of this passage.

[176] Spelman, *Inessential Woman*, 187.

[177] Schwarzer, *Simone de Beauvoir Today*, 117–18.

> It became, therefore, very easy for me to forget that a secretary could in no way enjoy the same privileges.... I tended to scorn the kind of woman who felt incapable, financially or spiritually, to show her independence from men.... Through *The Second Sex* I became aware of the struggle needed. I understood that the vast majority of women simply did not have the choices that I had had, that women are, in fact, defined and treated as a second sex by a male-oriented society whose structure would totally collapse if that orientation was genuinely destroyed.[178]

In other words, Beauvoir's own feminist consciousness would have been inconceivable without class consciousness, without coming to an awareness of her own "specialness" analogous to the burning sensation of her own white skin she felt in the American South.

And finally, Spelman's complaints about the amount of space *The Second Sex* gives to the lives of bourgeois women ignore how relentlessly negative Beauvoir is about them, and how she attributes both their stifling existences *and their bad behavior* to their class situation. I've discussed some of this in Chapter 1 above; examples might be multiplied. The section called "La vie de société" which Parshley unhelpfully translated as "social life," obscuring the fact that it deals exclusively with women of *high* society, is a veritable patchwork of evidence for the bad faith of the upper-class "parasite." Here's one example where cross-class relations are represented:

> The mistress of a household has a more intimate relationship with her maid than a man—unless he is homosexual—has with his valet or chauffeur; they tell each other secrets, and sometimes they are accomplices; but there is also a hostile rivalry between them, because while freeing herself from carrying out the work, the mistress of the house wants to take responsibility and credit; she wants to think of herself as irreplaceable,

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[178] Beauvoir continues: "But like economically and politically dominated peoples anywhere, it is very hard and very slow for rebellion to develop. First, such peoples have to become aware of their domination. Then they have to believe in their own strength to change it. Those who profit from their 'collaboration' have to understand the nature of their betrayal. And finally, those who have the most to lose from taking a stand, that is, women like me who have carved out a successful sinecure or career, have to be willing to risk insecurity—be it merely ridicule—in order to gain self-respect. And they have to understand that those of their sisters who are most exploited will be the last to join them. A worker's wife, for example, is least free to join the movement. She knows that her husband is more exploited than most feminist leaders and that he depends on her role as the housewife-mother to survive himself" ("Interview with John Gerassi," 79–80). This builds on what she said in *The Second Sex* (see above) but does not really change her position.

> indispensable. "As soon as I'm not there, everything goes wrong." She tries grimly to put the maid in the wrong; if she does her job too well, the mistress could no longer feel proudly unique.[179]

Two other chapters which deal in very negative terms with the bad faith of women who are complicit with the bourgeois patriarchy that traps them—the portraits of "La narcissiste" and "La mystique"—indeed contain no reference to working-class women, and Beauvoir's theory predicts why this would be so.

At the end of "Situation et caractère de la femme," Beauvoir turns briefly to the virtues that are the positive side of the coin of women's characteristic faults: sensitivity, refinement, care, spontaneity, generosity, a sense of irony, and a version of authenticity.

> But she will only have these advantages over her husband if she rejects the mystifications he offers her. In the upper classes, women are willing accomplices to their masters because they stand to profit from the benefits they are guaranteed. We have seen that women of the high bourgeoisie and aristocracy have always defended their class interests more stubbornly than their husbands do: they do not hesitate to radically sacrifice their autonomy as human beings.... Their vain arrogance, their radical incapability, their stubborn ignorance, turn them into the most useless beings, the most idiotic that the human species has ever produced.
>
> *It is thus as absurd to speak of "the woman" in general as of "the eternal man."* And we can see why all comparisons where we try to decide if the woman is superior, inferior, or equal to the man are pointless: *their situations are profoundly different* ... [emphasis added].[180]

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[179] "Une maîtresse de maison a avec sa bonne des rapports bien plus intimes qu'un homme—à moins qu'il ne soit pédéraste—n'en a jamais avec son valet de chambre ou son chauffeur; elles échangent des confidences, par moments elles se font complices; mais il y a aussi entre elles une rivalité hostile, car la patronne tout en se déchargeant de l'exécution du travail veut s'en assurer la responsabilité et le mérite; elle veut se penser irremplaçable, indispensable. 'Dès que je ne suis pas là, tout va de travers.' Elle essaie âprement de prendre sa servante en faute; si celle-ci s'acquitte trop bien de ses tâches, l'autre ne peut plus connaître la fierté de se sentir unique." (*DS* 2:414–15).

[180] "Mais elle n'aura sur le mâle ces privilèges qu'à condition de repousser les mystifications qu'il lui propose. Dans les classes supérieures, les femmes se font ardemment complices de leurs maîtres parce qu'elles tiennent à profiter des bénéfices qu'ils leur assurent. On a vu que les grandes bourgeoises, les aristocrates ont toujours défendu leurs intérêts de classe avec plus d'entêtement encore que leur époux: elles n'hésitent pas à leur sacrifier radicalement leur autonomie d'être humain.... Leur vaine arrogance, leur radicale

Since ought implies can, since not all women are equally materially situated or practically equipped to step away from sexist arrangements, a call for purely personal ethical change will only work for those who are the least constrained by material and practical structures. Insofar as Beauvoir *was* particularly addressing her own class, her message to them (us) is that unlike farm wives or factory workers, they (we) really have no excuse. Perhaps her greatest challenge, or her greatest accomplishment, was to make (some) women recognize themselves in the useless hypocrites patriarchy sometimes makes of us.

Spelman's lack of interest in that analysis strikes me as curious, but it is not at all unusual. Many subsequent commentators reference a cutting remark attributed to Judith Okely, that *The Second Sex* provides "a village ethnography, with Paris as the village." Okely actually doesn't quite say this (as an ethnographer herself, she would presumably be unlikely to misuse that term). What she does say is this: "Simone de Beauvoir has in part done an anthropological village study of specific women, but without the anthropological theory and focus. Her village is largely mid-century Paris and the women studied, including herself, are mainly middle-class. There are almost no references to working-class urban women and only rare glimpses of rural, peasant women who still made up the majority of French women at that time."[181]

Now, the time-hallowed empirical methods of philology (otherwise known as, going through a book and noting down examples of a thing, and then summarizing how that thing is dealt with by that author in that book) show Okely's statements to be quite misleading. I think she must have arrived at her view by discounting the literary examples, discounting the examples from the psychological case histories, and discounting most of the discussion in the "Histoire" section, because she continues, "[d]espite this hidden subjectivity, her observations and her recourse to historical, literary and psychoanalytic documentation raise questions beyond the local study." But isn't "Beauvoir" the author of those parts of the book, too, and isn't her use of "documentation"—the fact that whenever she didn't know enough about something, she went to the library and *looked it up*—also part of her "subjectivity"? Okely goes on to say that

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incapacité, leur ignorance butée en font les êtres les plus inutiles, les plus nuls qu'ait jamais produits l'espèce humaine.

Il est donc aussi absurde de parler de 'la femme' en général que de 'l'homme' éternel. Et on comprend pourquoi toutes les comparaisons où l'on s'efforce de décider si la femme est supérieure, inférieure ou égale à l'homme sont oiseuses: leurs situations sont profondément différentes" (*DS* 2:520–21, emphasis added).

[181] Judith Okely, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 71–2. Like Spelman, Okely fails to note that Beauvoir's copious descriptions of middle-class and upper class women are almost unfailingly negative.

"[a] paradoxical strength is in the hidden use of herself as a case study, and it was one to which many of her women readers intuitively responded." This, it turns out, is Okely's real interest; her book tells us a great deal about her own early life and how it was the same or different from Beauvoir's, and also includes anecdotes collected from people Okely knew. I find great value in this sort of writing, but as a scholarly introduction to Beauvoir's thought, it seems oddly limited. One must, of course, set aside large chunks of *The Second Sex* in order to talk well about any of it; what seems strange to me is to then also complain, as Okely and countless others have done, that what's in the bits one has set aside as uninteresting isn't in the book at all.

The question of which of these parts gives us the "real" Beauvoir is still very much with us. Penelope Deutscher is, I think, looking at many of the same passages as Spelman when she writes, though much less harshly, of the "tensions" and "auto-resistances" in Beauvoir's approach. Deutscher acknowledges that Beauvoir's work instantiates a kind of analysis we might call intersectional.

> One way of reading her … is to consider how she foregrounded the multiple means by which men and women are othered. If we return to the early Sartre for the comparison, he depicts an outwardly directed subjectivity temporarily interrupted by the world looking back at it. It is well known that Beauvoir interrupts this with her emphasis on the importance of group objectification and marginalization, the question of who becomes a being-for-others becoming less arbitrary, which she does at the risk of attributing inflexibility to group and individual patterns. But Beauvoir also interrupts this risk, intermittently, with a further reminder. Banal in contemporary feminism, it has been overlooked as an important component of her work: there is no gender without race, no age without gender, no race without class. Once one thinks of a subject in terms of the multiple fields by which it is dislocated by alterity, its apparent consolidation as gendered, raced, or classed is dislodged. This is one of the elements that forms part of the movement in Beauvoir's own work, in which certain positions put forward by her are engaged, answered, or undermined by others.
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> In both *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947* and *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir does refer to race relations and to gender relations as if these were separable. But inevitably, her own material speaks against her.[182]

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[182] Penelope Deutscher, "Vulnerability and Metamorphosis," 72–3.

But, who, in the last two sentences, is "Beauvoir"? How do we know? Who decides where "her material" stops and "Beauvoir" begins? (Again this is a question of method, too large for me to take up here: what counts as evidence for a writer's view, and what has the status of "exception"?)[183]

At many points, Deutscher's criticisms of that first "Beauvoir" echo Spelman's quite closely. Deutscher's own underlying commitments are sufficiently poststructuralist that Beauvoir's failure (in her view) to sustain a single consistent line of argument strikes her as a strength, not a weakness.[184] Beauvoir herself, though, *was* trying to make a consistent argument, though in some of the longer loops of the middle of the book it may take us (and indeed may have taken her) a long time to figure out what that argument is. But she was not arguing with other feminists: there was no institutional context for that. And she also wasn't arguing with other philosophers in an attempt to correct philosophical thinking.[185] Rather, as Michèle Le Dœuff has described the task for feminist philosophy, she was "arguing with a situation [and] a reality as if it were someone's thesis."[186] It is difficult for me to see how, unless feminist philosophy does that, it can hope to have much effect or indeed much purchase on what happens for women (and others) in what we tend to call the real world. (Is anyone really sorry that Angela Davis decided not to put finishing her philosophy dissertation at the top of her to-do list? Or that Alix Kates Shulman found the Columbia philosophy department so rebarbative and dull that she wrote *Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen* instead, and helped found *Ms.* magazine?) And if we are not interested in finding a way to solve actual problems, *why are we doing this*?

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[183] A conscientious student in my literature class asks me, "how many examples from the text do I need to prove a point? Like, maybe three?" How should I have answered her? Is the answer different for literature than for philosophy? Why? Do the social sciences have a clearer answer than the humanities? If so, what can "interdisciplinary feminist methodology" actually mean?

[184] By the same token, it is hard for me to come to grips with Deutscher's own argument, or to be sure what it really is. I understand that Deutscher would not see that as a problem, either—and indeed it may not actually be one. Deutscher's work has the immense merit of fully recognizing that, as Sonia Kruks says, "gender was not Beauvoir's only concern," and of fully engaging and integrating Beauvoir's work on aging, which I regret I've been unable to do in my own work. See Kruks, "Review of Penelope Deutscher, *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Ambiguity, Conversion, Resistance*," 257, and also Kruks, *Simone de Beauvoir and the Politics of Ambiguity*.

Deutscher's point in her earlier work, *Yielding Gender: Feminism, Deconstruction, and the History of Philosophy*, that "[i]nterpretations which ask how Beauvoir's inconsistencies can be explained can contribute to an infantilization of Beauvoir" (170) is a cogent one: it certainly will not do to attribute the parts of *The Second Sex* one disagrees with to the unfortunate influence of Sartre (or Hegel, or someone else) and call the rest of it "Beauvoir." But what if the "operative contradictions," as Deutscher calls them, are not in the book or the theory, but in the (lived) world? Could we not hope for a lucid and linear descriptive account and analysis of a (ridiculously) contradictory set of social and ontological facts?

[185] Deutscher dismisses Beauvoir's attempts toward a mixed methodology that would approach a topic or theme like racism (or what we would call sexism or ageism) as a concrete problem actually existing in the world, using whatever intellectual tools came to hand (*The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir*, 5). In her discussion of *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947*, Deutscher disparages Beauvoir's fall into "the social" (65–70); she also dismisses Beauvoir's literary productions as "popular" but "of mixed quality" (20, 67). It would seem that only properly philosophical arguments are interesting. Perhaps this is so, but I worry that Deutscher's emphasis on "ethics" and "ethical thinking" has the overall effect of

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However there's an excellent reason why Spelman's book struck a chord with so many readers and has had such staying power: the *rest* of it performed a much-needed intervention into feminist discourse in the United States. The chapter on Beauvoir, along with the earlier chapters about Plato and Aristotle, are really only the launching pad for Spelman's genuine contribution. Her next chapter is about the false universals implied in Nancy Chodorow's work: given the influence enjoyed in the 1980s by Chodorow's account of female development, and related work by Carol Gilligan and Dorothy Dinnerstein, it was urgent to answer her, as Adrienne Rich and Carolyn Steedman also did.[187] Spelman's critique is also certainly a sound one when applied to the way American feminists like Betty Friedan and Kate Millett picked up the idealist and individualist parts of Beauvoir's book, leaving out the class analysis, the more materialist strands, and the nuanced understanding of racial histories.[188] One

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depoliticizing the entire discussion, and diminishes Beauvoir's accomplishment by minimizing the purchase of her theses on the world. See also Tina Chanter, "The Trouble we (Feminists) Have Reasoning with Our Mothers."

Finally, I suspect that Deutscher overstates the extent of Beauvoir's commitment to the idea that racism is a white problem, with analogous formulations for women and for old people. Beauvoir provides sufficient phenomenological evidence for the suffering of the oppressed that we understand that while the problem is the oppressor's *fault*, the problems of the oppressed are not imaginary and cannot be analyzed away.

[186] *Hipparchia's Choice*, 30.

[187] Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," and Carolyn Kay Steedman, *Landscape for A Good Woman*.

[188] See also Simons, "Racism and Feminism: A Schism in the Sisterhood." I can't entirely agree with her reading there of Beauvoir (who plays a minor role in the article), but with respect to Kate Millett, Shulamith Firestone, and Mary Daly, hers is a typically powerful and well-reasoned argument that very much needed to be made. See Sandra Dijkstra, "Simone de

hypothesis might be that since the mainstream US uptake of Beauvoir's work did not include the anti-racist or anti-colonialist aspects of her work, and de-emphasized class, the subsequent US critique didn't see it, either, and "Beauvoir" became a stand-in for what US feminists had made of her work.

Most critiques of analogical thinking about race and gender assume that to think analogically means to *subordinate* the other term of the analogy to sex/gender, to see the sex/gender thing as *prior* to others (temporally or analytically) and thus deeper, more basic, more foundational. As I've explained above, I really do not think Beauvoir says this. But Shulamith Firestone, for instance, absolutely does say this in *The Dialectic of Sex* (1971), and formulates it explicitly as an interlocution with Beauvoir, to whom the book is dedicated.

Firestone's opening move certainly has a very different political tone from Beauvoir's introduction. "If there were another word more all-embracing than *revolution* we would use it" is a million miles away from "[f]or a long time I have hesitated…." Yet at many points she does follow the line, and the bite, of Beauvoir's argument quite closely. "Why should a woman give up her precious seat in the cattle car for a bloody struggle she could not hope to win?" is the best gloss on Beauvoir's idea of "complicity" I know.[189] Firestone's view that sexual difference *is* rooted in biology, but that nonetheless it can and must be changed, is generally consonant with Beauvoir's:

> [T]o grant that the sexual imbalance of power is biologically based is not to lose our case. We are no longer just animals. And the kingdom of nature does not reign absolute, as Simone de Beauvoir herself admits … "humanity is not an animal species, it is a historical reality. Human society is an anti-physis."[190]

Firestone's description of childbirth as "like shitting a pumpkin" is certainly in the spirit of Beauvoir's demystification of the myths of maternity.[191] She is not far from Beauvoir, either, in her suspicion of altruism and her contempt for

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Beauvoir and Betty Friedan: The Politics of Omission," for a detailed account of the relationship between *The Second Sex* and "its first illegitimate offspring, *The Feminine Mystique*" (293). "At their anticlimactic meeting in 1975, these two founding mothers of modern feminism … clarified the ideological differences that still separated them. Although the American feminist tried to justify her effort to place a monetary value on housework, the French feminist again sounded a more radical note. Her interest was rather 'to sap this regime, not to play its game'" (301). Chapter 4 will discuss this interchange further.

[189] Firestone, *Dialectic of Sex*, 11.

[190] Ibid., 18.

[191] Ibid., 189.

"the whole spectrum of Organized Ladyhood," and she is hardly less dismissive than Beauvoir of earlier feminisms, both the struggle for suffrage and what we might call "lifestyle" solutions.[192] ("They sat in front of their various easels in tears.")[193]

What interests me most here is how, and why, Firestone rewrites Beauvoir's claims about the relationship between women's oppression and other forms of illegitimate domination.

> The first women are fleeing the massacre, and, shaking and tottering, are beginning to find each other. Their first move is a careful joint observation, to resensitize a fractured consciousness. This is painful: no matter how many levels of consciousness one reaches, the problem always goes deeper. It is everywhere. The division yin and yang pervades all history, all culture, history, economics, nature itself; modern Western versions of sex discrimination are only the most recent layer. *To so heighten one's sensitivity to sexism presents problems far worse than the black militant's new awareness of racism* [emphasis added]: feminists have to question, not just all of *Western* culture [emphasis in original], but the organization of culture itself, and further, the very organization of nature. Many women give up in despair: if *that's* how deep it goes they don't want to know [emphasis in original]. Others continue strengthening and enlarging the movement, their painful sensitivity to female oppression existing for a purpose: eventually to eliminate it.[194]

Beauvoir does not say this. She says the oppression of women is different, structurally different, in that it cannot be traced to a particular historical moment or explained by geography or numbers. But she does not say anywhere it is worse. In fact, using "nous" to refer to lucky women like herself, whose battles have been largely won, she suggests that other oppressions may be more salient at that moment:

> Many women today, having been lucky enough to have seen all the privileges of human beings restored to them, can afford the luxury of impartiality: we feel the need of it, actually. Unlike our older sisters, we are not combatants; for the most part, we have won the game; in the most recent debates on the status of women the United Nations has called urgently

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[192] Ibid., 27.

[193] Ibid., 35.

[194] Ibid., 11–12.

> and repeatedly for the equality of the sexes to be fully accomplished; already many of us have never had to feel that being a woman was a nuisance or an obstacle; *many problems seem more pressing to us than those that affect us in particular* [emphasis added].[195]

Firestone, however, continues:

> Before we can act to change a situation, however, we must know how it has arisen and evolved, and through what institutions it now operates. Engels: "[We must] examine the historical succession of events from which the antagonism has sprung in order to discover in the conditions thus created the means of ending the conflict." For feminist revolution we shall need an analysis of the dynamics of sex war as comprehensive as the Marx-Engels analysis of class antagonism was for the economic revolution. More comprehensive. *For we are dealing with a larger problem, with an oppression that goes back beyond recorded history to the animal kingdom itself* [emphasis added].[196]

Here again Beauvoir does not say this, she does not "rank oppressions," and she does not link origins and solutions in this direct way.[197] Firestone's discussion of the inadequacy of Marx and Engels to explain the oppression of women—"[t]here is a level of reality that does not stem directly from economics"—

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[195] "Beaucoup de femmes d'aujourd'hui, ayant eu la chance de se voir restituer tous les privilèges de l'être humain, peuvent s'offrir le luxe de l'impartialité: nous en éprouvons même le besoin. Nous ne sommes plus comme nos aînées des combattantes; en gros nous avons gagné la partie; dans les dernières discussions sur le statut de la femme, l'ONU n'a cessé de réclamer impérieusement que l'égalité des sexes achève de se réaliser, et déjà nombre d'entre nous n'ont jamais eu à éprouver leur féminité comme une gêne ou un obstacle; beaucoup de problèmes nous paraissent plus essentiels que ceux qui nous concernent singulièrement" (*DS* 1:29).

[196] Firestone, *Dialectic of Sex*, 12. This is the sort of argument parodied in the first paragraph of Gayle Rubin's "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex." For Rubin, the payoff of the joke is that we actually do not need to locate some prehistoric "source" for the oppression of women to understand how the oppression of women *works*, and to fight it—a structuralist insight I think Beauvoir herself had, or almost.

[197] Beauvoir's discussion in a later chapter of the "key to the whole problem" of what Engels called the "world-historical defeat of the female sex" (that men risk life, whereas women merely "give" life) has caused some difficulty in the interpretive tradition, but I have to agree with Michèle Le Dœuff that Beauvoir really doesn't seem to care very much about it. It occurs along the way in her paraphrase of Engels, with whom she is preparing to partly disagree (*DS* 1:113–14; *Hipparchia's Choice*, 117).

tracks fairly well with Beauvoir's demonstration that their account is not adequate if read deterministically to exclude all other factors. Firestone says even more quickly that "the assumption that, beneath economics, reality is psychosexual is often rejected as ahistorical," then lays out her own thesis:

> But there is still an untried third alternative: we can attempt to develop a materialist view of history based on sex itself.[198]

And then she turns directly to "correct" Beauvoir.

> The early feminist theories were to a materialist view of sex what Fourier, Bebel, and Owen were to a materialist view of class. By and large, feminist theory has been as inadequate as were the early feminist attempts to correct sexism. This was to be expected. The problem is so immense that, at first try, only the surface could be skimmed, the most blatant inequalities described. Simone de Beauvoir was the only one who came close to—who perhaps has done—the definitive analysis. Her profound work *The Second Sex*—which appeared as recently as the early fifties to a world convinced that feminism was dead—for the first time attempted to ground feminism in its historical base. Of all feminist theorists De Beauvoir is the most comprehensive and far-reaching, relating feminism to the best ideas in our culture.
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> It may be this virtue is also her one failing: she is almost too sophisticated, too knowledgeable. Where this becomes a weakness—and this is certainly debatable—is in her rigidly existentialist interpretation of feminism (one wonders how much Sartre had to do with this). This, in view of the fact that all cultural systems, including existentialism, are themselves determined by the sex dualism. She says:
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>> Man never thinks himself without thinking of the Other; he views the world under the sign of duality *which is not in the first place sexual in character*. But being different from man, who sets himself up as the Same, it is naturally to the category of the Other that woman is consigned; the Other includes woman. [The italics are Firestone's.]
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> Perhaps she has overshot her mark: Why postulate a fundamental Hegelian concept of Otherness as the final explanation and then carefully document the biological and historical circumstances that have pushed the class "women" into such a category—when one has never seriously considered

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[198] Firestone, *Dialectic of Sex*, 15.

> the much simpler and more likely possibility that this fundamental dualism sprang from the sexual division itself? To posit *a priori* categories of thought and existence—“Otherness,” “Transcendence,” “Immanence”—into which history then falls may not be necessary. Marx and Engels had discovered that these philosophical categories themselves grew out of history.
>
> Before assuming such categories, let us first try to develop an analysis in which biology itself—procreation—is at the origin of the dualism….[199]

Why on earth would anyone “postulate a fundamental Hegelian concept of Otherness as the final explanation”? Well, there is an answer to this, in hindsight: not to do so, not to have some generalized account or explanation of “oppression” under which more specific types of oppression may be analyzed, makes it impossible to account in a full, respectful, accurate way for racism, anti-Semitism, colonialism, the immiseration of working class women and men, and so forth.[200] Firestone’s need to subsume these other issues, of which she was well aware, under the sexual theory, led to some bizarre and embarrassing contortions later in her book, particularly Chapter 5, “Racism: The Sexism of the Family of Man.”

> I shall attempt to show that *racism is a sexual phenomenon*. Like sexism in the individual psyche, we can fully understand racism only in terms of the power hierarchy of the family: in the Biblical sense, the races are no more than the various parents and siblings of the Family of Man; and as in the development of sexual classes, the physiological distinction of race became important culturally only due to the unequal distribution of power. Thus, *racism is sexism extended* [emphasis in original].[201]

What follows is an utterly ahistorical Oedipal myth, which turns Blacks into (you guessed it) the children, and touches reality at no point. Firestone makes use of the writings of Eldridge Cleaver and Bobby Seale as well as other first-person accounts from the radical press to set out “what everyone had known all along: that sex and racism are intricately interwoven,” as seen in “the obvious: that white men have a thing for black women, that black men have a thing for white women, that black men can't respect black women and white men can't get turned on by white women, that white women have a secret sympathy and curiosity about black men, that black women hate and are jealous of white women, and so on."[202] Now, I might be prepared to accept that *some* of this accurately transcribes the subjective experience of *some* people at that particular point in history, even though none of it seems "obvious" to me: it is one reading, though a tendentious one, of the situation Alice Walker fictionalized in her first novel, *Meridian*. But a novel is one thing and a theory is another. To present this while writing schematically as though one took a "view from nowhere"—well, frankly, this has to be read to be believed.

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[199] Ibid., 15–16.

[200] I’ve argued above that Beauvoir’s focus on sexuality, rather than (as Firestone puts it) “procreation,” was an important distinction. And I will not linger here on Firestone’s (utterly unsatisfactory) views of homosexuality.

[201] Firestone, *Dialectic of Sex*, 105.

> Let us now apply our political application of the Electra complex to the psychology of the black woman. If the black man is Son to the American family, then the black woman is Daughter. Her initial sympathy with the white woman (mother), her bond of oppression with her (mother) against the white man (father) is complicated by her later relationship with the white male (father). When she discovers that the white male *owns* that "world of travel and adventure," she, in the subservient position of child, attempts to identify with him, to reject the female in herself. (This may be the cause of the greater aggressiveness of the black woman compared with the docility of her white sisters.) In the effort to reject the womanly (powerless) element in herself, she develops contempt for the Mother (white woman). Like the young girl, she may react to her powerlessness in one of two ways: she may attempt to gain power directly by imitating white men, thus becoming a "big achiever," a woman of strong character who rises high ("especially for a black woman"), or she may attempt to gain power indirectly by seducing the Father (voilà the black sexpot), thus putting herself in sexual competition with the white woman for the Father's favor—causing her to hate and be jealous of the white woman, whom she must now attempt to imitate.[203]

I cannot deny that I prefer the fleeting presence of Black women in Beauvoir's book to the level of arrogant (and ignorant) contempt I read in Firestone's description—which goes on for pages and pages and pages. What is most deeply unsatisfactory here has its source in the decision to make racism simply a subset or offshoot of sexism, to make its causes all psychosexual, as though it had no independent economic and political history. At the very least, this excursus might shed some light on why Beauvoir bothered with Hegel: look at what became of Firestone without him.

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[202] Ibid., 103.
[203] Ibid., 109.

Spelman has a cogent takedown of Firestone, whom she groups with Kate Millett in her chapter on "The Ampersand Problem."[204] But her critique is curiously bloodless. Surely there is more wrong with a statement like "the All-American family is predicated on the existence of the black ghetto whorehouse" than that it muddles the sequence of propositions about how racism and sexism interact.[205] "[T]he racism of white women … perhaps produces an even greater bitterness in black men than the more immediately understandable racism of these women's husbands; for it betokens a betrayal by the Mother."[206] The problem isn't what Firestone leaves out, or renders theoretically incoherent. The problem is what she says, which is not simply an embarrassing gaffe or two, but follows directly from what she proudly claims as her theoretical breakthrough. That feminist theorists are currently attempting to recuperate Firestone without even mentioning any of this, as Stella Sandford does in an otherwise fascinating article, is interesting.[207] Have we become so sophisticated in identifying "the absence of a Black standpoint" that we don't have anything left to say about the kind of racism that stands up and squirts us in the eye?

The analysis of these issues in *The Dialectic of Sex* which Margaret Simons gave in 1979 was typically thorough; she also points to the ethnocentrism of Firestone's concept of the "family of man," and notes that Firestone explicitly departs from Beauvoir in her deployment of analogical reasoning. Simons makes a parallel case about Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics*, which was less careful about signaling its extensive indebtedness to Beauvoir. Simons writes: "Unlike Beauvoir, Millett denies the differences in the situations of minority and white women, dismissing the power and privileges accorded to white women as mere mystifications," quoting Millett as follows: "In a society where status is dependent upon the economic, social, and educational circumstances of class, it is possible for certain females to appear to stand higher than some males. Yet not when one looks more closely at the subject." Beauvoir really does not say this. Throughout the long chapter on history, she shows at length exactly the opposite.[208]

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[204] Spelman, *Inessential Woman*, 118–19.

[205] Firestone, *Dialectic of Sex*, 113.

[206] Ibid., 107.

[207] Stella Sandford, "Sexmat, Revisited." The best recent work on Firestone I know is Elizabeth Subrin's film *Shulie*, which gives her as she was, racism and all: a human being with a singular take on the world.

The question of whether/how to teach *The Dialectic of Sex* in an inclusive classroom, acknowledging its historical importance without giving it more weight than it finally deserves, is a tricky one. The usual solution is to excerpt the parts one likes and keep mum about the rest. Well…

7 Different Legacies: From Audre Lorde to Judith Butler

Perhaps my reader feels I am beating a dead horse here, and perhaps she is right. Certainly the critiques made by Spelman, and those who follow her, are good enough critiques of what happened to Beauvoir's theories once they reached the land of White. But my point is that if you walk back upstream, you find that the problems are not in *The Second Sex* itself, which could (and also did) flow in healthier directions. And I'm building a case against a reading of *The Second Sex* that would throw out the existentialism and "just keep the good parts." I'll put my cards on the table. I think the existentialist parts *are* the good parts. Or at least, they made the good parts possible.

Let me suggest some alternate genealogies. In the articles I discussed earlier, Glass and Gines both adduce Audre Lorde's "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master's House" for succeeding where Beauvoir failed.[209] Gines mentions in a footnote that Lorde actually cites Beauvoir in that essay, which took me back to Lorde's powerful final paragraph.

> Simone de Beauvoir once said: "It is in the knowledge of the genuine conditions of our lives that we must draw our strength to live and our reasons for acting." Racism and homophobia are real conditions of all our lives in this place and time. I urge each one of us here to reach down into that deep place of knowledge inside herself and touch that terror and loathing

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[208] Simons, "Racism and Feminism," 31.

[209] Glass moves on from her discussion of Beauvoir to criticize Hélène Cixous for a similar failure: "While [Cixous] acknowledges that 'there is … no general woman, no one typical woman,' she nonetheless lapses into essentialism via racially charged figurative language. In claiming Africa, for women in general, as the site of danger, darkness, and femininity, she merely reinforces romantic and problematic assumptions about the continent. Thus her appropriation of 'blackness' furthers the goals of women in general [I'd debate this] but has ambivalent implications for black women" ("Calling All Sisters," 226). The critique of Cixous is certainly apt (and then some). But it seems odd to bring these two French writers together without mentioning that the Cixous essay in question ("The Laugh of the Medusa") was a not-so-veiled attack on everything Beauvoir stood for, and also an attack on the materialist faction of the MLF (Christine Delphy and *Questions Féministes*) to whom Beauvoir gave her strong support. Beauvoir was well aware of the dangers of precisely *this* analogy—sexy mysterious Woman, sexy mysterious Africa—as her discussion of Claudel would show.

> of any difference that lives there. See whose face it wears. Then the personal as the political can begin to illuminate all our choices.[210]

To me, it sounds as if Lorde—speaking her bitterness against the organizers of a too-white conference convened in honor of *The Second Sex*[211]—is calling her sisters *back* to Beauvoir, as she calls for a kind of feminist realism, rooted in lived experience.

What also struck me, rereading Lorde's very familiar essay, was how thoroughly imbued it is by a Hegelian/existentialist sense of struggle—e.g., "Difference must be not merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic"—which brings it as close to Sartre, Beauvoir, and Fanon as it is to the work by bell hooks or Kimberley Crenshaw with which we often group it now. Lorde's vision of desiring and nurturing relationships between "women-identified women" is light-years away from anything Beauvoir says about lesbians in *The Second Sex*. Yet here are the words she uses to describe them:

> Interdependency between women is the way to a freedom which allows the I to be, not in order to be used, but in order to be creative. This is a difference between the passive be and the active being.[212]

"C'est sur la portée du mot être qu'il faudrait s'entendre?"[213] "What we make of what they make of us?" When Lorde says that

> [w]ithin the interdependence of mutual (nondominant) differences lies that security which enables us to descend into the chaos of knowledge and return with true visions of our future, along with the concomitant power to effect those changes which can bring that future into being,

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[210] Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," 113.

[211] "*The Second Sex*—Thirty Years Later: A Commemorative Conference on Feminist Theory," September 27–9, 1979, New York Institute for the Humanities.

[212] Lorde, "The Master's Tools," 111.

[213] (*DS* 1:25). "[W]hat we must understand is the range of the verb 'to be': bad faith consists in giving it the value of a static substance, when it has the dynamic Hegelian meaning: to be is to have become, to have been made as one now discloses oneself to be." [mais c'est sur la portée du mot *être* qu'il faudrait s'entendre; la mauvaise foi consiste à lui donner une valeur substantielle alors qu'il a le sens dynamique hégélien: *être* c'est être devenu, c'est avoir été fait tel qu'on se manifeste.] See discussion in Chapter 2 above.

are we not hearing about what Beauvoir called “the mutual recognition of two liberties,” now applied to a personal and political solidarity between women Beauvoir in the 1940s could barely sketch?[214] And when Lorde says that “[o]nly within a patriarchal structure is maternity the only social power open to women,” I hear a critique of the traditional family, and women’s confinement to it, with which Beauvoir would certainly have agreed.[215] The overall key to Lorde’s uptake of existentialism here is a *dynamic* understanding of difference: to paraphrase E. P. Thompson on “class,” difference for Lorde is expressed through relationships; it is not a “thing.”

I’ve referred several times above to Toril Moi’s point that for Beauvoir, identity would be an outcome of liberation, not a precondition, for the good existentialist reason that existence precedes essence. I was reminded of this again when Kathy Glass quoted Angela Davis, from a 1995 interview with Lisa Lowe.[216] Davis is talking there about productive “formations” for political organizing that would not be conceived of as coalitions between already existing identity groups. For example,

> [a] woman of color formation might decide to work around immigration issues. This political commitment is not based on the specific histories of racialized communities or its constituent members, but rather constructs an agenda agreed upon by all who are a part of it. In my opinion, the most exciting potential of women of color formations resides in the possibility of politicizing this identity—*basing the identity on politics rather than the politics on identity* [emphasis added].[217]

Later she says, “I think we should focus on the creation of unpredictable or unlikely coalitions grounded in political *project*s [emphasis added]”;[218] asked about early influences on her political thought, she mentions Sartre alongside Marcuse and Marx.[219] But I’m not making some kind of antiquarian point about sources here; I don't know whether or not Davis ever read *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, where Beauvoir argues for freely chosen projects as the best ethical ground for solidarity. My point is that these were good ideas, and they are still alive. (I hope this genealogy ultimately supports the project of *Convergences* to argue that the study of continental philosophy holds value for the study of race, and vice versa.)

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[214] Ibid., 111.

[215] Ibid., 111.

[216] Angela Davis, “Reflections on Race, Class, and Gender in the USA,” quoted in Glass, “Calling All Sisters,” 232.

[217] Davis, “Reflections on Race, Class, and Gender in the USA,” 318.

[218] Ibid., 322.

[219] “As an undergraduate, my interest in Marxism was further stimulated by professors like Herbert Marcuse. As a French major, I became very interested in the way Marxism was integrated into existentialist philosophy—and by Sartre’s political activism” (ibid., 312). See also Alice Kaplan, *Dreaming in French: The Paris Years of Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy, Susan Sontag, and Angela Davis.*

Returning to Spelman for just one moment: I also want to push back (briefly) against the blanket condemnation of analogy her critique inaugurated. The general condemnation of "analogical thinking" about oppressions suggests that if A is said to be *like* B, it is then impossible to see intersections or overlaps *between* A and B. This may be rigorously true in analytic philosophy for all I know, but it's not a very good account of how analogies and metaphors work. The more usual case (classically described by Paul de Man in *Blindness and Insight*) brings together two things that are *not* alike in a (nonpermanent) moment, to assert a similarity which will clarify and highlight certain truths while necessarily placing others in shadow. This isn't something only poets do (i.e. it's not one more good reason to throw them out of the Republic); it's arguably basic to human thinking, unavoidable even in the most scientific and objective discourses.[220] The honest strategy is to know and admit this, for instance by saying "on the one hand this, on the other hand that" (as I've argued above Beauvoir does), or perhaps in some more elegant way.

Judith Butler may or may not have had Beauvoir in mind when she wrote, in the part of the introduction to *Bodies That Matter* that explains the "trajectory" of her table of contents:

> It seems crucial to resist the model of power that would set up racism and homophobia and misogyny as parallel or analogical relations. The assertion of their abstract or structural equivalence not only misses the specific histories of their construction and elaboration, but also delays the important work of thinking through the ways in which these vectors of power require and deploy each other for the purpose of their own articulation.[221]

This passage is often quoted in support of the urgency of "intersectional" thinking. But on the next page, Butler says:

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[220] See Sheldon Sacks, ed., *On Metaphor*.

[221] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex,"* 17.

> This demand to think contemporary power in its complexity and interarticulations remains incontrovertibly important even in its impossibility. And yet it would be a mistake to impose the same criteria on every cultural product, for it may be precisely the partiality of a text which conditions the radical character of its insights....[222]

Butler's "and yet" occurs as she's moving to introduce sections of her book that engage in close textual analyses of representational narratives, including the documentary *Paris is Burning* and Nella Larsen's novel of the color line, *Passing*. It is almost as if Butler's own decision to attend more concretely to the lived experience of women and queers of color, and her need to answer the challenge often posed to her as the author of *Gender Trouble*—"what about the real, Judy?"—pulled in this direction: a turn from philosophical *agon* toward (if not actually *to*) narrative, and an acknowledgement that to demand that every form of oppression be represented *simultaneously* means that no oppression can be represented intelligibly, in a way that those subjected to the oppression can recognize and then act upon.[223]

Well, maybe. Anyhow, I would submit that the real-world situation cogently described in 1982 by women of color as "[a]ll the women are white, all the Blacks are men" was made possible, not by "analogical thinking," or any other theoretical flaw, but by actually existing racism in the American women's movement. Or, as Barbara Smith put it in that anthology: "Feminism in and of itself would be fine. The problems arise with the mortals who practice it."[224] Policing the texts of the past for lapses from theoretical purity is not going to fix that. Or at least, not on its own.

8 Beauvoir's Other "Others": Nation, Class, Colonialism

There were indeed blind spots in Second Wave American feminist theory which needed criticism; but I'd attribute them, not to Beauvoir's legacy, but to some habits of mind typical of the land of White that *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947* already criticizes. In the same way that white people are reminded to be aware of our own whiteness, it might not be a bad idea for people from the US to study our own US-ness. That's an awkward term, but what I'm talking about doesn't reduce to "Western" (or "Northern"), and it also doesn't reduce to White. One thing we might notice is that when we let "African-American" stand in for difference or inequality more generally, we limit our ability to notice that class, nation, colonialism were also key parts of Beauvoir's frame.

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[222] Ibid., 18.

[223] Ibid., iv-xii. In speaking of "intelligibility" and of the importance of narrative I am following the thread of Butler's later article about David Reimer, "Doing Justice to Someone."

[224] Barbara Smith, "Racism: A White Issue," 51.

Glass is not at all unusual when she boils down Beauvoir's list of other Others, referring to "the insight that 'no group ever sets itself up as the One without at once setting up the Other over against itself'; just as woman 'assume[s] the status of the Other' to man, Jews are 'different' for the anti-Semite, [and] Negroes are 'inferior' for American racists."[225] As I said above, I don't find the decision of Glass and Gines to focus on Beauvoir's discussion of American racism in any way problematic, given the purpose of their work: I want very much *not* to be engaging in "whataboutism" here, or attempting to mitigate the force of one critique because it does not mention all conceivable others. But if we look again at the lists of "others" in the introduction to *The Second Sex*, we can notice that the specific items in Beauvoir's "checklist" do not reduce to the abstract trilogy of "gender, race, and class" (or "race, class, and gender") that became a litany in the 1980s and 1990s.

> For the village-dweller, all those not from his village are suspicious outsiders; for the native of a country, those who live in countries not his own seem like foreigners; Jews are "the others" for the anti-semite, Blacks for American racists, indigenous peoples for the colonizers, proletarians for the property-owning class.[226]
>
> A situation which came about in time can be undone in another time: the Blacks of Haiti among others have proved this very well.[227]
>
> The proletarians made the revolution in Russia, the Blacks in Haiti, the Indochinese are fighting in Indochina….[228]

What tends to drop most completely out of our sight, when we paraphrase these lists, is the struggle between "l'indigène" and "le colon."

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[225] Glass, "Calling All Sisters," 227.

[226] "Pour le villageois, tous les gens qui n'appartiennent pas à son village sont des 'autres' suspects; pour le natif d'un pays, les habitants des pays qui ne sont pas le sien apparaissent comme des 'étrangers'; les Juifs sont 'des autres' pour l'antisémite, les Noirs pour les racistes américains, les indigènes pour les colons, les prolétaires pour les classes possédantes" (*DS* 1:16).

[227] "Une situation qui s'est créée à travers le temps peut se défaire en un autre temps: les Noirs d'Haïti entre autres l'ont bien prouvé" (*DS* 1:18).

[228] "Les prolétaires ont fait la révolution en Russie, les Noirs à Haïti, les Indochinois se battent en Indochine" (*DS* 1:19).

Does that matter? After all, most of the colonized are Black (or "yellow"), and that is hardly a coincidence. But it does matter, because "le colon" and "l'indigène" are positions in a particular system with a particular history, not identities or attributes like "le Noir" or "une Française." Nor is "l'indigène" reducible to "le prolétaire": Beauvoir had made this point explicitly in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*,[229] and the behavior of the French proletariat (and its elected representatives) during the Algerian crisis would prove her correct. And note the present tense of the last example I quoted above: the Indochinese *are fighting*. I want to suggest that we think of these comparisons, not as static entities which may be similar or dissimilar, but as points of connection to political reality that anchor the argument in place and time. Her "Indochinese" of 1948 are hardly the "Indochinese" of 1968, much less the "Indochinese" of today, if that term even makes sense now. What happens with "the Jew" is also interesting. In the immediate post-war period, readers probably saw more easily that when she (and Sartre) talked about "le Juif" they were responding to a particular twentieth-century human state of affairs, in a situation where simply being a Jew in *any* sense of the word "être" could get you killed. "The Jew" in that context is closer to "the Indochinese" than we might think.[230]

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[229] See discussion below.

[230] Continuities between "the Jew" in that sense, and Jews today, are frequently asserted, of course, and a certain political discourse deploys them as synonyms, but that assertion is itself contingent, not to say contentious. Meanwhile, in a certain highly formalized analytic philosophy, "the Jew" persists, accompanied by his double, Hitler, frozen around 1940, as a hypostatized quasi-hypothetical dead metaphor, standing for "that which is to be annihilated" (or not). And to pose the question of a "Jewish woman's standpoint" within American feminism is I think to immediately see why "standpoint" analysis on its own simply will not do.

Here are three cans of worms I simply must not allow myself to open properly if I am to have a prayer of ever finishing this project. But Jews (real ones) were at least as important to Beauvoir's development of the concept of "situation" as any other Others. There's a famous anecdote from *La force de l'âge* where her student Olga, fresh from hearing her expound on her earlier idealist theory, announces to a group of her Jewish friends, "you don't exist, my philosophy teacher says so!" Beauvoir tells this story against herself: it was the rise of Fascism that showed her Jews existed. We can hear the echo of that realization in *The Second Sex*: "if woman did not exist, men would have invented her. They did invent her. But she also exists" (*DS* 1:303).

In *La force de l'âge* she glosses the story as follows: "On many points, I was deplorably abstract (and the same was true for Sartre, though perhaps to a lesser degree). I recognized the reality of social classes, but by reaction against the ideologies of my father, I complained if anyone spoke to me of the French, the German, the Jew. Only singular human beings existed. I was right to refuse essentialism. I already knew to what abuses notions like the Slavic soul, the Jewish personality, the primitive mentality, the eternal feminine, would lead. But the universalism I rallied to in reaction took me far away from the

Another example: For many years, I read Beauvoir's phrase, "as the Blacks of Haiti, among others, have proved" and thought vaguely that it must refer to Toussaint L'Ouverture and the distant past. It now seems equally likely to me that Beauvoir had in mind the Haitian resistance to American occupation that began in the 1930s: that was a period of intense cultural interchange between Haiti and the French metropole, including interventions by such French allies as André Breton, and also saw a lively back-and-forth between Haitian and African-American artists, activists and scholars. During the 1930s, "writers on the left" from all these locations frequently made analogies between, for instance, the oppression of Blacks and Jews, or between "American Negroes" and those struggling against colonialism elsewhere (Césaire and Fanon do this, Langston Hughes did it) and claimed that struggles against "the color bar" and against the capitalist system were similar (or debated how they did or didn't interlock). One can call this metaphorical or analogical thinking, but it is clearly intended as a gesture of solidarity.[231]

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real world. What I was missing was the idea of *situation*, which alone makes it possible to define human groupings without enslaving them to a timeless fate. But no one at that time was suggesting that to me, outside the frame of the class struggle." [Sur un grand nombre de points, j'étais—Sartre aussi, quoique peut-être à un moindre degré—déplorablement abstraite. Les classes sociales, j'en reconnaissais la réalité; mais par réaction contre les idéologies de mon père, je protestais si on me parlait du Français, de l'Allemand, du Juif: il n'existait que des personnes singulières. J'avais raison de refuser l'essentialisme. Je savais déjà à quels abus entraînent des notions telles que l'âme slave, le caractère juif, la mentalité primitive, l'éternel féminin. Mais l'universalisme auquel je me ralliais m'emportait loin de la réalité. Ce qui me manquait, c'était l'idée de "situation" qui seule permet de définir concrètement des ensembles humains sans les asservir à une fatalité intemporelle. Mais personne alors, dès qu'on sortait du cadre de la lutte des classes, ne me la fournissait (*FA* 191).] This passage has been well discussed by, among others, Moynagh, "Beauvoir on Lived Reality," 11–12.

[231] See for example Fanon, *Peau noire masques blancs*: "It was my philosophy professor, originally from the Antilles, who reminded me one day: 'When you hear someone speak ill of the Jews, prick up your ears, they're talking about you.' And I thought he was right from a universal point of view, meaning to say that I was responsible, body and soul, for my brother's lot. Later I understood that he simply meant: an anti-semite is bound to be racist [négrophobe]." [C'est mon professeur de philosophie, d'origine antillaise, qui me le rappelait un jour: "Quand vous entendez dire du mal des Juifs, dressez l'oreille, on parle de vous." Et je pensais qu'il avait raison universellement, entendant par là que j'étais responsable, dans mon corps et dans mon âme, du sort réservé à mon frère. Depuis lors, j'ai compris qu'il voulait tout simplement dire: un antisémite est forcément négrophobe (*PNMB* 98; *BSWM* 92, translation altered).

Or Aimé Césaire: "To leave. / As there are hyena-men and panther-men, I will be a Jew-man / a Kaffir-man / a Hindu-from-Calcutta-man / a Harlemite-who-doesn't-vote-man // the famine-man, the insult-man, the torture-man / at any moment one could grab him beat him, kill him—kill him completely—without having to explain oneself to anyone

Notice too that in the examples above the analogy is an implicit one, made by parataxis, by constructing a simple list, and that it is not always the *same* list: sometimes it includes the Indochinese, sometimes not; on other occasions, she includes "the Slavs," which would have had more resonance in the immediate aftermath of Hitler's ideological and military assaults on Eastern Europe than it does here and now.[232] I do think Beauvoir understood how femininity could be a damaging effect of oppression better because she had seen Jim Crow in action: what she learned in the US informed her thinking in non-superficial ways. But this was only one of many "lightbulbs," and the lightbulb wasn't just about who was oppressed, it was about how oppression worked, not about who (or what) people (or groups) are but about what they do. I want to widen the context in which we see Beauvoir thinking about the many vectors of oppression. What can happen as a result of what one might call the "Spelman moment" in feminist theory is that all the intersectionalities are Black. To return to my opening anecdote: It took me a shocking length of time to recognize that the girl who was going to Hereford had, actually, introduced herself with the most salient thing about her identity: that she was working class. It was the prospect of crossing *that* boundary that was sending her scrabbling for the inhaler. Carolyn Steedman: "I read a woman's book, meet such a woman at a party (a woman now, like me) and think quite deliberately, as we talk: we are divided; a hundred years ago I'd have been cleaning your shoes. I know this and you don't."[233] It seems fair to say that in the US today hyper-awareness of race quite often blocks understanding of economic inequalities, even among feminists. But this is our problem; it was not Beauvoir's.

In part our inattention to some of the other intersectionalities is a function of which voices have and haven't yet been part of the conversation. But it is also because some of Beauvoir's other "Others" actually do not lend themselves at all well to being thought about through identity categories or "standpoints."

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without having to excuse oneself to anyone / a Jew-man / a pogrom-man / a little dog / a beggar." [Partir. / Comme il y a des hommes-hyènes et des hommes-panthères, je serais un homme-juif / un homme-cafre / un homme-hindou-de-Calcutta / un homme de Harlem-qui-ne-vote-pas // l'homme-famine, l'homme-insulte, l'homme-torture / on pouvait à n'importe quel moment le saisir le rouer de coups, le tuer—parfaitement le tuer—sans avoir de compte à rendre à personne sans avoir des excuses à présenter à personne / un homme-juif / un homme-pogrom / un chiot / un mendigot (Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, 20).]

[232] See *FA* 191 (quoted above); see also Doris Bergen, *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust.*

[233] Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman*, 2.

For starters, this is true of "class." I hope I've demonstrated above that Beauvoir did, in fact, pay attention to the lived experience of women who lacked economic privilege, as well as to the oppressive behavior of women who *did* have that privilege. In the next chapter below, I'll detail some historical/contextual reasons why American observers in particular, whether fans or critics of Beauvoir, may have found this hard to see. One big reason is that class consciousness (in the Marxist sense of "nous, les prolétaires") has been thin on the ground in the US since before the Second World War. Even the current political foregrounding of economic inequality tends to be couched in terms of unfairness to "the middle class." This is, of course, a mystification, but it is easier to say so than to suggest what might sensibly replace it, even for purposes of academic analysis.[234]

What do we talk about when we talk about "class"? The term refers, in a blurry way, to both economic and cultural factors, and must do so (the impoverished graduate student may have less *money* than the securely employed department secretary she patronizes, and yet ...). Plus, that "class" for women is different than for men, even in a European context, has been well-demonstrated from Woolf to Steedman to Nancy Folbre. It is a clumsy concept, albeit one without which we cannot do. One needn't be an orthodox Marxist, or any kind of Marxist really, to appreciate E. P. Thompson's point that "class is not a thing."

To explain this a different way: "nothing to say about race" and "nothing to say about class" are not entirely parallel formulations. The former usually means the absence of a racial "standpoint," and then the absence of an analysis that would logically arise from such a standpoint. A "class standpoint," though, is hard to pin down. So "don't forget about class" might mean, "don't forget about poor women—really poor women"; it might mean, "don't forget about ordinary working women, who are not intellectuals"; it might even mean, "don't forget about Marx," though anymore it usually doesn't. (There are still socialist feminists in the United States—Barbara Ehrenreich comes to mind—but they are not mostly interested in the finer points of arguments about integrating Marxism with feminist theory. Hm.)

Moreover, racism and classism are not just about inclusion and exclusion.[235] To speak of "exclusion" rather than "exploitation" or "domination" is a choice; if recent feminists within the US have tended to make that choice, we might think about why.[236] Those who say Beauvoir's is not a "standpoint analysis" are absolutely right, but "standpoint" must not be where intersectionality begins and ends. (It certainly can't be where it ends; perhaps it need not be where it begins, either.)

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[234] "The ninety-nine percent" is, at worst, another mystification, at best another illustration of "blindness and insight," since it encourages solidarity by blocking awareness of what the lived experience of poverty actually entails.

[235] Students and faculty of color on campuses across the United States have been drawing our attention to this point; for traditionally white institutions, "getting our diversity numbers up" is hardly the end of the story. What happens *after* people of color come to campus?

When Sally Markowitz, in her 2009 article "Oriental Dreams," finds Beauvoir's views incompatible with what she calls a "post-colonial perspective,"[237] I think she's dead right also, though not in the way she means it. For a citizen of the French empire to be "*post*-colonial" in 1948, he or she would have needed a time machine. Theorists now use "colonial" and "post-colonial" now almost as metaphors; for Beauvoir and Sartre, as for Fanon, colonialism referred to a specific, actually existing economic system, whereby resources were extracted, and human beings brutally exploited, for the benefit of the metropole. As Fanon memorably put it, "le colonialisme n'est pas une machine à penser": colonialism is not a thinking-machine.[238]

Beauvoir's commitments to the anti-colonial struggle in the Maghreb in the 1960s have been very well-discussed by Julien Murphy, Sonia Kruks, and others, particularly in respect to her vigorous public support of torture victim Djamila Boupacha. (I'll take this up in more detail in Chapter 5.) What I am contending here is that if we remember to look for it, we can find that commitment also in *The Second Sex*, and even earlier. Even though in her memoirs she represents her activism of the 1960s and 1970s as a shift in her consciousness and worldview, what shifted was her understanding of what she needed to publicly do, and a growing awareness that *she* could and should do it. The knowledge and analysis behind that stance had been in place for decades.

And what about first-generation college students who may be white? Talk about "diversity" and "multiculturalism" cannot easily speak to their condition. The discourse of "privilege," which is better in that respect, is static—and partly that is right, because privilege is historically sedimented, it is not entirely up to us who we are. (Depending on the meaning of the word "are" …) But perhaps one reason a language of "privilege" has replaced a language of "oppression" and "exploitation" is that it feels less threatening.

[236] We also tend to use "voice" as synecdoche for "power," which makes a lot of sense as long as we don't forget that "taking the part for the whole" doesn't mean the part actually *is* the whole. (Blindness and insight.)

[237] Markowitz, "Occidental Dreams: Orientalism and History in *The Second Sex*," 273. See further discussion below.

[238] "Colonialism is not a thinking-machine, it is not a body endowed with reason. It is a violence in the state of nature, and it can bend only before a greater violence." [[L]e colonialisme n'est pas une machine à penser, n'est pas un corps doué de raison. Il est une violence à l'état de nature et ne peut s'incliner que devant une plus grande violence (Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre*, 66).]

9 Beauvoir's Early Political Thinking and *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*

What we have been missing, I think, is an understanding that Beauvoir "was always, and consistently a woman of the left," an awareness of "how much Politics with a capital P were part of de Beauvoir's world," as the editors of the *European Journal of Women's Studies* put it in 1999.[239] Beauvoir's earliest and deepest political commitments—long before she saw being a woman as a political matter—had to do with class and colonialism; she came to the question of women after she had already thought, and thought deeply, about other forms of oppression. When she says, in partially dismissing the issue of feminism as already almost solved, "many problems seem more pressing to us than those which particularly affect us,"[240] the "problems" she meant were nontrivial: economic inequality and global injustice, a possible new rise of Fascism using the communist threat as an excuse … and the hypocrisy of a nationalist bourgeois discourse of "universal freedom and equality" that was falsified by the governing class's actual behavior on a daily basis. Beauvoir saw quite accurately that the oppression of women is not the only oppression in the world, and was unwilling to globalize her own experience, philosophically or rhetorically.[241] It is quite true that the "us" in that sentence is not "all women," that it amounts to "lucky women situated like me"—she clearly marks this—but it seems to me that she should be praised, rather than vilified, for such self-awareness.[242]

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[239] WISE, "Editorial," 260. A good and careful article by Lawrence Kritzman, "Simone de Beauvoir, The Paradoxical Intellectual," while noting that she was "a woman of the left," nonetheless concludes that she "remained ambivalent about political activism to the end of her life" (212). This is a plausible reading of his sources (which unfortunately include Deirdre Bair's biography), but I don't think it is right: I think Beauvoir may well have maintained an ambivalence about the particular politics *Sartre* engaged in at various points, which may account for his statement to Madeline Gobeil in 1965 that "[i]t is on only one subject that she leaves me flat, and that is politics" (Gobeil, "Sartre Talks of Beauvoir," 72–3). In some earlier work, I took this statement too much at face value, I now believe. Sartre continues: "She doesn't give a damn about it. It's not that she actually doesn't give a damn about it, but she doesn't want to get involved in the political rat race." She did decline at various points to participate in *electoral* politics, because no candidate seemed sufficiently radical, because of a suspicion of "the system," etc., but such refusals were tactical rather than total; and she does seem to have correctly predicted the futility of some of Sartre's efforts to create an independent left grouping through the Rassemblement démocratique révolutionnaire. But many other avenues of political activism, including (but not limited to) feminist ones, were open to her, and she participated fully and energetically. I discuss this further in Chapter 5 below.

In *Politics With Beauvoir: Freedom in the Encounter*, Lori Jo Marso now makes a strong case for Beauvoir as "a far more complex and nuanced thinker about political processes than we have previously recognized" (19), noting that Beauvoir "named enemies, developed allies, and sought to solicit new friendships" (37) in explicit and polemical ways.

[240] "[B]eaucoup de problèmes nous paraissent plus essentiels que ceux qui nous concernent singulièrement" (*DS* 1:29). See above.

But insofar as Beauvoir was "doing intersectionality," it's important to notice that she was starting from the other end. Rather than trying to answer a question like "how can we make our movement and our scholarship more diverse and inclusive," the question she was trying to answer was, does the situation of women even qualify to be called an "oppression," is the oppression of women systematic, is the oppression of women political, and if so, how? As Doris Ruhe, discussing Beauvoir's observation about the hollowness of segregationist claims regarding "separate but equal," points out, "[t]o carry over this observation to the relation between men and women seems obvious today; that wasn't so in 1949."[243] If we see feminism in a 1980s or 1990s frame as a roomful of white women from which other Others are excluded, it is harder to remember that gender was a relatively late addition to that checklist: in the 1940s, it was gender (or rather, "the woman question") that was the unthought, or at best the afterthought.

Beauvoir's opposition to colonialism, understood as an economic system underpinned by racist ideologies, was part of a generally leftist and anti-establishment orientation that long predated her encounter with Richard Wright and indeed predated her commitment to political "engagement." Looking back to the years before the Second World War when she and Sartre held themselves apart from politics, she condemns their misplaced optimism that "the wheel of history would turn in the right direction" without any actual effort on their part, in terms that nonetheless show how fully an anti-colonial stance was part of their world-view—and this at a time when many of their classmates were destined for the highest echelons of the Colonial Service.[244]

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[241] See also Hélène Wenzel, "Interview with Simone de Beauvoir." Wenzel, preparing to edit the *Yale French Studies* special issue on Beauvoir, asked, "[t]he articles and scope would be focused on your treatment of the 'woman question,' which has come to be called as well, the 'feminine question,' the 'feminist question.' Which of these do you prefer as a description of the question? After all these years, is there one which pleases you more or better describes your subject matter?" Beauvoir responded: "I don't know. I've spoken of women, I've also spoken of many other things. As a result, I'd prefer that a focus on my writing and my work not be absolutely limited … to the woman question" (6). But Wenzel was uninterested in discussing "other things."

[242] Another advantage of such a stance is that one can move forward politically in meaningful ways without having to argue from the depressive position, hold onto left melancholy, or think oneself into a position of greater oppression or victimization than the position one actually (materially) occupies. Michèle Le Dœuff has written of the value to the women's movement of political statements which begin "Many of us …" (*Hipparchia's Choice*, 125). See also Kruks, "The Politics of Privilege."

[243] "Transférer cette constatation à la relation homme-femme paraît aujourd'hui évident; cela ne l'était pas en 1949" (Ruhe, "Femmes, Juifs, Noirs," 87).

> Considering society in its current form, we were against it; but there was nothing sullen in our antagonism, which implied a robust optimism. Man was to be recreated, and this invention would be in part our life's work. Not that we pictured ourselves playing a part, other than by writing books; public affairs bored us; but we figured that events would turn out the way we wanted without our having to do anything; on this point, in the fall of 1929, we shared the happy delusion of the entire French left. Peace seemed definitely assured; the expansion of the Nazi party in Germany was just an epiphenomenon, nothing serious. Colonialism would be liquidated within a short time; the campaign launched by Gandhi in India and the communist agitation in Indochina was making sure of that. And the exceptionally bad financial crash that was shaking the capitalist world seemed an omen that this society wouldn't hold out much longer.... It seemed to us we already lived in a golden age.[245]

She tells us how naïve and misguided she and Sartre were as a result of their middle-class position: the next paragraph begins, "[w]e were ignorant in every respect of the weight of reality."[246] What is at stake is an exploration of the inadequacy of a completely individualized notion of "freedom," which the war would show them needed to be revised to account for political and social

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[244] Sartre's close friend Nizan actually took up a post, then conveyed his disgust for the whole enterprise in the novel *Aden Arabie*; that the hero (if that is the word) of *La nausée* has given up a government or business career in the East usually goes unremarked.

[245] "La société, sous sa forme actuelle, nous étions contre; mais cet antagonisme n'avait rien de morose: il impliquait un robuste optimisme. L'homme était à récréer et cette invention serait en partie notre œuvre. Nous n'envisagions pas d'y contribuer autrement que par des livres: les affaires publiques nous assommaient; mais nous escomptions que les événements se dérouleraient selon nos désirs sans que nous ayons à nous en mêler; sur ce point, en cet automne 1929, nous partagions l'euphorie de toute la gauche française. La paix semblait définitivement assurée; l'expansion du parti nazi en Allemagne ne représentait qu'un épiphénomène sans gravité. Le colonialisme serait liquidé dans un bref délai: la campagne déclenchée par Gandhi aux Indes, l'agitation communiste en Indochine le garantissaient. Et la crise, d'une exceptionnelle virulence, qui secouait le monde capitaliste laissait présager que cette société ne tiendrait pas le coup longtemps. Il nous semblait déjà habiter l'âge d'or qui constituait à nos yeux la vérité cachée de l'Histoire et qu'elle se bornerait à dévoiler" (*FA* 21–2).

[246] "Nous ignorions sur tous les plans le poids de la réalité" (*FA* 22).

situation. She refers to their “political blindness”:[247] “Our ignorance hid from us most of the problems that should have troubled us.”[248]

> Our indifference to money was a luxury we could afford because we had enough of it not to suffer from want and not to be driven to take hard or unpleasant jobs. As for our open-mindedness, we owed that to an education and a prospective future that were only accessible to our class. Our social status, that of young petty-bourgeois intellectuals, was what encouraged us to think social status did not affect us.[249]

If it remains important to us that Beauvoir “examine her own privilege,” these sections show her doing so.[250]

My point here, however, is to trace the thread of reflexive anti-colonialism as far back in her work as it will go. Even the earliest volume of her memoirs describes her childhood resistance to the nationalist and anti-semitic rhetoric of her parents’ milieu, with respect to the aftermath of the Dreyfus case, and to the bourgeoisie’s use of universalist rhetoric to mask class interests, as seen in her father’s talk of the “yellow peril” and his liking for Gobineau.[251] When she and Sartre first read Céline’s work, they liked it, in part because of the virulence of his attack on colonialism (his later books “opened their eyes” to his fascism).[252] At her first teaching job in Marseille, she got in trouble with the authorities for teaching Gide and other writers on sexuality but also for attacking colonialism, as Gide himself had done in *Voyage au Congo* (*Travels in the Congo*).[253]

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[247] “[A]veuglement politique” (*FA* 22).

[248] “[N]otre ignorance nous dissimulait la plupart des problèmes qui auraient dû nous inquiéter” (*FA* 23).

[249] “Notre indifférence à l’argent était un luxe que nous pouvions nous offrir parce que nous en possédions assez pour ne pas souffrir du besoin et pour n’être pas acculés à des travaux pénibles. Notre ouverture d’esprit, nous la devions à une culture et à des projets accessibles seulement à notre classe. C’était notre condition de jeunes intellectuels petits-bourgeois qui nous incitait à nous croire inconditionnés” (*FA* 28).

[250] See Kruks, “The Politics of Privilege.”

[251] *Mémoires d’une jeune fille rangée*, 177. Beauvoir used this story pretty much verbatim in *Les mandarins*, where Henri explains the roots of his political commitments to a reporter from *Samedi Soir*, who doesn’t get the point (both because she is too cynical, and because she is too naïve) (1: 171). This kind of recycling happens frequently in Beauvoir’s work: another example involving her developing awareness of poverty and injustice is the story about the death of the nursemaid’s little boy, which she dramatized in *Le sang des autres* (16–18) and worked into a psychological parable in *Pyrrhus et Cinéas* (241) before describing it more simply in *Mémoires d’une jeune fille rangée* (183).

[252] *FA* 158.

[253] *FA* 111.

Those are retrospective accounts, of course. But her early philosophical work also shows that she was first opposed to colonialism, racism, and other forms of domination as absolute evils *in themselves*, not simply insofar as they might philosophically or intellectually illuminate the situation of women like herself.

To show this, I need to look briefly at *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* and some other non-fictional texts she wrote after *L'invitée* but before *The Second Sex*, and for that matter before her trip to the United States, during what is often called (following her own terminology) her "moral period." There is already a strong ethical and political critique of nationalism and colonialism in those texts. It does seem important to recall that Beauvoir herself came to dislike them. About *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, she would say:

> Of all my books, it is the one that irritates me the most today.... [T]he attitudes I examine are explained by objective conditions; I limited myself to isolating their moral significance, to such an extent that my portraits are not situated on any level of reality. It was absurd to pretend one could define an ethics independent of social context....[254]

And about three essays from *Les Temps Modernes* that would be reprinted in *L'existentialisme et la sagesse des nations*, she said later:

> What I find hard to understand is the idealism that blemishes these essays. In fact, men defined themselves for me by their bodies, their needs, their work; I set no form, no value, higher than individuals of flesh and bone.... Why then, to justify the fundamental importance of basic need (which I recognized), did I take this detour through values other than need itself? Why did I write "concrete freedom" instead of "bread," and subordinate the life force to the meaning of life? Like Sartre, I had not freed myself far enough from the values of my class: even at the moment of repudiating them, I was still using their language. It has become hateful to me because, as I now know, to search for reasons why one should not tread on the face of another human being is to accept stepping on his face.[255]

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[254] "De tous mes livres, c'est celui qui aujourd'hui m'irrite le plus.... les attitudes que j'examine s'expliquent par des conditions objectives; je me suis bornée à en dégager les significations morales si bien que mes portraits ne se situent à aucun niveau de la réalité. Il était aberrant de prétendre définir une morale en dehors d'un contexte social" (*FCh* 1:99).

[255] "Ce que je comprends mal, c'est l'idéalisme qui entache ces essais. En fait, les hommes se définissaient pour moi par leur corps, leurs besoins, leur travail; je ne plaçais aucune

But as when she said she'd want to add more about "scarcity" to *The Second Sex*, she was not being quite fair to her own earlier work. The discussion of social justice in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* is abstract, but it is a recognizably *left* abstraction, refuses any distinction between ethics and politics, and includes a strong attack on colonial imperialism and on nationalism, which she regards as dangerous mystifications. Many philosophers have written about *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* as though the examples she gives are hypotheticals. But while they may sometimes sound like hypotheticals, they are drawn from life.

It is not my purpose here to give a full account of *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, which is in large measure a defense of existentialism from the charges that it is solipsistic, nihilistic, or absurdist.[256] Many have observed that she defended Sartre by changing his theory so that it was no longer those things; as Nancy Bauer puts it, "the views Beauvoir expresses in Sartre's defense often do not jibe with what's in *Being and Nothingness*."[257] To put it schematically, the problem Beauvoir is trying to solve is how to move from a philosophy of individual "liberté" to an ethics of "libération" that could ground collective, concrete political engagement.

As in *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir relies on a Hegelian dynamic that moves through conflict toward freedom, without adopting Hegel's system wholesale.[258] The structure of past, present, future is central; so is the way that the subject, caught in ambiguity, keeps moving forward, or at least *should* do so. Those who fall back into a static sense of who they "are" (in the bad, in-itself, "being" sense of "are") are in bad faith. From start to finish she trenchantly dissents from Hegel's triumphalist optimism:[259] the book concludes by denouncing his unconcern for

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forme ni aucune valeur au-dessus des individus de chair et d'os.... Mais alors, pour justifier la fondamentale importance que je lui reconnaissais, pourquoi passais-je par le détour de valeurs autres que le besoin même? Pourquoi écrivais-je "liberté concrète" au lieu de *pain* et subordonnais-je au sens de la vie la volonté de vivre? ... J'étais—comme Sartre—insuffisamment affranchie des idéologies de ma classe; au moment même où je les repoussais, je me servais encore de leur langage. Il m'est devenue odieux car, je le sais maintenant, chercher les raisons pour lesquelles il ne faut pas marcher sur la figure d'un homme, c'est accepter qu'on lui marche sur la figure" (*ibid.,* 1:100–101).

[256] The "ambiguities" which require and receive an ethical rethinking include life and death, subject and object, means and end, solitude and engagement with the world, freedom and servitude: "man" [*sic*] consists of, is pulled forward by, a constant tension between those poles.

[257] Bauer, *Beauvoir, Philosophy, & Feminism*, 141.

[258] As I've argued elsewhere, and above, Beauvoir uses Hegel as a tool or lens to interpret the world she sees; when he becomes useless to that task, she says so, puts him aside and picks up another. See also Bauer, *Beauvoir, Philosophy, & Feminism*.

[259] *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* (hereinafter PMA). Translations are from *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, translated by Bernard Frechtman (hereinafter *EA*). The very few changes I've

the victims of History with a capital H as a supreme mystification. She never loses sight of the more Kantian view that others must be treated as ends in themselves, not as means to an end, and that not to see this is an absolute evil; Hegel fails to see people in their singularity, and refuses the thickness of the world, and thus his theory is useful to dictators and fascists.

Beauvoir describes a number of ways human beings can refuse their freedom, but makes a distinction between those who are *constrained* to do so by situation, and those (more fully culpable) who resign their freedom in return for some ready-made "value" that places them in a position of power, and then hypocritically impose those Values (we might call them, reifications) on the oppressed. Like Sartre, Beauvoir refers to such a person (ironically) as "the serious man." The serious man is, more or less, simply a conformist, who denies his own freedom in favor of a preordained set of values which he erects into an absolute. One important example here is "le colon," a term often translated as "the colonial administrator," but "the colonizer" would fit just as well, and might include those in France who support colonial policies as well as those whose paid job involves carrying them out. *Le colon* shows his bad faith, not just by treating human beings instrumentally, as though they were objects, but by insisting that the people he is oppressing are better off for his intervention, and that because they are really "children" they would be worse off if they were set free.

> [The serious man] accords an absolute meaning to the epithet *useful*, which, in truth, has no more meaning if taken by itself than the words *high, low*, *right*, and *left*. It simply designates a relationship and requires a complement: useful *for* this or that. The complement itself must be put into question, and, as we shall see later on, the whole problem of action is then raised.
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> But the serious man puts nothing into question. For the military man, the army is useful; for the colonial administrator, the highway; for the serious revolutionary, the revolution—army, highway, revolution, productions becoming inhuman idols to which one will not hesitate to sacrifice

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found necessary to make are explained in my notes. Here and throughout, where he translated her use of "L'Esprit" for Hegel's "Geist" as "Mind," I have preferred "Spirit." See *PMA* 11, *EA* 6–7; *PMA* 24, *EA* 16; *PMA* 149–52, *EA* 105 ("Spirit is subject; but *who* is subject?" [l'Esprit est sujet; mais *qui* est sujet?]; "a game of hide and seek ... the whole system seems to be a vast mystification" [C'est ici que s'effectue un tour de passe-passe.... Tout le système apparaît comme une vaste mystification]); and *PMA* 162, *EA* 111 ("absolute universal Man exists nowhere" [L'homme universel, absolu, n'existe nulle part]). Is this book Hegelian? It is, but it is also anti-Hegelian. (Which I suppose is quite Hegelian of it...) It argues in his idiom, but plainly refuses his conclusion.

> man himself. Therefore, the serious man is dangerous. It is natural that he makes himself a tyrant. Dishonestly ignoring the subjectivity of his choice, he pretends that the unconditioned value of the object is being asserted through him; and by the same token he also ignores the value of the subjectivity and freedom of others, to such an extent that, sacrificing them to the thing, he persuades himself that what he sacrifices is nothing. The colonial administrator who has raised the highway to the stature of an idol will have no scruple about assuring its construction at the price of a great number of lives of the natives; for, what value has the life of a native who is incompetent, lazy, and clumsy when it comes to building highways?[260]

Beauvoir's examples of "the serious man" include the doctrinaire communist who gives up thinking for himself. But most of her scorn is reserved for right-wingers; those writers she names (Jouhandeau, Drieu de la Rochelle, Claudel, Maurras) were mainly Catholic ultras; some were Nazi collaborators; Claudel was also a prominent colonial bureaucrat.

> Seriousness leads to a fanaticism which is as formidable as that of passion. It is the fanaticism of the Inquisition which does not hesitate to impose a credo, that is, an internal movement, by means of external constraints. It is the fanaticism of the Vigilantes of America who defend morality by means of lynchings. It is the political fanaticism which empties politics of all human content and imposes the State, not *for* individuals, but *against* them.[261]

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[260] "[L'homme sérieux] accorde un sens absolu à cette épithète *utile* qui, en vérité, n'a pas plus de sens, si on la prend isolément, que les mots haut, bas, droite, gauche; elle ne désigne qu'un rapport et elle appelle un complément: utile *à* ceci ou cela; le complément lui-même doit être mis en question.… Mais l'homme sérieux ne met rien en question; pour le militaire, l'armée est utile; pour l'administrateur colonial, la route; pour le révolutionnaire sérieux, la révolution: armée, route, révolution, production deviennent des idoles inhumaines auxquelles on n'hésitera pas à sacrifier l'homme lui-même. Par là, l'homme sérieux est dangereux; il est naturel qu'il se fasse tyran. Méconnaissant avec mauvaise foi la subjectivité de son choix, il prétend qu'à travers lui s'affirme la valeur de la subjectivité et de la liberté d'autrui, si bien que, les sacrifiant à la chose, il se persuade que ce qu'il sacrifie n'est rien. L'administrateur colonial qui a élevé la route à la hauteur d'une idole n'aura pas de scrupule à en assurer la construction au prix d'un grand nombre de vies d'indigènes; car quelle est la valeur d'une vie d'indigène maladroit à construire des routes, inefficace ou paresseux?" (*PMA* 70–1, *EA* 47–9).

[261] "Le sérieux conduit à un fanatisme aussi redoutable que le fanatisme de la passion; c'est le fanatisme de l'Inquisition qui n'hésite pas à imposer un credo, c'est-à-dire un mouvement intérieur, par des contraintes extérieures; c'est le fanatisme des Vigilants d'Amérique qui défendent la moralité par des lynchages; c'est le fanatisme politique qui vide la

To avoid misunderstanding, she makes clear that "the serious man" can often be *funny*—or at least, he thinks he is:

> In order to justify the contradictory, absurd, and outrageous aspects of this kind of behavior, the serious man readily takes refuge in disputing the serious, but it is the serious of others which he disputes, not his own. This, the colonial administrator is not unaware of the trick of irony. He contests the importance of the happiness, the comfort, the very life of the native, but he reveres the Highway, the Economy, the French Empire; he reveres himself as a servant of these divinities. Almost all serious men cultivate an expedient levity; we are familiar with the genuine gaiety of Catholics, the fascist "sense of humor."[262]

Perhaps she had in mind something that happened while she was writing the book: *La force des choses* describes, in a section that quotes directly from her diary, an encounter with "a highly-placed French official" while she and Sartre were traveling in Switzerland.

> B is hateful when he talks about the Arab midwives with whom he traveled by truck in Africa. In the evenings they were herded into a separate encampment "because they smelled bad." They had been converted to Catholicism and they protested in the name of religion: "But we have souls, just as you do." "All one could do was laugh," says B; he tells this story with a smug self-satisfaction that is unbearable.[263]

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politique de tout contenu humain et impose l'État non pour les individus, mais contre eux" (*PMA* 71–2, *EA* 50).

[262] "Pour justifier ce que ces conduites ont de contradictoire, d'absurde, de scandaleux, l'homme sérieux se réfugie volontiers dans une contestation du sérieux, mais c'est le sérieux d'autrui qu'il conteste, non le sien propre. Ainsi l'administrateur colonial n'ignore pas le jeu de l'ironie; il conteste l'importance du bonheur, du confort, de la vie même de l'indigène, mais il révère la Route, l'Économie, l'Empire français, il se révère lui-même comme serviteur de ces divinités. Presque tous les hommes sérieux cultivent une légèreté profitable; on connaît la gaîté de bon aloi des catholiques, le 'sens de l'humour' fasciste" (*PMA* 72, *EA* 49).

[263] "[U]n officiel français, très haut placé … B. est odieux quand il parle des sages-femmes arabes, avec qui il voyageait en camion, en Afrique, et qu'on parquait à part, le soir, 'parce qu'elles sentaient mauvais'; elles avaient été converties au catholicisme et elles protestaient au nom de la religion: 'Mais on a des âmes comme vous.' On ne faisait qu'en rire, dit B.; il raconte ça avec une complaisance insupportable" (*FCh* 1:128).

But intellectuals are not off the hook. A certain class of disengaged thinker also comes in for scorn.

> Critical thought claims to bring about a universal contestation of all aspects of the serious,[264] but without foundering in the anguish of pure negation. It sets up a superior, universal, and timeless value, objective truth. And correlatively, the critic defines himself positively as the independence of the mind.… Thus he thinks that he himself escapes all earthly criticism. He does not have to choose between the highway and the native, between America and Russia, between production and freedom. He understands, dominates, and rejects, in the name of total truth, the necessarily partial truths which every human engagement discloses.[265]

But in laying claim to this "view from nowhere," the disengaged intellectual is kidding himself; the critic is still a man among men, and if he doesn't assume his subjectivity he is caught in the trap of the serious man. "Instead of the independent mind he pretends to be, he is only the shameful servant of a cause to which he has not chosen to rally."[266]

Many arguments in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* will feel somewhat familiar to readers of *The Second Sex*, except that they are made mostly without reference to women, who appear only fleetingly: two sustained discussions

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[264] Frechtman has: "Critical thought attempts to militate everywhere against all aspects of the serious but without foundering in the anguish of pure negation."

[265] "[L]a pensée critique prétend effectuer une contestation universelle de tous les aspects du sérieux, mais sans sombrer dans l'angoisse de la pure négation; elle pose une valeur supérieure, universelle, intemporelle, qui serait la vérité objective; et corrélativement le critique se définit positivement lui-même comme l'indépendance de l'esprit.… Ainsi il croit échapper lui-même à toute critique terrestre; il n'a pas à choisir entre la route et l'indigène, entre l'Amérique et la Russie, entre la production et la liberté; il comprend, il domine et il refuse, au nom de la vérité totale, les vérités nécessairement partielles que dévoile tout engagement humain. Mais l'ambiguïté est au cœur de son attitude même, car l'esprit indépendant, c'est encore un homme avec sa situation singulière dans le monde, et ce qu'il définit comme vérité objective, c'est l'objet de son propre choix. Ses critiques tombent dans le monde des hommes singuliers; il ne décrit pas seulement, il prend parti. S'il n'assume pas la subjectivité de son jugement, il est pris infailliblement au piège du sérieux" (PMA 98–9, *EA* 67).

[266] "Au lieu de cet esprit indépendant qu'il prétend être, il n'est que le serviteur honteux d'une cause à laquelle il n'a pas choisi de se rallier" (PMA 99, *EA* 67). The critic is contrasted to "l'artiste" and "l'écrivain." I wonder whether she is thinking here of Maurice Blanchot, whether this may be a veiled jab in response to his criticism of *Le sang des autres*, which she'd be more polite about in her essay on the metaphysical novel. See Doris Ruhe, "Beauvoir, Blanchot, et Sartre: dialogues ambigus autour du *Sang de autres*."

(a few pages apiece) and a number of passing mentions add up to perhaps six pages out of the two hundred and thirty. When Beauvoir describes the way oppressors mask their oppression as an inevitable natural fact, her example is not women, but the proletariat:

> [O]ne of the ruses of oppression is to camouflage itself behind a natural situation since, after all, one cannot revolt against nature. When a conservative wishes to show that the proletariat is not oppressed, he declares that the present distribution of wealth is a natural fact and that there is thus no means of rejecting it.[267]

Similarly, a long discussion of complicity takes place without any reference to women.

> [T]he oppressor would not be so strong if he did not have accomplices among the oppressed themselves; mystification is one of the forms of oppression; ignorance is a situation in which man may be enclosed as narrowly as in a prison; as we have already said, every individual may practice his freedom inside his world, but not everyone has the means of rejecting, even by doubt, the values, taboos, and prescriptions by which he has been surrounded.[268]

(Complicity is importantly distinguished from actual guilt. "When a young sixteen-year-old Nazi died crying 'Heil Hitler!' he was not guilty, and it was not him whom we hated but his masters."[269]) There is also a discussion of love, passion, and generosity, which some commentators (especially Debra Bergoffen) have made much of, but here it takes place without particular attention to sex or gender.

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[267] "[U]ne des ruses de l'oppression sera de se camoufler en situation naturelle: puisqu'en effet on ne saurait se révolter contre la nature. Lorsqu'un conservateur veut démontrer que le prolétariat n'est pas opprimé, il déclare que la distribution actuelle des richesses est un fait naturel et qu'il n'y a donc pas moyen de la refuser" (*PMA* 120–21, *EA* 62). Here the person she is arguing with is her father. See *MJFR*, 178–85.

[268] "[L]'oppresseur ne serait pas si fort s'il n'avait des complices parmi les opprimés eux-mêmes; la mystification est une des formes de l'oppression; l'ignorance est une situation où l'homme peut être enfermé aussi étroitement que dans une prison; nous l'avons dit déjà, tout individu peut exercer sa liberté à l'intérieur de son monde: mais tous n'ont pas les moyens de refuser, fût-ce par le doute, les valeurs, les tabous, les consignes dont on les a entourés" (*PMA* 141, *EA* 97). (I've changed Frechtman's "by which he is surrounded" to "by which he has been surrounded," because the passive voice seems important: other people, "on," have done this.)

[269] "Quand un jeune nazi de seize ans mourait en criant: 'Heil Hitler!', il n'était pas coupable, et ce n'est pas lui qu'on haïssait, mais ses maîtres" (*PMA* 141, *EA* 97).

Sometimes a woman will appear very briefly in an example, as when the bad faith of the serious man is compared to "the mythomaniac who while reading a love letter pretends to forget that she has sent it to herself."[270] Other passing references: in explaining that "the serious man" need not be grim (see above), she tells us that "a frivolous lady of fashion can have the mentality of the serious as well as an engineer";[271] in explaining that true generosity, *pace* Kant, is not abstract and general but addressed to people in their singularity, she draws a contrast with the activities of the "charity lady";[272] a slap at Claudel's conformism includes a "by the way" criticism of "masculine arrogance";[273] the letters of Julie de Lespinasse are one example among others of how "the passionate man" can come to enjoy the grief and torment of loss or hopeless devotion: the other examples are men.[274] In criticizing the "Don Juan" type of adventurer, she notes that in the end he'll have to confront Elvira and admit that he's less free than he pretends.[275] And under the question of whether saving someone from suicide against their wishes is ethical, one of her examples is a young girl.[276] None of these examples is present because of "what it tells us about women" or gender, and none is built on in any way beyond the point they are meant to briefly illustrate. What I'm trying to establish here—and I realize the philology is tedious, sorry—is that the issues of race, class, and colonialism raised in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* cannot be seen as mobilized solely in the service of "white feminism," or any other kind of feminism, since women barely come into the picture. We'll meet some of these unhappy women again at greater length in *The Second Sex*, but *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* is not about women, it's about *people*, human beings, into which category some women do happen to fall.

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[270] "La mauvaise foi de l'homme sérieux provient de ce qu'il est obligé de sans cesse renouveler le reniement de cette liberté; il choisit de vivre dans un monde infantile: mais à l'enfant les valeurs sont réellement données; l'homme sérieux doit masquer ce mouvement par lequel il se les donne, telle la mythomane qui feint d'oublier, en lisant une lettre d'amour, qu'elle se l'est envoyée à elle-même" (PMA 68, *EA* 47).

[271] "[U]ne élégante frivole peut avoir l'esprit de sérieux autant qu'un ingénieur" (PMA 67, *EA* 45).

[272] "It is not the fault of the *dame de charité* if she is apt to be odious; because, her money and time being limited, she hesitates before distributing it to this one or that one, she appears to others as a pure externality, a blind facticity." [Ce n'est pas tout à fait la faute de la dame de charité si elle est facilement odieuse; du fait que, disposant de son temps, de son argent en quantité limitée, elle hésite avant de le distribuer à celui-ci ou à celui-là, elle apparaît en face d'autrui comme pure extériorité, facticité aveugle (PMA 208, *EA* 143).] Frechtman translates "dame de charité" as "district social worker," but the Collins gives "benefactress," and in context I think the woman Beauvoir has in mind is an unpaid Lady Bountiful type.

[273] "At the beginning of Claudel's *The Satin Shoe*, the husband of Dona Prouhèze, the Judge, the Just, as the author regards him, explains that every plant needs a gardener in order to grow and that he is the one whom heaven has destined for his young wife; beside the fact that we are shocked by the arrogance of such a thought (for how does he know that he is an enlightened gardener? Isn't he just a jealous husband?) this likening of a soul to a plant is not acceptable; for, as Kant would say, the value of an act lies not in its *conformity* to an external model, but in its internal truth." [Au début du *Soulier de Satin*, de Claudel, le mari de Dona Prouhèze, le Juge, le Juste, selon la pensée de l'auteur, explique que toute plante a besoin pour pousser droit d'un jardinier et qu'il est celui que le ciel a destiné à sa jeune épouse; outre qu'on est choqué par l'arrogance d'une telle pensée (car d'où sait-il qu'il est ce jardinier éclairé? n'est-il pas seulement un mari jaloux?), cette assimilation d'une âme à une plante n'est pas acceptable; car, pour reprendre le mot de Kant, la valeur d'un acte n'est pas dans sa conformité à un modèle extérieur, mais dans sa vérité intérieure (PMA 199, *EA* 137).]

[274] "[L]'homme passionné" (PMA 91, *EA* 66).

A few more substantive passages do show more interest in the situation of women as a class. One paragraph uses Nora from Ibsen's *A Doll's House* as one among several examples of those who are "enslaved" or "mystified," and who don't seem to deserve quite as severe condemnation as the serious man who "has the necessary instruments to escape this lie and who does not want to use them."[277] Another passage examines (and eviscerates) bad faith excuses that oppressors give for keeping the masses, women, and “indigenous people in the colonies” from voting. Beauvoir does not deny that some people are better educated than others, who may be characterized as “backward,” but that does not give the “enlightened elites” the right to make choices supposedly “on their behalf”: such choices are exposed as self-serving.

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[275] "The adventurer always meets others along the way; the conquistador meets the Indians; the condottiere hacks out a path through blood and ruins; the explorer has comrades about him or soldiers under his orders; every Don Juan is confronted with Elviras." [L'aventurier sur son chemin rencontre toujours autrui; le conquistador rencontre les Indiens; le condottiere se fraie une route à travers le sang et les ruines; l'explorateur a des camarades autour de lui ou des soldats sous ses ordres; en face de tout Don Juan il y a des Elvire (PMA 86, *EA* 60).]

[276] PMA 206, *EA* 141.

[277] "We have already pointed out that certain adults can live in the universe of the serious in all honesty, for example, those who are denied all instruments of escape, those who are enslaved or who are mystified. The less economic and social circumstances allow an individual to act upon the world, the more this world appears to him as given. This is the case of women who inherit a long tradition of submission and of those who are called the 'humble.' There is often laziness and timidity in their resignation; their good faith [Frechtman has 'honesty'] is not quite complete; but to the extent that it exists, their freedom remains available, it is not denied. They can, in their situation of ignorant and powerless individuals, know the truth of existence and raise themselves to a properly moral life. It even happens that they turn the freedom which they have thus won against the very object of their respect; thus, in *A Doll's House*, the childlike *naïveté* of the heroine leads her to rebel against the lie of the serious. On the contrary, the man who has the necessary instruments to escape this lie and who does not want to use them consumes his freedom in denying them. He makes himself serious. He dissimulates his subjectivity under the shield of rights which emanate from the ethical universe recognized by him; he is no longer a man, but a father, a boss, a member of the Christian Church or the Communist

> I recall, among others, the *naïveté* of a girl from a conservative family who said, ‘The vote for women is all well and good in principle, only, if women get the vote, they’ll all vote Red.’[278] With like impudence it is almost unanimously stated today in France that if the natives of the French Union were given the rights of self-determination, they would live quietly in their villages without doing anything, which would be harmful to the higher interests of the Economy.[279]

The third passage, which occurs in the middle of a discussion of childhood and irresponsibility, has received a certain amount of attention: I’ll follow Nancy

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Party.” [Nous avons indiqué déjà que, dans l’univers du sérieux, certains adultes peuvent vivre avec bonne foi: ceux à qui est refusé tout instrument d’évasion, ceux qu’on asservit ou qu’on mystifie. Moins les circonstances économiques et sociales permettent à un individu d’agir sur le monde, plus ce monde lui apparaît comme donné. C’est le cas des femmes qui héritent d’une longue tradition de soumission, et de ceux qu’on appelle les humbles; il y a souvent de la paresse et de la timidité dans leur résignation, leur bonne foi n’est pas entière; mais dans la mesure où elle existe, leur liberté demeure disponible, elle ne se renie pas; ils peuvent dans leur situation d’individus ignorants, impuissants, connaître la vérité de l’existence et s’élever à une vie proprement morale. Il arrive même que la liberté ainsi conquise, ils la retournent contre l’objet même de leur respect; ainsi, dans *Maison de Poupée*, la naïveté enfantine de l’héroïne la conduit à une révolte contre le mensonge du sérieux. Au contraire, l’homme qui a les instruments nécessaires pour s’évader de ce mensonge et qui ne veut pas en user, celui-là consume sa liberté à la refuser; il se fait lui-même sérieux, il dissimule sa subjectivité sous l’armure de droits qui émanent de l’univers éthique reconnu par lui; il n’est plus un homme, mais un père, un chef, un membre de l’Église chrétienne ou du Parti communiste (PMA 69–70, *EA* 47–8).]

[278] Frechtman has “a right-thinking girl,” but “bien-pensante” is, or at least was, used to refer to middle- and upper-class Catholic respectability. This same anecdote appears at greater length in *Mémoires d’une jeune fille rangée,* 355; see also 179–80 on her father’s arguments against giving the vote to the poor.

[279] “Je me rappelle, entre autres, la naïveté d’une jeune fille bien pensante qui disait: ‘Le vote des femmes, c’est très bien en principe; seulement si on donne le vote aux femmes, elles voteront rouge.’ Avec une même impudence, on déclare à peu près unanimement aujourd’hui en France qui si on permettait aux indigènes de l’Union française de disposer d’eux-mêmes, ils vivraient tranquillement dans leurs villages sans rien faire, ce qui serait néfaste aux intérêts supérieurs de l’Économie” (PMA 200–203, *EA* 138–39).] Translation altered: I’ve changed “one” to “people.”

Bauer's lead in quoting the whole thing, so my readers can make up their own minds.

> There are beings whose life slips by in an infantile world because, having been kept in a state of servitude and ignorance, they have no means of breaking the ceiling which is stretched over their heads. Like the child, they can exercise their freedom, but only within the universe that has been set up before them, without them. This is the case, for example, of slaves who have not raised themselves to the consciousness of their slavery. The southern planters were not altogether in the wrong in considering the negroes who docilely submitted to their paternalism as "grown-up children." To the extent they respected the world of the whites the situation of the Black slaves was exactly an infantile situation. This is also the situation of women in many civilizations; they can only submit to the laws, the gods, the customs, and the truths created by the males. Even today in western countries, among women who have not had in their work an apprenticeship of freedom, there are still many who take shelter in the shadow of men; they adopt without discussion the opinions and values recognized by their husband or their lover, and that allows them to develop childish qualities which are forbidden to adults because they are based on a feeling of irresponsibility. If what is called women's futility often has so much charm and grace, it is because it manifests a pure and gratuitous taste for existence, like the games of children; it is the absence of the serious. The unfortunate thing is that in many cases this thoughtlessness, this gaiety, these charming inventions imply a deep complicity with the world of men which they seem so graciously to be contesting, and it is a mistake to be astonished, once the structure which shelters them seems to be in danger, to see sensitive, ingenuous, and light-minded women show themselves harder, more bitter, and even more furious and cruel than their masters. It is then that we discover the difference which distinguishes them from an actual child: the child's situation is imposed upon him, whereas the woman (I mean the western woman of today) chooses it or at least consents to it. Ignorance and error are fates as inescapable as prison walls. The negro slave of the eighteenth century, the Mohammedan woman locked up[280] in a harem have no instrument, be it in thought or by astonishment or anger, which permits them to attack the civilization which oppresses them. Their behavior is defined and can be

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[280] Frechtman translates "enfermée" as "enclosed," but the Collins dictionary gives only "shut up" and "locked up."

> judged only within this given situation, and it is possible that in this situation, they realize a perfect assertion of their freedom. But once there appears a possibility of liberation, it is resignation of freedom not to exploit the possibility, a resignation which implies bad faith and which is a positive fault.[281]

Now, the problem Beauvoir has been trying to solve throughout her essay is an abstract one: how to bring the general ethical theory—that people are born with the capacity for freedom, but must still *will* themselves free, and are at fault if they don't—into conjunction with the truth that on the other hand, some people really are freer than others, because of their situation and history.

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[281] Again, Frechtman has "dishonesty" for "mauvaise foi." "Il y a des êtres dont la vie tout entière s'écoule dans un monde infantile, parce que, maintenus dans un état de servitude et d'ignorance, ils ne possèdent aucun moyen de briser ce plafond tendu au-dessus de leurs têtes; comme l'enfant lui-même ils peuvent exercer leur liberté, mais seulement au sein de cet univers constitué avant eux, sans eux. C'est le cas par exemple des esclaves qui ne sont pas encore élevés à la conscience de leur esclavage. Ce n'est pas tout à fait à tort que les planteurs du Sud considéraient comme de 'grands enfants' les noirs qui subissaient docilement leur paternalisme; dans la mesure où ils respectaient le monde des blancs, la situation des noirs était exactement une situation infantile. Dans beaucoup de civilisations, cette situation est aussi celle des femmes qui ne peuvent que subir les lois, les dieux, les mœurs, les vérités créées par les mâles. Même aujourd'hui, dans les pays d'Occident, il y a encore beaucoup de femmes, parmi celles qui n'ont pas fait dans le travail l'apprentissage de leur liberté, qui s'abritent dans l'ombre des hommes; elles adoptent sans discussion les opinions et les valeurs reconnues par leur mari ou leur amant, et cela leur permet de développer des qualités enfantines interdites aux adultes parce qu'elles reposent sur un sentiment d'irresponsabilité. Si ce qu'on appelle la futilité des femmes a souvent tant de charme et de grâce, si parfois elle possède même un caractère émouvant d'authenticité, c'est que, tout comme les jeux enfantins, elle manifeste un goût gratuit et pur de l'existence, elle est absence de sérieux. Le malheur est qu'en beaucoup de cas cette insouciance, cette gaîté, ces inventions charmantes, impliquent une profonde complicité avec ce monde des hommes qu'elles semblent si gracieusement contester, et c'est à tort qu'on s'étonne de voir, dès que l'édifice qui les abrite semble en danger, des femmes sensibles, ingénues, légères, se montrer plus âpres, plus dures, voire plus furieuses ou plus cruelles que leurs maîtres. Alors on découvre quelle différence les distingue d'un véritable enfant: à l'enfant sa situation est imposée, tandis que la femme (j'entends la femme occidentale d'aujourd'hui) la choisit ou au moins y consent. L'ignorance, l'erreur sont des faits aussi inéluctables que les murs d'une prison; l'esclave noir du XVIII^e^ siècle, la musulmane enfermée au fond d'un harem, n'ont aucun instrument qui leur permet d'attaquer, fût-ce en pensée, fût-ce par l'étonnement ou la colère, la civilisation qui les opprime: leur conduite ne se définit et ne saurait se juger qu'au sein de ce donné; et il se peut que dans leur situation, limitée comme toute situation humaine, elles réalisent une parfait affirmation de leur liberté. Mais, dès qu'une libération apparaît comme possible, ne pas exploiter cette possibilité est une démission de la liberté, démission qui implique la mauvaise foi et qui est une faute positive" (*PMA* 54–6, *EA* 37–8).

On the one hand, "freedom can always save itself" (or so Frechtman's translation has it; "se sauver" can also mean "run away").[282] But on the other hand "situations are not equivalent."[283] How can we avoid blaming the victim, without granting what would now be called "agency" only to the oppressors?

As Bauer notes, commentators disagree about the value of these moral period essays. Bauer herself finds them "marked by a certain vagueness, an imprecision of thought that disqualifies them, on my view, contra Bergoffen, from serious independent philosophical consideration."[284] This section in particular has come in for a great deal of criticism. That the discussion of "the slave" here is more satisfying than what Sartre says about slaves in *L'être et le néant* is indisputable, but that is a pretty low bar. Bauer quotes some of what he said:

> A man cannot ever abdicate his liberty; when he feigns to renounce it, he does nothing but mask it, and mask it freely. The slave who obeys chooses to obey and his choice must be renewed at each instant.[285]
>
> You can throw a man in prison, leave him there, cut off his arms, lend him wings; but his liberty remains infinite in every case. The automobile and the airplane do not change anything with regard to our liberty, and neither do the chains of the slave.[286]

That this was not a promising start for a discussion of oppression is rather obvious,[287] and Beauvoir's version is certainly preferable; but her discussion of whether and how slaves are free seems frankly muddled. And many feminists have been troubled by Beauvoir's use of the term "harem," and by the distinction she sometimes draws between "the Western woman of today" and … someone else. This is the first appearance of that crux in her published work.

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[282] "On voit que d'une part la liberté peut toujours se sauver, car elle se réalise comme dévoilement d'existence à travers ses échecs mêmes et elle peut encore se confirmer par une mort librement choisie" (PMA 45, *EA* 31).

[283] "Mais d'autre part les situations qu'elle dévoile à travers son projet vers elle-même n'apparaissent pas comme équivalentes" (PMA 45, *EA* 30–1).

[284] Bauer, *Beauvoir, Philosophy, & Feminism*, 140. Bauer sees them as mostly interesting for what they tell us about who she was (as a philosopher appropriating the work of other philosophers) before she wrote *The Second Sex*, and basically I agree, though my interest is not primarily in her philosophic method.

[285] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 72.

[286] Ibid., 86.

[287] The difficulty lies, as many have noted, in Sartre's conception of human beings as *either* subjects *or* objects; the subjectivity of the other person can thus only be experienced as a threat. Bauer, *Beauvoir, Philosophy, & Feminism*, 148: "That there is something positive about the Other's freedom is a possibility never raised by *Being and Nothingness.*"

I'll discuss the "harem" problem in more depth in Chapter 5. For now, I'll just suggest that in this passage the emphasis is not on "musulmane" but on "enfermée" (locked up, imprisoned, confined). The opposition here is not between western and "Eastern" women, or between modern women and some group of women that have been left behind; the opposition is between those who are able to free themselves and those who aren't, and there are some of these in each (geographical and temporal) category. Some harem women and some slaves, she says at the end of the paragraph, *are* free, and some western women of the past and of today are *not* free. (Indeed, in the passage about *A Doll's House* I discussed above,[288] she makes the same point, illustrating it with the example of Ibsen's heroine, who is clearly European, white, and modern.)

Rather than speak of the Situation of Woman, she uses a restrictive "qui" (who) to set apart those women to whom her statement applies: "la situation est aussi celle *des femmes qui ne peuvent que subir* les lois, les dieux, les mœurs, les vérités créées par les mâles" (the situation is also that of *women who can only submit to* the laws, gods, customs, and truths creates by males), and "[c]'est le cas *des femmes qui héritent* d'une longue tradition de soumission" (this is true of *women who inherit* a long tradition of submission)[289]—not for women who don't submit to or inherit those things. For any grammar mavens listening: there is no comma before "qui," "who," right? Even apart from that rather pedantic point, though, the paragraph wouldn't make any sense if the expression was meant to apply to women *tout court*.[290]

What Beauvoir is trying to do here, as overall, is get some people (including some women) off the hook of moral condemnation for not *assuming* their freedom.[291] You can't assume what you haven't got. But she is not at all clear here, as Bauer shows, about *which* women are exceptions to the rule of bad faith, or when, or why. (Is the situation of such men and women "limited as all human situations are limited," or is it limited in some different and special way?)[292] This is one place that fully justifies her self-criticism I quoted above: "the attitudes I examine are explained by objective conditions; I limited myself to isolating their moral significance, to such an extent that my portraits are not situated on any level of reality." The question is posed too abstractly to admit of any useful answer, or rather, it is entirely circular, since the question of who belongs in which category is itself the point at issue. (In *The Second Sex*, as we've seen, she will cut the Gordian knot by saying that the fall into immanence is an absolute evil whether the subject consents to it or not.) My purpose in discussing *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* at this juncture, though, was to show the political bent and intention behind the philosophical language: an intention to which women are, at best, an afterthought or, as here, a sketch toward what further work might investigate.

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[288] *PMA* 68–9, *EA* 48. See note 273 above.

[289] *PMA* 54, *EA* 37; *PMA* 69, *EA* 48.

[290] Women in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* are just that, women, not Woman. Beauvoir here uses the collective singular "la femme" only twice in the book: once for "la femme occidentale d'aujourd'hui," in apposition to "la musulmane," and once, near the discussion I quoted earlier about votes for women and the inhabitants of colonies, where she explores the bad faith analogy conservatives make between women and slaves on the one hand, and children on the other. "To the extent that woman or the happy or resigned slave lives in the infantile world of ready-made values, calling them 'an eternal child' or 'a grown-up child' has some meaning, but the analogy is only partial." [Dans la mesure où la femme, l'esclave heureux ou résigné vivent dans le monde infantile des valeurs toutes faites, cela a un sens de les appeler "une éternelle enfant," "un grande enfant," mais l'analogie n'est que partielle (*PMA* 204, *EA* 141).] This occurs in the context of reported speech, and speech with which Beauvoir disagrees (she is also not associating herself with the idea that slaves are "happy," though she'll have more to say about that in her next book than she does here). For the most part, women in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* are singular or plural *people*, not a Concept or a Question.

Now, I have been present in many rooms where philosophers discussed *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, and I have rarely heard it discussed as a text about colonialism. The people involved are good people, and many of them are also political people. So I am forced to conclude that in one important respect, Beauvoir's retrospective judgement of her moral period work was right*:* if she wanted to raise her voice on behalf of the oppressed, this sort of philosophical writing was not the way to do it, because nobody could hear that that was what she was trying to do. (Her next book after *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* would be *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947*.) To argue abstractly against abstraction made no sense: she would never do it again.[293]

But if Beauvoir was right to find her essay "deplorably abstract," others seem to find it deplorably *concrete*. An updated example is provided by a 2011 article by Sabine Broeck, "Re-Reading de Beauvoir 'After Race.'" Broeck writes, in explaining why she agrees with Spelman (and not with Deutscher and Simons) about the pernicious legacy of Beauvoir's work, that "even though individuals like Sartre and de Beauvoir became part of anti-colonial mobilizations, this anti-colonial sentiment never translated into a philosophical questioning of the white premises of the Enlightenment *beyond a local engagement with blatant racism in the French metropolis, or later support of the Algerian resistance*."[294] (The italics in all these quotations are mine.)

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[291] Sonia Kruks has a good explanation of this word: "the French word *assumer* … has the sense of 'taking up the responsibility for something.' The English verb 'to assume' may have a similar sense when one talks of 'assuming' a burden of some kind, or of 'assuming' a debt" ("Living on Rails: Freedom, Constraint, and Political Judgement in Beauvoir's 'Moral' Essays and *The Mandarins*," 83).

[292] See Bauer, *Beauvoir, Philosophy, & Feminism*, 167–71, for a fuller discussion of this passage, which Bauer sees as an early sketch of "an idea that is fundamental to *The Second Sex*, namely that being a woman constitutes a situation," though she also notes that "we see Beauvoir hesitating to invest herself fully in the idea." This is true; but I see that "hesitation" as grounded in an understanding that being a woman does not always constitute the *same* situation.

[293] She wouldn't let her characters in *Les mandarins* get away with it, either.

> Beyond Sartre's anti-colonial protestations in *Black Orpheus* (1948), no thorough epistemic revision of Enlightenment based on a confluence of anti-fascist, anti-capitalist and anti-colonial knowledge present in the post-World War II situation in Paris, was developed. However much the personal and collective exchanges, friendships, collaborations between and arguments across camps, between various strands of Negritude, African-American civil rights discourse, post-Stalinist Marxist analyses, psychoanalysis, late surrealism, anti-fascism, progressive ethnography, and Jewish post-Shoah ethical critiques of the collapse of western civilization created a significant *chance* for the possible generation of a relentless deconstruction of "capitalist colonialist modernity," a concerted epistemically programmatic critique did not emerge from those crosscurrents.[295]

Considered as a reading of Beauvoir's work, Broeck's article has some puzzling features. For one thing, she treats *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* as though it were a text about women, when it barely mentions them. She has a lot to say about what's wrong with Beauvoir's use of "immanence" there, but while "immanence" is an important term in *The Second Sex*, it barely appears in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, even when Beauvoir is speaking of the "sous-homme" (sub-man), who refuses transcendence and takes refuge in his own facticity. (The term does come into play briefly where she is discussing the way tyrants imprison the oppressed in "immanence" by reducing them to the status of things rather than people.)[296] When Broeck writes of "the upheaval of de Beauvoir's 'discovery' of the subjective voice of the first person female," she cannot be referring to *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, which takes an entirely genderless "view from nowhere";[297] but "first person female" is not really an accurate characterization of the "voice" of *The Second Sex*, either. When Broeck writes, "the rhetorical construction that casts woman as slave in opposition to man as master has long allowed white western women to enter critical negotiations of subjectivity in western (post)-Enlightenment thought,"[298] she may be right about *something*, but she is not right about Beauvoir's uptake of Hegel, as Eva Lundgren-Gothlin demonstrated twenty years ago.[299]

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[294] Broeck, "Re-Reading de Beauvoir 'After Race,': Woman-as-Slave Revisited" 170, emphasis added.

[295] Ibid.

[296] PMA 144–48, *EA* 100–103. The word is used a total of five times.

[297] Broeck, "Re-Reading de Beauvoir 'After Race,'" 171. Where "nous" is not a pure abstraction of the "we tend to say" variety, it may be taken to refer to existentialists as a group: a group of which Beauvoir was at that stage the only female member.

Now, I agree with Broeck that what Beauvoir says in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* about whether slaves can, or can't, have freedom, is muddled, and somewhat patronizing; this is one respect in which *The Second Sex* shows an improvement, rather than a simple continuity. However, her claim that Beauvoir reduces the slave to his slavishness by neglecting to speak of the agency of the slave revolt is false.[300] Beauvoir does so in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*—"the fact is that he decides against oppression, and it is then that the moment of emancipation really begins"[301]—and (see above) she does so in *The Second*

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[298] Ibid., 171.

[299] See Eva Lundgren-Gothlin, *Sex & Existence*. As Bauer summarizes (*Beauvoir, Philosophy, & Feminism*, 177–78): "Lundgren-Gothlin parts ways quite sharply with the usual breezy understanding of how we are to understand Hegel's place in *The Second Sex*. She claims, in effect, that Beauvoir uses the master-slave dialectic not as a philosophical *model* of the way things stand between the sexes but as a philosophical *foil*: rather than simply recalling Hegel's figures of the master and the slave to dramatize the inequality between men and women, Lundgren-Gothlin argues, Beauvoir is *contrasting* the position of women with that of the slave.... Lundgren-Gothlin sees that 'it won't do to shoehorn what Beauvoir says about the situation of women into Hegel's master-slave model.'" Bauer herself sees "a genuine reworking of the Hegelian notion of ambiguity, one motivated by Beauvoir's giving a face—and a body—to the master, and the slave"; her own analysis shows *The Second Sex's* theory as emerging from Beauvoir's realization that the analogy between women and slaves would not work, that she had to do something else, she had to think it *otherwise*.

In my view, the master/slave story in *The Second Sex* is a mobile metaphor, that sometimes applies and sometimes does not; and it is also a strong general account of the mechanism of domination that underlies everything, but is not attached to any particular identity or any particular struggle. Beauvoir is inconsistent about whether the "slave" is Black, and commentators on Beauvoir are not consistent, either. And Susan Buck-Morss makes a convincing argument in *Hegel and Haiti* that we shouldn't even assume that *Hegel's* account was univocally un-raced. Interestingly, Buck-Morss's attention to the historical particular in her contextualized reading of Hegel—bringing her to conclude that yes, the slave in the *Phenomenology* is Black—leads to a call for us to reexamine and revalue human universals, if only so that the (particular) oppressed can appeal to them in time of dire need: she suggests that we reject the *bad* universal for the aspiration toward a real one. But I really can't get into this here.

[300] Broeck, "Re-Reading de Beauvoir 'After Race,'" 174.

[301] "Le fait est qu'il se décide contre l'oppression et c'est alors que le mouvement d'affranchissement commence véritablement" (PMA 125–26, *EA 87*).

Sex as well, more clearly and vigorously. But when Beauvoir describes the revolt of the slave or the *indigène*, and when she outlines the culpability of the white slavemasters and colonizers, she tends to refer to things actual people have actually done, or could do, and for some reason Broeck feels this doesn't *count*. Beauvoir's strong attack on the self-justifications of the colonialist state—an attack that few, at that time, were willing to make—is condescendingly dismissed as mere "anecdote."

> [*Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*] moves from abstract musings at the beginning *to rather anecdotal argumentation*, densely packed with examples from de Beauvoir's contemporaneous political moment.... Over and against reading the text as a document of purely intra-philosophical speculation of the depths of existential freedom, it displays a drive towards *a very mundane concreteness*....
>
> Crucially, the text does not explore the relation between transcendence and immanence as a hybrid of interchangeable, permeable, reciprocal, and flexible locations: its empathy privileges the subject's transcendent desire for freedom over against actions by clearly and obviously separable bearers of unfreedom and immanence. It not only positions those poles as ontological givens, but also has them—*in a series of anecdotes that relate historically identifiable occurrences—acquire social and historical materiality*. Such episodes naturalize those oppositions so that, structurally speaking, it appears as if the struggle between transcendence and immanence is an inevitably binary struggle...
>
> The challenge I see here is that the text, repeatedly and without necessity of its own logic, *relies on historical contingency in its very anecdotalism: Stalinism, colonialism, lynching, French collaboration with Nazism, the resistance, are all neatly narrativized.* The effect of this is that the philosophical, and from the outset rather abstract meditation changes its mode to draw attention to *excessive historical contingency, and supposed veracity*.[302]

Yes, these matters are "narrativized;" as Merleau-Ponty put it at the time, *la guerre a eu lieu*, the war has taken place. *Something happened.* And yes, Beauvoir believes in "clearly and obviously separable bearers of unfreedom and immanence"—such people have, for instance, names, faces, and addresses, can be sent to death camps, are subjected to real (as opposed to merely epistemic) violence. How does it become possible to regard *examples* that deal with lynching, the holocaust, the massive death toll of colonial road-building, etc., as "mere anecdotes"?[303] "Why is it that de Beauvoir's transnational, multiethnic and anti-racist intellectual friendships did not lead her to an examination of her own epistemic position?"[304] I am tempted to respond that her friends, and she, had other fish to fry.

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[302] Broeck, "Re-Reading de Beauvoir 'After Race,'" 172–73.

Broeck is certainly accurate when she writes that

> [t]here are no postmodern equivocations [in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*] about the impossibility of ethical judgment, or about the contingency of diverse subjects' competing instantiations of freedom: for de Beauvoir, freedom reigns absolute, even in the ambiguity of its achievement.[305]

If the problem she sees is simply that Beauvoir's epistemology is "modern" rather than "postmodern," well, ok, we knew that. If the complaint is that she didn't reject Enlightenment values such as freedom, reason, rights—no, she didn't, and this isn't because she was regrettably "of her time"—even after such postmodern possibilities were part of the French intellectual milieu, she acknowledged and rejected them, by mocking a certain strand of Foucauldianism in *Les belles images*, and in her debate with the *Tel Quel* group.[306] The continuing complaint that Beauvoir and Sartre are insufficiently postmodern reminds me of the books written by some of their contemporaries deploring that they were insufficiently Catholic. Readers are expected to take on faith the superiority of the doctrine, and concur in pitying the poor authors who had not yet agreed to see by its light. Sorry, but *non serviam*.[307] If I am to accept that Beauvoir's view of race is "problematic," I need to hear about something *besides* her lack of a thoroughgoing "epistemic critique."[308]

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[303] I am reminded of Beauvoir's unpleasant characterization of "la pensée critique" which pretended to be above all partisan political questions by virtue of the standpoint of objective and absolute Truth; one strand of "critical thought" today finds an alibi in the *impossibility* of such Truth. But I digress.

[304] Ibid., 173.

[305] Ibid., 174.

[306] Beauvoir's contribution to a 1964 roundtable bringing together representatives of "littérature engagée" with proponents of the *nouveau roman* was printed in Yves Buin, *Que peut la littérature*? For a translation, see Beauvoir, *The Useless Mouths and Other Literary Writings*, 191–210. See also Moi, "What Can Literature Do?: Simone de Beauvoir as Literary Theorist."

[307] Actually, several of the stars of the *Tel Quel* group's epistemic revolution have since actually *become* Catholics, haven't they? Hm. Sorry, that actually *is* an anecdote, never mind.

The part of *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* that seems of most lasting usefulness for feminists is the section called "Les antinomies de l'action" (The Antinomies of Action), which doesn't talk about women *at all*, but does lay some groundwork for an intersectional analysis proper to a theory of action, which is to say, one which could acknowledge complexity without leading to paralysis.

> As we have seen, the situation of the world is so complex that one cannot fight everywhere at the same time and for everyone. In order to win an urgent victory, one has to give up the idea, at least temporarily, of serving certain valid causes; one may even be brought to the point of fighting against them. Thus, during the course of the last war, no anti-fascist party could have wanted the revolts of the natives in the British Empire to be successful;[309] on the contrary, these revolts were supported by the Fascist regimes; and yet, we cannot blame those who, considering their emancipation to be the more urgent action, took advantage of the situation to obtain it.[310]

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[308] I'm well aware that modern epistemologies have been entwined with actually oppressive practices such as slavery. However, people managed to oppose slavery before postmodern epistemology existed; indeed, Enlightenment arguments were deployed with rather marked success by people like Frederick Douglass, Wilberforce, Wollstonecraft … What do I mean by "success"? Well, The Confederate flag is still with us, but the plantation is a museum. Between "participation in a problematic discourse" and leg shackles, I will take the discourse, thanks.

And anyhow, *Where is it leading us, this signifying chain of epistemic critiques?* I drafted this section in the summer of 2016, during the run-up to the American elections: on one side of my Facebook feed, a former student was going, "yo, if Trump gets elected he will deport half my family, does anybody care?" and on the other side, some highly educated political "activists," for whom any concern with the material *effects* of the coming election on actually existing people of color, immigrants, women, etc., would be embarrassingly impure and retrograde, were debating the relative merits of two third-party candidates in order to artisanally craft a vote that would "make a statement" … in contrast to which the fate of Areli's family would certainly look like an "anecdote"…

[309] Frechtman says simply, "no anti-Fascist could have wanted," omitting to translate "parti," which would refer to a political party.

[310] "Nous l'avons vu aussi: la situation du monde est si complexe qu'on ne saurait lutter partout à la fois et pour tous. Pour remporter une victoire urgente, on devra renoncer, du moins provisoirement, à servir certaines causes valables, on pourra même être amené à les combattre. Ainsi aucun parti anti-fasciste ne pouvait souhaiter, au cours de la dernière guerre, le succès des révoltes indigènes au sein de l'empire britannique; ces révoltes étaient appuyées au contraire par les régimes fascistes; et cependant on ne blâmera pas

This strikes me as a sketch of what I'm calling her "intersectional" analysis. It matters where she chooses her examples, which are indeed "narrativized."

> The problem is complicated in practice by the fact that today oppression has more than one face; the Arabian fellah is oppressed by both the sheiks and the French or English administration;[311] which of the two enemies is to be combatted? The interests of the French proletariat are not the same as those of the natives in the colonies: which are to be served? But here the question is political before being moral: we must end by abolishing all suppression; each one must carry on his struggle in connection with that of the other and by integrating it into the general pattern. What order should be followed? What tactics should be adopted? It is a matter of opportunity and efficiency. For each one it also depends on his singular situation.[312] It is possible that he may be led to sacrifice temporarily a cause whose success is subordinate to that of a cause whose defense is more urgent; on the other hand, it is possible that one may judge it necessary to maintain the tension of revolt against a situation to which one does not wish to consent at any price; thus, during the war, when Negro leaders in America were asked to drop their own claims for the sake of the greater interest, Richard Wright refused; he thought that even in time of war his cause had to be defended. In any case, morality requires that the combatant not be blinded by the goal which he sets up for himself to the point of falling into the fanaticism of seriousness or passion. The cause which he serves must not lock itself up and thus create a new element of separation: through his own struggle he must seek to serve the universal cause of freedom.[313]

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ceux qui, considérant leur affranchissement comme l'action la plus urgente, profitaient de la situation pour l'obtenir" (*PMA* 142, *EA* 98).

[311] Frechtman: "today oppression has more than one *aspect*; the Arabian fellah is oppressed by both the sheiks and the French *and* English administration."

[312] Frechtman has "individual," which is a fine translation, but Emily Ann Parker has convinced me that Beauvoir makes a distinction between "singulière" and "individuel."

[313] "Le problème se complique pratiquement du fait qu'aujourd'hui l'oppression a plus d'un visage: le fellah arabe est opprimé à la fois par les cheiks et par l'administration française ou anglaise; lequel des deux ennemis faut-il combattre? L'intérêt du prolétariat français n'est pas le même que l'indigène colonisé: lequel servir? Mais la question ici est politique avant d'être morale; il faut aboutir à ce que toute oppression soit abolie; chacun doit mener sa lutte en liaison avec celle des autres et en l'intégrant au dessin général; quel ordre suivre? Quelle tactique adopter? c'est affaire d'opportunité et d'efficacité. Cela dépend aussi pour chacun de sa situation singulière. Il se peut qu'il soit amené à sacrifier provisoirement une cause dont le succès est subordonné à celle d'une cause plus urgente à

For each one it also depends on his singular situation. Beauvoir is clear that those who are oppressed are best positioned to carry out their own "luttes," but she has been equally clear about the bad faith of the conservative who asks, "what right does one have to will something for others?" as an excuse for washing his hands of abuses carried on by his country or his class.[314] The cause of liberty, she says, is everyone's.

Further discussion draws on two other examples from (fictionalized) American labor history. Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle*, where a union leader does not hesitate to launch a costly walkout with a doubtful outcome, hoping to raise the consciousness of the workers to the possibility of revolt, makes sense to her. But she contrasts this to an incident from a Dos Passos story, "The Adventures of a Young Man": some miners have been condemned to death as a result of a strike, and the leader must decide whether to conciliate the authorities (and save their lives), or call in the Communist Party, which will create an international *cause célèbre* that will be good for the cause of the Revolution (or at least the party), but give up the chance of actually saving the men. The Dos Passos hero chooses to save his men, and Beauvoir thinks he is right. "If it is really *men* which the movement claims to be serving, in this case it must prefer saving the lives of three concrete individuals to a very uncertain and weak chance of serving a little more effectively, by their sacrifice, the mankind to come."[315] Also, in the Steinbeck case, even as a failure the strike is an immediate and honest call to the *liberté* of the workers, whereas in the Dos Passos example refusing to settle the men's case would amount to duping them, "and the whole proletariat [would be] duped with them."[316]

Beauvoir's discussion of these dilemmas has the undeniable flavor of trolleyology, the kind of abstract and arid philosophical reasoning that Jake, the kid in Carol Gilligan's *A Different Voice*, memorably called "a math problem

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défendre; il se peut au contraire qu'on juge nécessaire de maintenir la tension de la révolte contre une situation à laquelle on ne veut à aucun prix consentir; ainsi, l'Amérique en guerre ayant demandé aux leaders noirs de renoncer dans l'intérêt général à leur revendications propres, Richard Wright a refusé, estimant que même à travers la guerre sa cause devait être défendue. En tout cas, ce qu'exige la morale, c'est que le combattant ne soit pas aveuglé par le but qu'il se propose au point de retomber dans le fanatisme du sérieux ou de la passion; la cause qu'il sert ne doit pas se refermer sur elle-même, créant un nouvel élément de séparation: à travers sa propre lutte il doit chercher à servir la cause universelle de la liberté" (PMA 128–29, *EA* 88).

[314] "[D]e quel droit voudrait-on quelque chose pour autrui?" (PMA 124, *EA* 85).

[315] "Si ce sont vraiment des hommes que le mouvement prétend servir, il doit ici préférer la vie de trois individus concrets à une très incertaine et faible chance de servir un peu plus efficacement par leur sacrifice l'humanité à venir" (PMA 218–19, *EA* 150).

[316] "[O]n dupe avec eux tout le prolétariat" (PMA 219, *EA* 324).

with humans."[317] But it is a math problem based on *real* humans. (Indeed, such situations, which really did arise during the Second World War, seem to be where the "trolley problem" came from in the first place.)[318] The dilemmas posed by the Steinbeck and Dos Passos cases have different answers, not by some categorical yardstick, but because of concrete features of their situation; the larger point she is making is that "[e]thics does not furnish recipes, any more than do science and art. One can merely propose methods."[319]

We are not really all that far, here, from the style of contextualized reasoning Gilligan's book was asking us to prefer, nor from the further extrapolation of Gilligan's view by such feminist moral philosophers as Margaret Urban Walker, who develops the idea of "moral remainders": "genuine moral demands which, because their fulfillment conflicted with other genuine moral demands, are "left over" in episodes of moral choice, and yet are not just nullified."[320] Qrescent Mali Mason describes an equally suggestive parallel between Beauvoir's statement that "ethics does not furnish recipes" and the long article in which Kimberlé Crenshaw first used the term "intersectionality." Mali Mason writes:

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[317] Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, 26.

[318] See Cass Sunstein, "How Do We Know."

At *PMA* 164, *EA* 113, Beauvoir says: "I have known a Kantian rationalist who passionately maintained that it is as immoral to choose the death of a single man as to let ten thousand die.… This position of the problem is rather abstract, for one rarely bases a choice on pure quantity." [J'ai connu un rationaliste kantien qui soutenait avec passion qu'il est aussi immoral de choisir la mort d'un seul homme que d'en laisser périr dix mille.… Cette position du problème est d'ailleurs assez abstraite, car il est bien rare qu'on fonde le choix sur la pure quantité.] But she would later be equally unsatisfied by the abstract level on which she responded to the "problème," and it is hard to disagree. As Sartre says somewhere, "on pense mal quand on pense par problème."

[319] "La morale, pas plus que la science et l'art, ne fournissent des recettes. On peut proposer seulement des méthodes" (*PMA* 194, *EA* 134).

[320] Margaret Urban Walker, "Moral Understandings: Alternative 'Epistemology' for a Feminist Ethics," 20–1. While Beauvoir would have been quite unsympathetic to the "ethic of care" background on which Walker's ideas emerge, some further echoes are suggestive. Opposing what she calls the "universalism" of most ethical theory, Walker proposes an "alternative moral epistemology [which] holds … that adequacy of moral understanding decreases as its form approaches generality through abstraction." Here and elsewhere, she talks about the importance of narrative, and other extraphilosophical modes of inquiry, in reaching moral understanding:

"A lively interest in understanding how various factors (semantic, institutional, political) shape our ability to arrive at shared interpretations is needed, as is a questioning of barriers between philosophical, literary, critical, and empirical investigations of moral life. These endeavors can, however, be carried out in a cheerfully piecemeal fashion; we need not expect or require the results to eventuate in a comprehensive systematization."

> It is important to remember that Crenshaw's initial argument for intersectionality is based in the field of law. She has in mind a particular way in which particular deployments of antidiscrimination laws tend to erase or render incomprehensible the experiences of Black women. In this sense, they are grounded in their attendance to practical action and in their calls for policy change.[321]

My point here, though, is simply that statements like "lynching is an absolute evil"[322] predate any mobilization as an analogy within Beauvoir's feminism. "When one fights for the emancipation of oppressed *indigènes*, the liberation of American Blacks, the establishment of a Palestinian State, the socialist revolution, it is obvious that one aims at a long-term goal." But "the tasks we have set up for ourselves and which, though exceeding the limits of our lives, are ours, must find their meaning in themselves and not in a mythical End of History."[323] "When one fights [*Quand on lutte*]" does not *argue* that one should fight for these things, it assumes that of course one does, it tells us something about who "one [*on*]" *is*, something that seemed at the time too obvious to say.

Oh, by the way, did you know that Simone de Beauvoir was concerned about "the establishment of a Palestinian state" in the 1940s? If you did know that, thank a French teacher. Because Frechtman gives only: "When one fights for the emancipation of oppressed natives, or the socialist revolution, he … " Perhaps he thought American readers would be confused about what sort of state Beauvoir might have been hoping for (and also about what the "liberation" of American Blacks might consist in).[324] But why ask why? Compared to Parshley, or to whoever made the cuts in the first English version of *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947*, Frechtman is a prince among translators, even if the alterations I've needed to correct all tend to point the reader away from the text's historical and political specificity.

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[321] Qrescent Mali Mason, "Intersectionality, Ambiguity and Feminist Ethics."

[322] "Lyncher un nègre ou supprimer cent oppositionels, ce ne sont pas deux actes analogues. Le lynchage est un mal absolu" (*PMA* 211, *EA* 146). Frechtman has eliminated "un nègre."

[323] "Quand on lutte pour l'affranchissement des indigènes opprimés, la libération des noirs d'Amérique, l'édification d'un État palestinien, la révolution socialiste, il est évident qu'on vise un but à longue échéance … les tâches que nous nous proposons et qui, tout en débordant les limites de nos vies, sont nôtres, doivent trouver leur sens en elles-mêmes et non dans une fin mythique de l'Histoire" (*PMA* 184–85, *EA* 128). Where Frechtman has "a mythical Historical end," I've changed this to "a mythical End of History," because Hegel.

[324] This is a legitimately complicated question, and to answer it would require more research (in the *Temps Modernes* archive, perhaps) than I can undertake right now. However, Claude Lanzmann's autobiography, *Le lièvre de Patagonie*, suggests that he, and the *Temps Modernes* team in general, strongly supported the rights of Palestinian Arabs alongside a

Beauvoir's own lists of worthwhile "luttes" are not always the same. Other examples are drawn from the French revolution, the Resistance to the Nazis, "the insurrections in Paris and Lyons at the beginning of the nineteenth century" and "the revolts in India."[325] (Despite the centrality of the proletariat to her views, she reserves judgment as to whether the USSR represents a truly socialist society: there is bad faith on both sides of the question and, as we saw, "les Staliniens" can be an example of the serious man, if they give up the right to think for themselves.)[326] She does not yet include (anywhere) "la lutte des femmes." She would continue till the end of her life fighting for all the others, and resolving the "antinomies" based on the concrete situations she saw.

And oddly enough, despite the text's aridity and its other lapses, *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* does seem to have found some readers. Remember that sentence Audre Lorde quoted, in the peroration to "The Master's Tools"?[327] It doesn't come from *The Second Sex*. Here it is in context, in the opening section of *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*.

> There was Stalingrad and there was Buchenwald, and neither of the two wipes out the other. Since we do not succeed in fleeing it, let us therefore try to look the truth in the face. Let us try to assume our fundamental ambiguity. *It is in the knowledge of the genuine conditions of our lives that we must draw our strength to live and our reasons for acting* [emphasis added].[328]

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belief in the legitimacy of the Jewish state of Israel. (Best known outside of France for his film *Shoah*, Lanzmann was Beauvoir's companion and shared her apartment from 1952–59; afterwards they remained friends and close collaborators.)

[325] "[L]es insurrections de Paris et de Lyon, au début du XIXième, ou les révoltes des Indes" (PMA 217, *EA* 149).

[326] PMA 180, *EA* 125.

[327] Lorde, "Master's Tools," 113.

[328] "Il y a eu Stalingrad et Buchenwald et aucun des deux n'efface l'autre. Puisque nous ne réussissons pas à la fuir, essayons donc de regarder en face la vérité. Essayons d'assumer notre fondamentale ambiguïté. C'est dans la connaissance des conditions authentiques de notre vie qu'il nous faut puiser la force de vivre et des raisons d'agir" (PMA 12–13, *EA* 8).

10 Last Thoughts

Finally, let me also put my earlier quotation—"She was always, and consistently, a woman of the left"—in a little more context, by handing the microphone back to the editors of the *European Journal of Women's Studies*, who have more standing to explain than I.

> When the Special Issue on *The Second Sex* was planned and discussed … few of us supposed that in March 1999 NATO would begin a campaign of systematic bombing in Yugoslavia. As a result of this action, one of our Associate Editors, Jasmina Lukic from Belgrade, is now living in a city which is under daily threat of destruction … The tragic irony of this new war in Europe is that it recalls only too vividly words that de Beauvoir wrote in the third volume of her autobiography.… De Beauvoir, like everyone of her generation, rejoiced in the beginning of a new peace and welcomed the Allied military forces that had defeated the Germans. Men in uniforms were agents of a just war and a hopeful peace. Only a few years later, many of those same uniforms had become not the symbols of peace, but the representatives of repression and a new form of cultural and economic materialism, that of the USA.… What is striking about rereading *Force of Circumstance* in 1999 is how much of the book is dominated by a discussion of world politics, and in particular the attempt of de Beauvoir and Sartre to identify and articulate a politics which did not embrace either the free market ideology of the USA or the repression of state socialism.…
>
> In re-reading de Beauvoir we need, therefore, to recognize how much Politics with a capital 'P' were part of de Beauvoir's world.… It is very easy to read de Beauvoir, and particularly *The Second Sex*, and recognize the dynamics of relations with individual men or the continuing misogyny of many aspects of our culture. But, at the same time as we do this, we may be in danger of forgetting [that] she was always and consistently a woman of the Left. She identified with those politics which appeared to empower and improve the living conditions of the poor and the disadvantaged.… Rethinking the relationship of women to formal politics still requires discussion and debate. Nevertheless, at this moment of writing, Jasmina Lukic and every other woman in Yugoslavia and Kosovo is living in real physical danger. Equally, all women in the Balkans face the terrible prospect of the death of others, the absolute disruption of their lives and the destruction of civil society. It is one of

> the great strengths of de Beauvoir's feminism that she placed it outside the Anglo-American discourse of legal rights and institutional emancipation. In celebrating *The Second Sex* at this particular and specific historical moment we should perhaps remember in particular de Beauvoir's dissent from the assumptive world which has brought war to Europe.[329]

So to sum up my argument so far: here is the third example where I answer "*we* wouldn't say that *now*" with "true enough, but you say that like it's a bad thing." Also, do you really mean "we wouldn't say that *now*" or "we wouldn't say that *here*"? And just who do *you* think "we" are?

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[329] WISE, "Editorial," 260–62.

CHAPTER 4

Beauvoir and Blackness

Nous faisons ici le procès des mystifiés et des mystificateurs.
FRANTZ FANON, *Peau noire masques blancs*[1]

I'll return to some of the critiques of Beauvoir's "ethnocentricity" later. But first, I want to change the conversation by situating Beauvoir in the left context of her time: which is to say, intellectually between Wright and Fanon; and politically, between Europe and America.

1 Two-Way Streets: Richard Wright, Psychology, and Politics

Beauvoir always acknowledged Richard Wright as a good friend and a key intellectual influence. Margaret Simons's groundbreaking 1997 essay followed her lead, taking up Paul Gilroy's challenge in *The Black Atlantic* to look at the influence Wright has had on the European thinkers he came into contact with.[2] Gilroy's overall agenda was first to restore awareness of the Black contribution to modernity, showing that its intellectual ships sailed in both directions, and second to make clear the limitations of a simple kind of Afrocentric Black nationalism, "to demonstrate why the polarisation between essentialist and anti-essentialist theories of black identity has become unhelpful."[3] (There's a parallel to Toril Moi's discussion of a similar impasse with reference to sex and gender.)[4] In the decades since Gilroy's book appeared, his view seems to have largely won out: see, for instance, Satya Mohanty's call for the study of "alternative modernities," a "disaggregated modernity"—"[c]ultural chauvinism is toxic"—and the work of Duncan McEachern Yoon and others on excavating "Bandung

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[1] "We here put on trial both those who have been swindled and those who swindled them." Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire masques blancs* (hereinafter PNMB), 25; *Black Skin, White Masks*, translated by Charles Lam Markmann (hereinafter BSWM), 17. Throughout this chapter and the chapter that follows, I will give page numbers from Markmann's translations in the Pluto Press edition, and my translations are based on his, but I have made a very large number of changes, some of them significant. This particular passage, for instance, is almost unrecognizable.

[2] Margaret Simons, "Richard Wright, Simone de Beauvoir, and *The Second Sex*."

[3] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, x.

[4] Toril Moi, *What is A Woman?*, especially vi-xvi and 3–21.

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Humanism."[5] The motto of the Caribbean Philosophers' Association—"shifting the geography of reason"—is a beautiful way of stating this larger project. As Jane Anna Gordon explained at the Diverse Lineages of Existentialism conference, "to do rigorous work we need to understand the transnational networks our figures worked in."[6]

Working along those lines, then, Simons credits Richard Wright's influence with moving Beauvoir beyond an apolitical consideration of ethics in the "moral period" works. The break between Beauvoir's early philosophical essays and *The Second Sex* seems less sharp to me (see chapter 3 for discussion of Beauvoir's critique of nationalism and colonialism in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*). But I am otherwise very much in agreement with Simons's view that Wright's analysis helped Beauvoir see and explain the simultaneously free and unfree situation of women.[7]

It's important that Wright offers an account of Blackness that we could call social constructionist, without falling into a purely "humanist" race-neutral position.[8] Gilroy quotes Wright: "the word Negro in America means something not racial or biological, but something purely *social*, something made in the United States."[9] And yet obviously, for Wright, race remains the central fact of Black lived experience, and those who seek to deny this become, quite literally, crazy. This is very close to Beauvoir's position.[10] "If woman did not exist, men would have invented her. They did invent her. But she also exists."[11]

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[5] See Columbia University Institute for Comparative Literature and Society, "Bandung Humanisms." See also Satya Mohanty, "Literature to Combat Cultural Chauvinism: From Indian Literature to World Literature," and Duncan Yoon, "The Global South and Cultural Struggles: On the Afro-Asia People's Solidarity Organization."

[6] Jane Anna Gordon, Opening Plenary, Diverse Lineages of Existentialism conference. St. Louis, Missouri, June 2014.

[7] See now also Lori Marso, *Politics with Beauvoir: Freedom in the Encounter*, 122–47, for a parallel account.

[8] The scare quotes around "humanism" are mine, not his—what I mean is that he didn't use "humanism" as an excuse to pretend race, or racism, did not exist.

[9] Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 149, quoted from Richard Wright, *White Man, Listen!*, 80.

[10] "To decline to accept such notions as the eternal feminine, the Black soul, and the Jewish character, is not to deny that Jews, Blacks, women exist today—such a denial would not represent a liberation for those concerned, but rather a flight from reality. It is clear that no woman can claim without bad faith to situate herself beyond her sex." [Refuser les notions d'éternel féminin, d'âme noire, de caractère juif, ce n'est pas nier qu'il y ait des Juifs, des Noirs, des femmes: cette négation ne représente pas pour les intéressés une libération, mais une fuite inauthentique. Il est clair qu'aucune femme ne peut prétendre sans mauvaise foi se situer par-delà son sexe (*DS* 1:13).] See chapter 1 above for discussion of this point in a different context.

[11] "[S]i [la femme] n'existait pas, les hommes l'auraient inventée. Ils l'ont inventée. Mais elle existe aussi sans leur invention" (*DS* 1:303).

Simons lists a number of other ways Wright importantly influenced Beauvoir's understanding of oppression, including "his subjectivist approach, his critical analysis of the limitations of Marxist ideology … and his militant engagement."[12] She sees Wright as passing on to Beauvoir W. E. B. DuBois's idea of "double consciousness," which served as a model for Beauvoir's concept of women as split and divided against ourselves: both integrated into and alienated from the dominant culture which defines us as defective human beings. She also notes Wright's demystification of "the claims by segregationists that blacks are happy and contented with their naturally inferior place in society" as a parallel to Beauvoir's debunking of myths about women, quoting from *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947*: "the famous laughter of blacks … is often only a mask that the black dons in the presence of whites because he knows that it is demanded of him."[13] Beauvoir's crucial abandonment of the concept of "happiness" and her choice to speak instead of "freedom," which I discussed in chapter 1 above, may thus rest in part on Wright's analysis, and the illustrations he provides.[14]

Another important confluence between Beauvoir's thinking and Wright's has to do with the specifically *psychological* account *The Second Sex* provides of the damage oppression does. Jay Garcia's 2012 book, *Psychology Comes to Harlem*, has underscored the centrality of psychoanalysis and related versions of psychological and social research to Wright's work as both novelist and activist. When Wright dedicated himself to exposing "'the unconscious machinery of race relations' in modern American life," which led ineluctably to violence and might lead to fascism, he seems to have meant "unconscious" in a literally Freudian way.[15] Like many progressives in the 1940s, Wright "recognize[d] the field as a resource for alternative and dissident interpretations of the racialized social order";[16] his collaboration with Fredric Wertham to found the Lafarge Clinic in Harlem showed on a small scale that segregation could be reframed as a "public health problem" without being de-politicized;[17] in novels and essays, his analysis of the relationship between frustration and aggression, between fear and rage, diagnosed a sickness that damaged both whites and Blacks and called into question the patriotic idea of America as an ethical ideal. For instance, his introduction to *Black Metropolis* drew attention to "how *any* human beings can become mangled, how *any* personalities can become distorted when men are caught in the psychological trap of being emotionally committed to living a life of freedom that is denied them,"[18] and quoted *Life* magazine's analysis of "Myrdal's notion of dissonance in American consciousness":

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[12] Simons, "Richard Wright," 176. Simons sees Wright's "phenomenological descriptions of black experience of oppression" as an alternative both to Myrdal's social science approach and "the economic reductionism of Marxist orthodoxy," though she notes also that "[h]is critique of liberal individualism is as resounding as his critique of Marxism" (181).

[13] Simons, "Richard Wright," 178.

[14] "[T]here is no way to measure someone else's happiness and it is always easy to declare that the situation one wants to impose on him is a happy one: in particular, those who one condemns to stagnation one declares happy, under the pretext that happiness is immobility." [[I]l n'y a aucune possibilité de mesurer le bonheur d'autrui et il est toujours facile de déclarer heureuse la situation qu'on veut lui imposer: ceux qu'on condamne à la stagnation en particulier, on les déclare heureux sous prétexte que le bonheur est immobilité (*DS* 1:31).]

[15] Jay Garcia, *Psychology Comes to Harlem: Rethinking the Race Question in Twentieth-Century America*, 14.

> The dilemma, of course, is this: the basic tenets of the American creed make all men free and equal in rights. Yet in fact we deny equal rights to our largest minority, and observe a caste system which we not only criticize in other nations but refuse to defend in ourselves. This makes us living liars—a psychotic case among the nations.[19]

When Faulkner, who had encouraged "the Negro" to "go slow" in demanding human rights, won the Nobel Prize in 1950, Wright remarked, "[i]t would be a great mistake to feel that the Negro was the only victim of the white South's proud neurosis."[20]

Medical and moral language are inextricable in terms like "neurosis" and "psychotic"; Garcia convincingly traces this discourse through a number of writers who followed Wright (Chester Himes, Lillian Smith, Ralph Ellison, to some extent James Baldwin), and reminds us that the case in *Brown v. Board of Education* was built largely from expert evidence about the psychological damage done to children by segregation in schools. So from Wright's perspective, and from a mid-century perspective generally, Myrdal's idea of "pathology" seems less problematic than it did to Simons (and might seem to most readers now).

Narrative depictions of psychological dysfunction (glossed as such) in Wright's work might be multiplied almost endlessly—Bigger Thomas in *Native*

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[16] Ibid., 53.

[17] Wertham said that psychotherapy must be discussed "at *this* time and at *this* place" (Garcia, *Psychology Comes to Harlem*, 62).

[18] Richard Wright, "Introduction" to St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*, xxvi. See Garcia, *Psychology Comes to Harlem*, 40.

[19] Wright, *Black Metropolis*, 41.

[20] Michel Fabre, *The World of Richard Wright*, 89.

Son is the best-known example. Less melodramatically, in his autobiographical *Black Boy* Wright describes African Americans "transferring" hatred to other African Americans, and explores problems of "adjustment," "self-hatred," and being at war with reality. Passages like his descriptions of co-workers in a hotel—"how smoothly the black boys acted out the roles that the white race had mapped out for them … [T]hey knew … what not to aspire to"[21]—make it easy to understand why *Black Boy* was attacked for "negative portrayals" of African American life, even though Wright is describing a mutually reinforcing system: "Whites would rather have had negros who stole, work for them than negros with self-respect."[22] Reading this, it's hard not to be struck by the similarities to Beauvoir's account of the "feminine" personality formed as a result of male domination, whether directly or through complicity or both—the "negative portrayals" of women for which she, too, was attacked, especially in discussions of her fiction.[23]

But Wright and the others Garcia discusses wrote with an ultimately therapeutic aim. (Even the decision in *Brown v. Board* can be read that way.) And as I've said in chapter 1 above, Beauvoir was relentlessly opposed to both the formal institution of psychotherapy, and its prevalence as a cultural practice—she saw it as a quintessentially American project of conformity and normalization.[24] She would not change her mind about this: the late novel *Les belles images* puts therapy in parallel with the "reassuring lies" of the Catholic Church and technocratic capitalism, and the dénouement turns on the heroine's success in resisting "treatment" for her daughter. So, as with her use of Stekel, and of Freudians generally, we could see Beauvoir following Wright's descriptive account but unhooking herself from the prescriptions that follow.

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[21] Richard Wright, *Black Boy*, in *Later Works*, 188.

[22] Ibid., 191. See Garcia, *Psychology Comes to Harlem*, 43.

[23] For fuller discussion, see Altman, "Beauvoir as Literary Writer."

[24] In this, she was closer to the Jamaican C. L. R. James, who, while, in Garcia's words, "buoyed" by his "wonderful" meeting with Wright, still judged psychoanalytic thought in the modern world not liberatory but "a refuge from social ills" and "found 'the football that American intellectuals had made of it' disturbing" (Garcia, *Psychology Comes to Harlem*, 100). James lived in the United States between 1938 and 1953, after he'd already written *The Black Jacobins*; his book *American Civilization* was written quickly, before he was deported. Beauvoir did not read *The Black Jacobins* until much later.

The irony that "American" psychoanalysis was almost entirely the creation of European émigrés would take entirely too long to follow up here, but it's worth noting, as Garcia does, the importance of Freud to studies of fascism such as Adorno's *The Authoritarian Personality* which in turn influenced Wright, Wertham, *Brown v. Board*, etc. Adorno's work of this period also combined what we would call "theory" with empirical social science methodology deployed on a large scale; his psychohistorical exploration of fascism did not prevent criticisms rather similar to Beauvoir's of the negative cultural effects of popular Freudianism from emerging in his *Minima Moralia.* The methodologies seemed complementary rather than conflicting. See Stefan Müller-Doohm, *Adorno: An Intellectual Biography*.

It's easy to trace continuities between Wright's discussion of American pathologies and a term in current use, "historical trauma." (Ta-Nehisi Coates makes this connection: the title of his powerful 2015 book, *Between the World and Me,* is a line from an early poem by Wright.) But the distinction Wright and Beauvoir make between "happy" and "free" is not much heard today. Wright and Beauvoir are both concerned with the psychological damage oppression does, on the level of what we might now call "affect." Affect matters. But the question of who affectively experiences/feels the effect of oppression, and the question "who is oppressed," are distinct questions: while the epistemology of affect is important, it does not block other epistemologies.[25] That seems to me, for lack of a better term, healthy. As Beauvoir makes clear in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté,* situations do occur that pit the need of one oppressed group against another in irreconcilable ways. If the measure of oppression is taken *solely* in terms of affect, a kind of "race to the bottom" or competition around who feels worse becomes inevitable; even though all the feelings involved may be both authentic and legitimate, the resulting negative spiral can do damage to all concerned, without pointing toward solutions.

We should remember, too, that Bigger Thomas is hardly presented as a moral exemplar: Wright's view included the idea that racism creates criminals, but criminality as such is not glorified or romanticized as "resistance." This seems to me consistent with Beauvoir's refusal to romanticize women damaged by oppression: as I discussed above, for her, the harmed person could not be good, and that was part of the harm.

2 Lost in Translation

Simons also points out that by "presenting Wright as her mentor, her guide not only to the sights of Harlem, but to the intellectual terrains of racism, Beauvoir's narrative legitimizes Wright's analysis—perhaps the reason that an American edition of *America Day by Day 1947* did not appear until 1953, with most of the discussion of Myrdal's text and the passages in which Wright appears to be teaching Beauvoir deleted."[26] Michael Barber gives more detail:

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[25] Consider this, from *White Man, Listen*: "Recently a young woman asked me: 'But would your ideas make people happy?' and before I was aware of what I was saying, I heard myself answering with a degree of frankness that I rarely, in deference to politeness, permit myself in personal conversation: my dear, I do not deal in happiness, I deal in meaning" (xxix).

> Although Beauvoir's preoccupation with the anti-black racism she experiences in the United States appears in the first English translation, the translation fails to convey the intensity of her concern since it omits at least fifteen discussions, often pointed, about race relations, including Beauvoir's most extensive reflections on race in the United States, an important account of a visit to an African-American church with Richard Wright, and a rather long discussion of the treatment of African-Americans within the cotton industry in the South.[27] When one considers these key omissions, including a regular deleting of comments on labor relations, red-baiting, and Truman's foreign policy, with which Beauvoir often introduces her daily entries, one realizes that the English translation has been depoliticized and actually so deformed that it is hardly the same book.[28]

So while it's tempting (and not incorrect) to attribute the deletion of Wright's role to the same American racism he and Beauvoir were both analyzing, I'd argue that's just one part of a broader depoliticization of the texts, a refusal to take political ideas seriously.

This may have been the first such transatlantic "revision" of a Beauvoir text but it was hardly the last. Something similar happened with *Les mandarins*, Beauvoir's 1954 "condition of France" novel about the post-war period. While the central ethical drama of *Les mandarins* involves French intellectuals coming to terms with the aftermath of the Second World War, a significant portion of its action unfolds in the United States. Its clearest fictional precursor is John Dos Passos's trilogy, *U.S.A.*: both books cogently explore the failings of almost every faction on the left, and yet leave us with a sense that a leftist perspective remains urgent, that no other road is possible. *Les mandarins* was reviewed in the *New Republic* under the title "Simone Go Home," even though, as Bill McBride has shown, the translation softened its politics to the point of incoherence. (McBride points in particular to the disappearance of the word "hegemony" from Beauvoir's descriptions of post-war American domination.)[29]

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[26] Simons, "Richard Wright," 181; *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947* (hereinafter *AJ*), 181–82.

[27] *AJ* 231–42, 265–69, 207–10.

[28] Barber, "Phenomenology and the Ethical Bases of Pluralism," 161–62.

[29] William McBride, "The Conflict of Ideologies in *The Mandarins*: Communism and Democracy, Then and Now," 33–45. The negative review (Donald Malcolm, "Simone Go

The de-politicized translation of *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947* wasn't the first time a publisher thought Americans were too stupid, or too lazy, to understand the political context and implication of European intellectual work, and it wasn't the last time, either. How many generations of American graduate students devoured Roland Barthes's *Mythologies* without realizing that something like a third of the original book had been silently deleted, eliminating all the topical references and distorting Barthes's political critique? The lack of cultural and political context that accompanied the importation of Foucault and Derrida led American readers to lump them together as "post-structuralists," to the irritation of both. Another example is the selling of the "New French Feminism" in the 1980s.[30] Mistranslations of Fanon's work could hardly conceal that he was a political writer, but with mistakes like changing "l'expérience vécue du noir" to "The Fact of Blackness" Charles Lam Markmann certainly made a Parshley-sized hash of his views.[31] Fair or unfair, the assumption that "American readers won't get it" has been a self-fulfilling prophecy: the more we receive our "theory" with the politics excised, the less likely we are to understand, or even notice it, when it *is* there. *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947* diagnosed this problem, as well as falling victim to it.[32] Beauvoir's frustration that

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Home") is cited in the introduction to Sally Scholz and Shannon M. Musset, eds., *The Contradictions of Freedom: Philosophical Essays on Simone de Beauvoir's* The Mandarins, 22.

[30] See Christine Delphy, "The Invention of French Feminism: An Essential Move," and Claire Moses, "Made in America: 'French Feminism' in Academia."

[31] See Nigel Gibson, "Fanon and the Pitfalls of Cultural Studies," and David Macey, *Frantz Fanon: A Biography*, 25–6. Richard Serrano describes pointing out the mistranslation to a keynote speaker who was using it in a project on "the poetics of Fanon": "The speaker informed me that others had already pointed out these errors to him, but added that he considered the mistranslation of Fanon a crucial part of the text's history" (*Against the Postcolonial: Francophone Writers at the End of the French Empire*, 174).

[32] While the 1998 translation by Carol Cosman restored the cuts, I noticed that all the English-language versions continue to drop "1947" from the title, presumably to increase sales by making the book seem less "dated"; but the result distorts Beauvoir's intentions by implying a more totalizing view: the date implied a more local and direct political "take" on rapidly changing conditions that the writer might hope to influence. (Around the same time Sartre was arguing that engaged writing should be designed to be consumed quickly on the spot, like bananas; if a text became "dated," that was a *good* sign rather than a problem [*What is Literature*, 74].) In contrast, a 1969 translation from Buenos Aires is titled *Norteamérica al desnudo*, which perhaps unbalances Beauvoir's view too far in the other direction.

The cover of the new British paperback edition shows an African-American couple in 1940s hats sitting on an old-fashioned bus (we see them from the back); but the cover of the newer American edition is a nice picture of a young, rather innocent-looking Simone alone, looking out diagonally over a snowy street that could be anywhere—the same picture appears on *La force de l'âge* and indeed on a number of books about Beauvoir. The hardly anyone in the United States was willing to discuss, for instance, the implications of the atomic bomb, or the rise of McCarthyism, is palpable throughout the long sections about her visits to college campuses: both students and faculty members seem clueless, careerist, cowed, or simply paralyzed by the prevailing conformism.

That *The Second Sex* also came to American audiences in a significantly truncated and distorted form is well known. But not all of what I'm going on about can be blamed on Parshley or his editors.[33] Which parts do *you* assign? Which parts do you skip because "they won't understand it anyway, and it will take too long to explain"? I asked a bunch of reasonably clever college seniors what they already knew about Marx, what associations they had. No one spoke at first; then one of them raised her hand and ventured, "Was he the one who worked on the fish?" (She must have been thinking of Darwin.) Let me be clear: *I don't think this was the student's fault.*

And you know, Audre Lorde was a woman of the international left, too. When that class of seniors came to read *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, I gave them a reading quiz that included:

- Who were the Rosenbergs?
- When Audre and Ginny ride the bus downtown singing "union songs," what are these?
- Why don't the women in the factory use the protective shields on their machines?
- What is a "speedup"?
- Why is Rhea crying? (Answer: she's a Party member, and they've threatened to exclude her for living with Audre.)
- Why was Eudora living in Mexico? (Answer: she's a journalist, and she's been blacklisted.)

Stopping to explain these things did slow us down in getting to the famous passage about "the very house of difference," but I think it added to their understanding of the book, and of American history.

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current French paperback uses Bernice Abbott's dreamy-looking headshot, and in the excerpt on the back cover Beauvoir describes her text as tentative and subjective, and draws attention to her own incompetence. (Ironically, my favorite cover is the one on the 1953 Dudley translation: a stylized design based on the American flag, with one rather lopsided star.)

[33] Anna Bogic ("Uncovering the Hidden Actors with the Help of Latour: The 'Making' of *The Second Sex*") has painstakingly excavated the archive of correspondence to show Parshley in a more sympathetic light, as having fought unsuccessfully for a better translation than the one we've all been blaming him for.

And to go back to the "Master's Tools" essay I discussed above: the anthologized version of this piece many of us religiously teach does end, as I said above, with the strong peroration quoting Beauvoir. Interestingly, though, an earlier version of the text exists, and in the earlier version something came *after* that paragraph. Lorde gave the last word to Aimé Césaire, the revolutionary poet and statesman from Martinique.

> Prospero, you are the master of illusion.
> Lying is your trademark.
> And you have lied so much to me
> (Lied about the world, lied about me)
> That you have ended by imposing on me
> An image of myself.
> Underdeveloped, you brand me, inferior,
> That is the way you have forced me to see myself
> I detest that image! What's more, it's a lie!
> But now I know you, you old cancer,
> And I know myself as well.
>
> CALIBAN, in AIME CÉSAIRE's *A Tempest*[34]

Why did the anthology-makers cut this? "Oh, people won't know who Aimé Césaire was." Too right, they won't. And cuts like this are why.[35]

Oh, and then look: the first essay in *Sister Outsider* is about Lorde's trip to Moscow, where she is pleased to find that the Russian people aren't racist and that health care is provided free. And we don't teach that essay because … because … well … So there is an endless regress here.

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[34] This version of Lorde's text circulates on-line, with the source given as follows: Lorde, Audre. "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House." 1984. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Ed. Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press. 110–14. 2007. Print. I found it at https://www.muhlenberg.edu/media/contentassets/pdf/campuslife/SDP%20Reading%20Lorde.pdf.

However, all the editions of *Sister Outsider* I have been able to locate omit this ending. So I am unable to determine at what stage the cut was made, or whether the decision was Lorde's or someone else's. I think I remember a stand-alone pamphlet version of the essay, with a stapled cardboard cover, being sold in feminist bookstores in the early 1980s; this may be that, but I can't find it, and must leave any further investigation for others.

[35] And anyhow, I have international students from Africa and the Caribbean in my classes now. Maybe they do know who Césaire and Senghor were. *And maybe if they don't, they need to.*

But can it be right to present this material in a way that denies our students and readers, Black and white, full knowledge of the sources from which the authors we revere drew some of their analysis, and some of their strength?

• • •

To return to Gilroy's point about the "two-way streets," and by way of filling in the historical record, I want to underline that Wright was present, active, and important at the founding moment of *Les Temps Modernes*, as well as helping to co-found the Paris-based Pan-Africanist *Présence Africaine* right around the same time.[36] A translation of Wright's "Fire and Cloud" appeared in the very first issue of *Les Temps Modernes* in October 1945. It comes after Sartre's famous "présentation," where he called for the writer to be "engagé" and announced an "anthropologie synthétique," and right before Merleau-Ponty's important argument for intellectual responsibility, "La guerre a eu lieu" (The War Took Place). Wright's stories in this and later issues aren't relegated to the back of the book where we find the sociologically and politically valuable *Documents* that are meant to contribute to that "synthetic anthropology;" he's in the front section with the political and literary theorists. The 1946 special issue *Les Temps Modernes* devoted to the United States included another story of Wright's, and other texts he helped them select; they serialized *Black Boy* alongside with excerpts from Beauvoir's *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* and Sartre's *Qu'est ce que la littérature?*, which both mention it. Wright was clearly someone the *Temps Modernes* group were thinking *with*, not just someone they were thinking *about*.[37]

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[36] Doris Ruhe draws our attention to the close collaboration between the two journals: "Sartre's attention was drawn to African and Caribbean authors, if not earlier, thanks to his work on a 'committee of support' for the review *Présence Africaine* which Alioune Diop had just founded, a committee which also included such other intellectuals as Richard Wright, André Gide, Albert Camus, and Michel Leiris." [L'attention de Sartre fut attirée au plus tard sur les auteurs d'Afrique et des Caraïbes grâce à son travail dans un "comité de patronage" pour la revue *Présence Africaine* que venait de fonder Alioune Diop, comité auquel appartenaient également d'autres intellectuels tels que Richard Wright, André Gide, Albert Camus et Michel Leiris (Ruhe, "Femmes, juifs, noirs," 79–80).] The first issue of *Présence Africaine* (October-November 1947) included Alioune Diop, "Niam N'Goura, or *Présence Africaine*'s raison d'être," translated by Richard Wright and Thomas Diop (190–91). The French original appears in the same issue (7–14). So does Wright's "Bright and Morning Star," translated by Boris Vian, and Gwendolyn Brooks's poem "The Ballad of Pearl May Lee." Wright, working with the journal's editorial board until 1950, was also responsible for *Présence Africaine*'s publishing Frank Marshall Davis, Samuel Allen, Horace Cayton, and C. L. R. James. Like *La Revue du Monde Noir* in the early 1930s, *Présence Africaine* also published an English edition. See Toro Kiuchi and Yoshinobu Hakutani, *Richard Wright: A Documented Chronology*, and Brent Hayes Edwards, "The Uses of Diaspora."

From its first issue, *Les Temps Modernes* was the voice of an independent and anti-imperialist French left.[38] As Sonia Kruks notes, its editors were early and consistent opponents of colonialism.

> Anticolonial resistance had begun in Vietnam by 1945. As early as 1946, the journal *Les Temps Modernes* (for which Beauvoir was a member of the editorial board) took a firmly anticolonial position. Indeed, the journal adhered to a pro-independence position for all the French colonies well before most of the French left, including the highly influential Communist Party, did so. Most of the left urged a degree of reform in the French colonies, but until the late 1950s, saw actual independence as far fetched.[39]

Beauvoir's level of responsibility for *Les Temps Modernes* is often not marked as clearly as it should be. (Disappointingly, even the excellent *New History of French Literature*, which is organized through a series of significant events serving as windows on larger movements, covers the publication of the first issue of *Les*

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[37] My point here is to undo any impression that Beauvoir was simply appropriating or "sampling" Wright's work as a jumping-off point for her own analysis. For further details, see Simons, "Richard Wright"; Kiuchi and Hakutani, *Richard Wright: A Documented Chronology*; and Michel Fabre, "Interview with Simone de Beauvoir." Fabre describes Wright as in some ways closer to Beauvoir than to Sartre because Beauvoir, unlike Sartre, spoke English (Wright's French was never all that good) and because she was "more congenial and less impressive than Sartre and Camus .... Not that her thinking was less vigorous than theirs, but her manners were more open and her metaphysical interest always focused upon everyday implications and applications" (*World of Richard Wright*, 169). See Gines, "The Race/Gender Analogy," for Wright's influence on Sartre's play, *La putain respectueuse*, based on the case of the Scottsboro Boys.

[38] Indeed, that honorable tradition continued for as long as the journal lasted: until Gallimard stopped publication at the end of 2018, following the death of its last editor, Claude Lanzmann. (See Agnès Poirier, "*Les Temps Modernes*: Paris mourns the passing of the intellectual left's bible.")

[39] Kruks, "Politics of Privilege," 200N21, referencing David Drake, *Intellectuals and Politics in Postwar France*. Elsewhere she notes that "[i]n the context of the intensifying cold war in the late 1940s, the journal took a position of 'critical support' for the Soviet Union, arguing that although a return to the prewar capitalist status quo was unacceptable, the Soviet Union could not be fully supported either" (*Retrieving Experience: Subjectivity and Recognition in Feminist Politics*, 30). See also Ian Birchall, *Sartre Against Stalinism*. But the details of Sartre's interactions with the Communist Party are of less interest to me here than the unwavering support the journal provided to the anti-colonial struggle, and to anti-racist efforts in France.

Temps Modernes as though Sartre had created the journal single-handedly.)[40] But as Doris Ruhe reminds us, the first issue, which appeared in October 1945, was "signed by Simone de Beauvoir, alongside Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, as official co-editor."[41] Stève Bessac-Vaure has given a full (though oddly depoliticized) account of Beauvoir's role in sustaining the magazine's international character; letters to Algren make clear the level of her day to day attention to the often tedious tasks of maintaining its work, year after year, although this has seemed less interesting to her biographers than the details of her sex life and other emotional ups and downs.[42] And in a way, the clearest evidence for Beauvoir's leftist and anti-colonialist work is the least newsworthy—what Auden called "the expending of powers / On the flat ephemeral pamphlet and the boring meeting"[43]—the parts of *La force des choses* and *Tout compte fait* that even the most well-meaning of American readers tend to skip: acronyms of organizations that only lasted for a few years, numbers of people imprisoned or killed, lists of who signed or didn't sign the protest letter, explanations of why we quarreled with this person or that.[44] This is the sort of work that Henri in *Les mandarins* would really like to put aside in order to work on his novel. But he does not put it aside, and neither did Beauvoir, including in that novel.[45]

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[40] Denis Hollier, ed., *A New History of French Literature*, 82. Most of the article concentrates on the later quarrel between Sartre and Camus. The only reference to Beauvoir in that article is a footnote to *Les mandarins*. To be fair, later entries in Hollier's history give Beauvoir her due: the publication of *The Second Sex* gets its own article, written by Toril Moi, who attributes the hostility with which that book was received by both left and right to the Cold War—"a deeply divided intellectual climate"—and the fact that "[i]n 1949 Beauvoir, like the rest of the group around *Les Temps Modernes*, belonged to the beleaguered non-aligned French left." The article on what came to be called the "new French feminisms," written by Jane Gallop, begins with the special issue of *L'arc* devoted (supposedly) to Beauvoir's work.

[41] "En octobre 1945 avait paru le premier numéro … pour lequel Simone de Beauvoir avec Sartre et Merleau-Ponty signe en tant que coéditrice responsable" (Ruhe, "Femmes, juifs, noirs, " 82).

[42] Stève Bessac-Vaure, "Simone de Beauvoir as Mediator of Foreign Literature in *Les Temps Modernes*," 2015. According to Bessac-Vaure, Beauvoir's choices included Böll, Pavese, and Mayakovsky as well as Algren and Wright; he seems to be arguing that unlike Sartre, the fellow-traveler, Beauvoir's tastes were philosophical and literary rather than political, and notes that authors published by *Les Temps Modernes* diverged from the more restrictive list promulgated by the Communist party. What seems missing here is the whole conception of an *independent* left perspective. Both Communists and right-wing thinkers (on both sides of the Atlantic) sneered at that very conception, but we need not agree with them.

[43] Auden, "Spain," in *Selected Poems*, 54.

[44] Like *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947*, those volumes of her autobiography were not written "for the ages" and we are not the audience to whom they are addressed. And yet historians of the post-war period, even those hostile to Beauvoir, still turn to them.

3 Violence and Authenticity

But if Richard Wright prepared Beauvoir to understand America, and America prepared her to understand women … who or what prepared her to understand Richard Wright? What made it possible for Beauvoir to take a subject position by his side, or at least approach the world through his lens, given his explicit project in *Native Son* to make sympathy from whites, and especially from white women, impossible? He explains in a frequently-quoted passage from "How Bigger Was Born":

> I had written a book of short stories which had been published under the title of *Uncle Tom's Children.* When the reviews of the book began to appear, I realized that I had made an awfully naïve mistake. I found that I had written a book which even bankers' daughters could read and weep over and feel good about. I swore to myself that if I ever wrote another book, no one would weep over it; that it would be so hard and deep that they would have to face it without the consolations of tears. It was this that made me get to work in dead earnest.[46]

I want to pair this with a quotation from an interview Beauvoir gave Michel Fabre, who asked how she first came across *Native Son* in 1940.

> Sylvia Beach had told me: "You like violent books, well, here is a violent one, it will hit you hard." And I said, "Yes, I'll read it." I read it and I was very, very much impressed.[47]

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[45] See *Les mandarins* chapter 11, especially 2:440–49. When *Les mandarins* won the Goncourt prize, Beauvoir wrote that "Some young Malagasy sent me a wooden statue, appreciating that I had spoken of the repression of '47." [De jeunes Malgaches m'envoyèrent une statuette en bois, touchés que j'eusse parlé de la répression de 47" (*FCh* 2:57).]

[46] Wright, "How Bigger Was Born," 874.

[47] Michel Fabre, "Interview with Simone de Beauvoir," *World of Richard Wright*, 253. The interview took place on June 24, 1970. Sylvia Beach was the owner of "Shakespeare and Company," the famous English language bookstore in Paris, across the street from the *Maison des amis des livres* founded by her companion Adrienne Monnier. Beauvoir frequented both shops beginning in her student days: see *MJFR*, 258, 307, 369, and *La force de l'âge* (hereinafter *FA*), 57, 62. Beach is also well-known as the first publisher of James Joyce's *Ulysses*.

And the fact is, Beauvoir did like violent books. One thing she and Sartre had in common with Richard Wright was a deep affinity for *True Detective* magazine and other gory real-life sources of *faits divers*.[48] She is not an exception to the general existentialist tendency to associate violence with freedom: one might wonder why the *acte gratuit*, from Gide's *Les caves du Vatican* to Camus's *L'étranger* and Beauvoir's own *L'invitée*, and well beyond, is so frequently an act of *murder*. Somehow violence functions as a sign of authenticity: the eruption of violence into the everyday (or, the recognition that our notion of "the everyday" rests on a tacit acceptance of the violence it leaves unspoken) can put paid to a certain kind of bourgeois hypocrisy.

Beauvoir would recognize, in her self-criticism about the melodramatic conclusion of *L'invitée*, that there is a world of difference between killing someone off *in a book* and really killing them.[49] But this doesn't mean that portraying Black men as killers in books can't have real-world dangerous effects down the line. The idea of racial "authenticity" has a troubled history, with which the other, existentialist meaning of "authenticity" is both productively and problematically intertwined. The question is, at what point does a search for raw authenticity in the experience of Others spill over into exoticism and/or radical chic: in today's terms, when does cultural appreciation become cultural appropriation?

Disentangling this is no simple matter. Consider something else that was going on in Beauvoir's Paris circle around the same time, the publication of a book called *J'irai cracher sur vos tombes* (I'll Spit on Your Graves). The book's real author was a young white Frenchman, Boris Vian, a trumpeter and passionate aficionado of jazz and all things American, and a key entrepreneur of the underground social scene in Saint-Germain-des-Prés that was becoming associated with tabloid versions of "existentialism." Vian was also a serious writer (he'd just been passed over for the Prix de la Pléiade for his quite good novel *L'écume des jours*, and was very angry about it), and he and his wife Michelle were quite close to Sartre, who invited him to contribute a column called "Chronique du menteur" (Liar's Chronicle) to *Les Temps Modernes.* In the case of *J'irai cracher sur vos tombes*, however, Vian claimed that he was only the translator, and that the author of the novel (and its several sequels) was a light-skinned American Black man named Vernon Sullivan. The book itself is a sort of trashy thriller mystery. The hero and narrator, Lee Anderson, passes for white in order to seduce young white women ("bobby-soxers"). His plan is to avenge the lynching of his younger brother by deliberately "ruining" and then murdering a very rich man's daughter; he does so in a highly sadistic way, and then is himself lynched. (How he nonetheless manages to narrate the book is never explained.) So there is a double movement of passing here: Vian ventriloquizes a Black American whose hero pretends to be white in order to kill. However, Vian was exposed as the book's real author in 1947, because in real life a French man killed a woman, and when the police found the body, Vian's book was in the room, open to the page where Lee commits the murder. This led to a prosecution for obscenity, and *J'irai cracher sur vos tombes* was banned.

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[48] "Faits divers" refers to short news items or "human interest stories"; those Beauvoir mentions in *La force de l'âge* are often violent, including the crime of the Papin sisters on which Jean Genet would base his play, *Les bonnes*, and the story of Violette Nozières, on trial for killing her abusive father. See *FA* 151–54.

[49] "Novelists too often forget that in reality a gulf separates a dream of murder from a murder: to kill is not an everyday act." [Les romanciers oublient trop souvent que dans la réalité un abîme sépare un rêve de meurtre d'un meurtre; tuer n'est pas un acte quotidien (*FA* 386–87).]

J'irai cracher sur vos tombes is, by any measure, a very bad book. However, in some ways it's not quite bad enough: it "works" both as a piece of pornography and as a crime novel, and the first-person narrative is skillful enough at placing us inside the main character's subjectivity that we are seduced into complicity with his crime. The sex scenes owe a lot to Henry Miller (who was prosecuted for obscenity at the same time as Vian) and the sexual violence, especially at the end, owes a lot to Bataille and to the surrealist tradition. Faulkner's *Light in August* is also a pretty evident influence.[50]

A successful fraud that crosses ethnic or gender lines is always interesting, because it reveals a cultural consensus about the plausible features of identity: the stunt "comes off" because of shared myths about gender and race. I'm offering Vian in part as an example of the Foucauldian point that at this time (and perhaps more generally), racist and anti-racist discourses were too close for comfort, so close as to be inextricable. Vian could claim to have exposed, or at least told some compelling stories about, the habitual casual violence and racism of Southern whites that motivates Anderson's revenge.[51] But when the main character is lynched at the end, the reader (or anyhow this reader) feels that he deserves to die. So one is left wondering, wait a minute, what was the author trying to say?[52] In the fake publicity surrounding the hoax, Vian claimed that "Vernon Sullivan" could not step forward as the author because an actual Black man would have been lynched for writing such a book; and that claim was plausible. What then is the political effect of a white man's fantasy engagement with that real danger from a position of safety?

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[50] This is even truer of Vian/Sullivan's second attempt, *Les morts ont tous la même peau* (The Dead All Have the Same Skin), whose desperately "passing" murderer turns out in the end to be white.

[51] The rich white girl's family made their money in West Indies rum, much as in *Native Son* Mary Dalton's "progressive" father is a Chicago slumlord. Unlike Mary Dalton, however, the murder victim in Vian's novel is herself a blatant racist.

[52] As literary critic Mounia Benalil explains: "The sadistic violence of the novel's closing scenes explosively unsettles the reading, while stripping bare the social diaspora and psy-

Vian's main motivation appears to have been simply to make a little money (and prove that he was capable of doing so). And yet, he seems to have held other political commitments that were somewhat sincere. (During the Algerian crisis he'd become famous again for writing and singing a breezy but devastating anti-war anthem, "Le déserteur": "M. le président, je vous fais une lettre….") Critics have noted how strongly *J'irai cracher sur vos tombes* draws on Wright's *Native Son*; Vian (with his wife's help) had already translated a short story of Wright's for *Les Temps Modernes*, and his translation of Wright's "Bright and Morning Star" also appeared in the first issue of *Présence Africaine*, in 1946. But *J'irai cracher sur vos tombes* is a pretty perverse reading of *Native Son*, where the murder is accidental and the white woman is *not* raped: if anything, it is Bigger's fear of being wrongfully accused of rape that leads to Mary Dalton's death. Boris Vian today remains something of a cult figure, as though his "problematic" texts are just light-hearted kitsch; other critics have taken him seriously as a premature post-modernist about race, language, and the impossibility of authenticity. Stephanie Brown makes a strong case for this; but to do so, she must sidestep political questions entirely.[53] Perhaps the lapse of time makes this reasonable. One contemporary reader, Frantz Fanon, found himself in a quandary with rather higher stakes, when dealing with white negrophobia (and fetishism) in his clinical practice:

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chic homelessness of 'mixed-blood' identity. No program of social or political reform for the Black condition is proposed. The lynching of Lee that ends the novel signifies a return to the white man's order, a return through which the racial status quo is maintained." [La violence sadique des scènes qui clôturent le roman "dérange" la lecture au même moment où elles représentent une mise à nu profonde de l'errance psychique et de la diaspora sociale de l'identité des "sang-mêlés." Aucun programme de réforme sociale ou politique de la condition des Noirs n'est proposé. Le lynchage de Lee en conclusion du roman traduit un retour à l'ordre de l'homme blanc, un retour par lequel le statu quo racial est maintenu ("Boris Vian face à l'institution littéraire: le cas de *J'irai cracher sur vos tombes*," 51).]

[53] Stephanie Brown, "Black Comme Moi: Boris Vian and the African American Voice in Translation." Brown's reading is made plausible by Vian's many "knowing" metatextual asides, which seem to position the author as above the fray. For instance, the white woman, Lou, comments on the main character's voice: "'I suppose you couldn't do anything about it,' she said. 'You were born like this.' 'No. I became like this.'" [Je suppose que vous n'y pouviez rien, dit-elle. Vous êtes né comme ça.—Non. Je suis devenu comme ça (*J'irai cracher*, 136).] For a general account of Vian's career, see Philippe Boggio, *Boris Vian*.

> Another woman developed negrophobia after reading *J'irai cracher sur vos tombes.* We attempted to demonstrate the irrationality of her position in bringing her to see that the white victims were as morbid as the *nègre*. Moreover, we added, it was not a question of Blacks taking revenge as the title seemed to say, since the author was Boris Vian. We had to recognize that our efforts were in vain. This young woman would not understand. Anyone who has read the book will easily understand what ambivalence the phobia expresses.[54]

The whole episode reveals a dangerous slippage between a spectacular, sensationalized view and the voice of political commitment: both claim to be breaking silence as a challenge to the bourgeois social order, but this bare claim is not enough. Discourses speak through us, speak us, in ways that commonsense analysis (whether psychoanalytic or literary) can't disarm.

While Vian's view may be one plausible reading of *Native Son* and *Black Boy*, Beauvoir and Sartre (in *La putain respectueuse*) had a different reading. But it is not a simple matter to disentangle Beauvoir's relationship to some of the exoticizing discourses about race that she found in her social and intellectual circle in Paris. For instance, in *La force de l'âge*, she explains that before the war, during the avant-garde vogue for African art, she liked "les masques nègres" for the same reason she liked hermetic poems, surrealist films, abstract painting, old illuminations, and marionettes: they satisfied her taste for the supernatural, for a kind of stand-alone absolute, that persisted after she had given up her faith in God.[55] She connects this also to what drew her to *les faits divers* in the newspapers, and magazines like *Détective*: how violent and "extreme cases" disclosed the "unshakeable core of night" at the heart of every being, knocked down bourgeois façades, and led to a radical sense of freedom.[56] It's also true that some of the lesbian eroticism of *L'invitée* takes place with an "exotic" background filling in for what Beauvoir's heroine cannot quite verbalize about her own desire: an important early scene unfolds as Françoise and Xavière watch Arab women dance in a café, and the younger woman has a passion for the famous "bal nègre," which the novel also labels the "bal colonial." Beauvoir describes that venue rather dispassionately in *La force de l'âge*; she says she liked to watch the "splendid animality" but that she didn't dance herself, and thought those whites who did looked ridiculous, "like hysterics having fits."[57] And she

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[54] "Une autre femme avait la phobie du nègre depuis la lecture de *J'irai cracher sur vos tombes*. Nous avons essayé de lui montrer l'irrationalité de sa position en lui faisant remarquer que les victimes blanches étaient aussi morbides que le nègre. De plus avions-nous ajouté, il ne s'agit pas de revendications noires comme le laisserait entendre le titre, puisque Boris Vian en était l'auteur. Nous dûmes constater la vanité de nos efforts. Cette jeune femme ne voulait rien entendre. Quiconque a lu ce livre comprendra aisément quelle ambivalence exprime cette phobie" (*PNMB* 129–30; *BSWM* 123, translation altered).

[55] "Sartre found it idle to deplore the gap between word and thing, between the given world and the created work of art; he saw this, on the contrary, as the underlying condition of literature and its reason for being; rather than dream of abolishing it, the writer should use it: his successes come from assuming this failure.

"Be that as it may, I had trouble getting used to this divorce; I wanted to write books without renouncing my 'trances'; I was torn. Because of this conflict I persisted for a long time in the conception of art I'd decided on before I met Sartre, which was rather different from his. I liked hermetic poems, surrealist films, abstract paintings, old engravings, antique tapestries, negro masks. I had an immoderate liking for puppet-shows; Podrecca's had displeased me on account of their realism, but I had seen some, including at [Dullin's]

Atelier, whose deliberate naïveté enchanted me. These predilections were partly explained by the influences of my youth. I had given up on God, but not on everything supernatural. Obviously I knew that a work created on earth could never speak any but an earthly language. But some seemed to me to have escaped from their author and taken back for themselves the meaning he'd wanted to give them; they stood up without anyone's help, mute and indecipherable, like great abandoned totems; these alone brought me in contact with something necessary and absolute."

[Sartre trouvait oiseux de déplorer cet écart entre le mot et la chose, entre l'œuvre créée et le monde donné: il y voyait au contraire la condition même de la littérature et sa raison d'être; l'écrivain doit en jouer, non rêver de l'abolir: ses réussites sont dans cet échec assumé.

Soit; je m'accommodais tout de même difficilement de ce divorce; je voulais faire des livres, mais non renoncer à mes "transes": j'étais tiraillée. C'est à cause de ce conflit que je persévérai longtemps dans la conception de l'art à laquelle je m'étais arrêtée avant de connaître Sartre, et qui s'éloignait de la sienne .... J'aimais les poèmes hermétiques, les films surréalistes, les tableaux abstraits, les vieilles enluminures, les tapisseries anciennes, les masques nègres. J'avais un goût immodéré pour les spectacles de marionnettes; celles de Podrecca m'avaient déplu par leur réalisme, mais j'en avais vu, entre autres à l'Atelier, dont la naïveté appuyée m'avait charmée. Ces prédilections s'expliquent en partie par les influences que j'avait subies dans ma jeunesse. J'avais renoncé au divin, non à toute espèce de surnaturel. Évidemment, je savais qu'une œuvre forgée sur terre ne peut jamais parler qu'une langue terrestre; mais certaines me semblaient avoir échappé à leur auteur et résorbé en elles le sens dont il avait voulu les charger; elles se tenaient debout, sans le secours de personne, muettes, indéchiffrables, pareilles à de grands totems abandonnés: en elles seules, je touchais quelque chose de nécessaire et d'absolu. (*FA* 50–51).]

[56] *FA* 150–51, 153. I discuss these passages further below.

[57] "Sunday nights, we would leave behind the bitter elegance of skepticism and be excited by the splendid animality of the Blacks of the rue Blomet. I went many times with Olga to this ball, which Sonia and her friends also frequented. I ran into Marie Giraud, who had hardly changed since Berlin; she was hanging around Montparnasse and the places that the Montparnasse crowd favored. We were the exceptions: at that time few white women mixed with the Black crowd, fewer still ventured onto the dance floor: next to the agile Africans, the quivering Antillais, their stiffness was distressing to see; when they tried to shake it off, they started to look like hysterics having fits. I didn't go along with the snob-

describes also being profoundly moved and attracted by American films featuring Black actors, such as *Green Pastures* and King Vidor's *Hallelujah*, and by Black American music, which (as she later realized) she didn't distinguish very clearly by genre.

> Like most young people of our generation, we were deeply moved by negro spirituals, "work songs," and the "blues." The grab-bag of songs we loved included "Old Man River," "St James Infirmary," "Some of These Days," "The Man I Love," "Miss Hannah," "St Louis Blues," "Japansy," and "Blue Sky": men's mournful sorrows, wild joys, and broken hopes had found a voice that flew in the face of artistic "good manners," a voice that burst brutally from the heart of their night, racked by rebellion; born from vast collective emotions, those felt by each and by all, these songs touched us at a deep and personal place, one all humans share.[58]

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bishness of the Café de Flore, I didn't imagine I was participating in Africa's grand erotic mystery; but I liked to watch the dancers; I drank punch; the noise, the smoke, the fumes of alcohol, the orchestra's violent rhythms put me in a daze; through the fog I saw beautiful happy faces drifting by. My heart beat a bit faster when the last dance broke into a tumult: as the festive bodies let loose, they seemed to bring me closer to my own ardor for life."

[Le dimanche soir, on délaissait les amères élégances du scepticisme, on s'exaltait sur la splendide animalité des Noirs de la rue Blomet. J'accompagnai plusieurs fois Olga à ce bal où venaient aussi Sonia et ses amies. J'y rencontrai Marie Giraud qui avait peu changé depuis Berlin: elle traînait à Montparnasse et dans les endroits que les gens de Montparnasse fréquentaient. Nous étions des exceptions: à cette époque, très peu de Blanches se mêlaient à la foule noire; moins encore se risquaient sur la piste: face aux souples Africains, aux Antillais frémissants, leur raideur était affligeante; si elles tentaient de s'en départir, elles se mettaient à ressembler à des hystériques en transe. Je ne donnais pas dans le snobisme des gens du Flore, je n'imaginais pas que je participais au grand mystère érotique de l'Afrique; mais j'aimais regarder les danseurs; je buvais du punch; le bruit, la fumée, les vapeurs d'alcool, les rythmes violents de l'orchestre m'engourdissaient; à travers cette brume je voyais passer de beaux visages heureux. Mon cœur battait un peu plus vite quand explosait le tumulte du quadrille final: dans le déchaînement des corps en fête, il me semblait toucher ma propre ardeur à vivre (*FA* 400).]

[58] "Comme la plupart des jeunes gens de notre temps, nous étions passionnément émus par les 'negro spirituals,' par les 'chants de travail,' par les 'blues.' Nous aimions pêle-mêle Old Man River, St. James Infirmary, Some of these days, The man I love, Miss Hannah, St. Louis Blues, Japansy, Blue Sky; la plainte des hommes, leurs joies égarées, les espoirs brisés avaient trouvé pour se dire une voix qui défiait la politesse des arts réguliers, une voix brutalement jaillie du cœur de leur nuit et secouée de révolte; parce qu'ils étaient nés de vastes émotions collectives, celles de chacun, de tous—ces chants nous atteignaient chacun en ce point le plus intime de nous-mêmes qui nous est commun à tous" (*FA* 161).

All this comes together in an admiration for Faulkner: both for *Sanctuary*—"sex, in Faulkner, literally turned the world to fire and blood"[59]—and later for *Light in August*:

> The events that throw Christmas into the hands of the lynch mob are both as heartbreaking as life and as ineluctable as death. In this South, stripped of its future, with no truth left except its legend, the most turbulent explosions are frozen in place ahead of time by fate. Faulkner found a way to let his story unfold in time while also abolishing time… for Christmas, [the present day] is only a break between two chains of events, one running back to the day of his birth, the other running down to his horrific end, both embodying the same curse: black blood in his veins.[60]

Even if we remember that Wright himself, and later Toni Morrison, would acknowledge the influence of *Light in August* and draw deeply and productively on Faulkner's image-repertory, none of this is especially reassuring.

However, to return to the question I started from—what prepared Beauvoir to understand Richard Wright?—I'd argue that two preexisting strands prepared the ground for Wright's influence. One was the deep-seated disgust for European colonialism I discussed in chapter 3; the other was a fascination with the "otherness" of both African and African American art and music, a fascination she shared with many of her Parisian contemporaries. For both these strands, she was indebted, strangely enough, to surrealism.[61]

4 Surrealism's Paradoxical Legacy

I say "strangely enough" for several reasons. For one thing, post-war stand-offs between existentialists and surrealists could get quite vicious. There were genuine philosophical points of non-coincidence between the groups,[62] but political maneuverings played a larger part. The battle lines were drawn by Sartre's attack on surrealism in his polemic for engagement (the essays in *Les Temps Modernes* that became *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?*), the surrealists counterattacked in *Rupture intégrale* (1947), and the argument went on for decades; both groups were dancing the masochism tango with the French communist party, seeking ways to be politically effective while remaining independent, but they only rarely found themselves dancing in the same direction at the same time.[63]

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[59] "[L]e sexe, chez Faulkner, met littéralement le monde à feu et à sang" (*FA* 214).

[60] "[L]'aventure qui jette Christmas aux mains des lyncheurs fut à la fois poignante comme la vie et aussi inéluctable que la mort. Dans ce Sud, dépouillé de son avenir, et qui n'a plus d'autre vérité que sa légende, les plus tumultueux déchaînements sont figés d'avance par la fatalité; Faulkner avait su donner une durée à son histoire tout en annulant le temps …. [P]our Christmas, il n'est que la coupure entre deux séries, l'une qui remonte vers la jour de sa naissance, l'autre qui descend vers l'heure de son horrible fin, toutes deux manifestant une même malédiction: du sang noir dans les veines" (*FA* 271–72).

[61] In what follows, I am construing "surrealism" broadly to include those who became dissidents or even constructed important works in opposition to the charismatic despotism of Breton.

Another reasons the pairing seems strange is that, while surrealism stridently presented itself as a revolutionary movement, it often does not look that way to us now, because its formal strategies have been so fully recuperated by consumer culture that what was once shocking is now cliché. Their particular claim of *sexual* non-conformism has a grain of truth, but only a grain. As Amy Lyford sees it, "the surrealist agenda for social transformation failed," because

> [t]he myriad surrealist works that dramatize femininity as "other," deviant, deformed or violated are legendary for consistently promoting a power differential between men and women and for drawing on gender stereotypes.... Viewed at a distance, surrealist images of the 1920s and 1930s seem to have laid the groundwork for an increasingly sexualized rhetoric of the mass media while opening up new terrain for social and sexual regulation.[64]

Lyford's discussion of the surrealists' supposedly liberatory "Recherches sur la sexualité" of 1928 shows that the sexual non-conformism they embraced was relentlessly heterosexual, and for the most part "dismissed women's experiences."[65]

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[62] See Bruce Baugh, *French Hegel: From Surrealism to Postmodernism.*

[63] See Susan Suleiman, "Le mythe de la femme et les écrivains: Breton ou la poésie." Suleiman points out (236) that Breton nonetheless was briefly a member, along with Beauvoir and Sartre, of the Rassemblement démocratique révolutionnaire, Sartre's post-war attempt to create a non-Communist "third way" on the left, and that all three would later sign the same protest letters against the Prague trials and the *Manifeste des 121* against the French war on Algeria.

[64] Amy Lyford, *Surrealist Masculinities: Gender Anxiety and the Aesthetics of Post-World War I Reconstruction in France*, 186. She continues: "Aragon's words (in '1930') presage T. J. Clark's 'bad dream of modernism,' a nightmare in which avant-garde explorations of new forms of consciousness simply make it easier for cultural institutions to colonize the spaces the avant-garde had cleared for the road to a liberated future" (186).

The now-familiar feminist critique of surrealism began, in fact, with Simone de Beauvoir. *The Second Sex* is highly critical of surrealist myths. After discussing women's position as "Other" in three otherwise very different writers, Montherlant, D. H. Lawrence, and Claudel, Beauvoir skewers André Breton by quoting extensively from texts which swear undying total Amour for a series of different women; his supposedly "idealizing" (and supposedly avant-garde) view, she says, just amounts to one more objectification.

> Despite the gulf that separates Claudel's religious world from Breton's poetic universe, there is an analogy in the role they assign to woman: she is an element of perturbation…[66]
>
> This unique woman, both flesh and artifice, natural and human, has the same magic spell as the ambiguous objects the surrealists love: she is like the spoonshoe, the wolftable, the marble sugar-cube which the poet finds at the flea market or invents in a dream; she participates in the secret of familiar objects suddenly unveiled, the secret of plants and stones.[67]
>
> Since Breton's perspective is exclusively poetic, it is exclusively as poetry, thus as other, that he contemplates woman.… She is poetry itself, in the here and now, that is to say for the man; whether she is also this for herself, we are not told. Breton does not speak of woman insofar as she is Subject …. Truth, Beauty, Poetry, she is Everything …. Everything, except herself.[68]

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[65] "[F]or all their efforts to promote new ideas about sexuality and sexual practice, the participants stuck to rather traditional ideas about sex and sexual difference. Some anxiety about the stability of male sexuality also permeated the discussions" (ibid., 144–45).

[66] "Malgré l'abîme qui sépare le monde religieux de Claudel de l'univers poétique de Breton, il y a une analogie dans le rôle qu'ils assignent à la femme: elle est un élément de perturbation" (*DS* 1:366).

[67] "Cette femme unique, à la fois charnelle et artificielle, naturelle et humaine a le même sortilège que les objets équivoques aimés des surréalistes: elle est pareille à la cuiller-soulier, à la table-loup, au sucre de marbre que le poète découvre à la foire aux puces ou invente en rêve; elle participe au secret des objets familiers soudain découverts dans leur vérité; et à celui des plantes et des pierres" (*DS* 1:370).

[68] "La perspective de Breton étant exclusivement poétique c'est exclusivement comme poésie donc comme *autre* que la femme y est envisagée.… Elle est la poésie en soi, dans l'immédiat, c'est-à-dire pour l'homme; on ne nous dit pas si elle l'est aussi pour soi. Breton ne parle pas de la femme en tant qu'elle est sujet.… Vérité, Beauté, Poésie, elle est Tout.… Tout excepté soi-même" (*DS* 1:374–75).

Much subsequent feminist writing on surrealism takes its cue from these observations. Xavière Gauthier followed Beauvoir's lead in one of the first works of second-wave feminist literary criticism in France, *Surréalisme et sexualité*,[69] which argues for the movement's intrinsic misogyny: "the surrealist woman is a male forgery."[70] Beauvoir has often been a jumping-off point, too, for feminist writers who wish to complicate Gauthier's view by pointing to and re-valuing the many women painters, writers, and photographers who somehow did find surrealism artistically fruitful and productive, and still do.[71] But some tight-rope walking is always necessary. There's stuff one can't un-see. As Mary Ann Caws memorably puts it:

> Headless. And also footless. Often armless too; and always unarmed, except with poetry and passion. There they are, the surrealist women so shot and painted, so stressed and dismembered, punctured and severed: it is any wonder she has (we have) gone to pieces? … Sure and strident, ready to do anything we can—except we can neither speak nor think nor

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Susan Suleiman sees Beauvoir's takedown of Breton in *The Second Sex* as a "oui, mais": "[The method] consists of summing up the author's vision with a great deal of understanding, even a certain sympathy, only to ask one or two questions at the end which, like the serpent's tail where the poison is, attack where he is weakest.… The last sentences of the chapter are an execution: a gentle execution, but an undeniable one." [Cela consiste à résumer avec beaucoup de compréhension, voire avec une certaine sympathie la vision de l'auteur, pour poser à la fin une ou deux questions qui—semblables à la queue du scorpion où se trouve le poison—attaquent son point faible.… Ces dernières phrases du chapitre sont une exécution—exécution douce, mais indéniable ("Breton ou la poésie," 228–30).] Suleiman also reminds us that Montherlant, Claudel, and Breton were *living* authors (not subjects of academic study), underlining the polemical quality of Beauvoir's intervention.

[69] Xavière Gauthier, *Surréalisme et sexualité*, 1971.

[70] "La femme surréaliste est une forgerie de mâles" (Gauthier, 190). Anna Watz ("Angela Carter and Xavière Gauthier's *Surréalisme et sexualité*") calls this "an assertion that might serve as a summary of her main argument" (101). Watz traces the further influence of Beauvoir, through Gautier, on Angela Carter's work, especially *The Sadeian Woman*, which itself had a strong influence on later feminist writers, especially in England. See Suleiman, "Breton ou la poésie," for a fuller discussion of the broader influence of this section of *The Second Sex* on feminist literary criticism.

[71] See Katharine Conley, *Automatic Woman: The Representation of Woman in Surrealism*; Susan Suleiman, *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics, and the Avant-Garde*; Mary Anne Caws, "Seeing the Surrealist Woman: We Are a Problem." In her commentary on Beauvoir's Breton chapter Suleiman goes farther, seeing all of second-wave feminist literary criticism, including her own work, as growing from this section of *The Second Sex*, in ways later writers usually failed at the time to acknowledge (Suleiman, "Breton ou la poésie").

> see, nor walk and run, certainly not love and paint and write and be. Surrealist woman, problematic and imprisoned, for the other eyes.[72]

So it is strange to note how often in Beauvoir's memoirs she marks an affinity, especially in her youth, to the surrealist world view. She credits them with a transition, while still a (somewhat bored) philosophy student, not just in her literary tastes, but in the attitude to society these implied:

> For the most part I came around to Brunschvicg's version of critical idealism, even though it left me unsatisfied on a number of points. On the boulevard Saint-Michel, Picart's bookshop welcomed students; there I'd leaf through the avant-garde reviews that were born and died like flies in those days. I read Breton, I read Aragon; surrealism won me over. After a while the literature of "inquiétude" struck me as insipid; I prefered the excesses of pure negation. Destruction of art, of morality, of language, systematic derangement of the senses, despair to the point of suicide: these excesses delighted me.[73]

This enthusiasm dates back to her student days, when she was still liberating herself from the "proper young lady" persona of her Catholic upbringing. But it persisted, as when she mentioned surrealist films in the same breath with "les poémes hermétiques" and "les masques nègres" as continuing to satisfy her taste for the supernatural and the absolute in art, in a passage I referred to above.[74] Later, in explaining why she was loath to analyze and interpret the behavior of those around her (and not especially good at it), she'll say that "surrealism had marked [her]" with a lasting attraction to what is mysterious and silent about human beings.[75] She also acknowledges a more serious intellectual debt, crediting the surrealists with having helped her and Sartre admit (though incoherently) the existence of an unconscious:

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[72] Caws, "Seeing the Surrealist Woman," 11.

[73] "En gros je me ralliai à l'idéalisme critique, tel que nous l'exposait Brunschvicg, bien que, sur bien des points, il me laissât sur ma faim. Je repris du goût pour la littérature. Sur le boulevard Saint-Michel, la librairie Picart s'ouvrait libéralement aux étudiants: j'y feuilletais les revues d'avant-garde qui en ce temps-là naissaient et mouraient comme des mouches: je lus Breton, Aragon; le surréalisme me conquit. L'inquiétude, à la longue, c'était fade; je préférai les outrances de la pure négation. Destruction de l'art, de la morale, du langage, dérèglement systématique, désespoir poussé jusqu'au suicide: ces excès me ravissaient" (*Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*, hereinafter MJFR, 324–25). "Inquiétude" here refers to an earlier literature, to which she'd been introduced by her cousin Jacques, for instance Gide's *Nourritures terrestres*, which served as her bedside book for a time: writers who later seemed like rather timid bourgeois rebels, rather than revolutionaries. She would satirize them, and Jacques, relentlessly in *Quand prime le spirituel*.

[74] *FA* 50–51. See note 53 above for the full quotation.

> Extreme cases fascinated us, for the same reason as neuroses and psychoses; the attitudes and passions of so-called normal people stood out in relief, purified and exaggerated. They also touched us in a different way. All perturbations satisfied our anarchism; we were charmed by the grotesque. One of our contradictions was that we denied the existence of the Unconscious; and yet Gide, the surrealists, and (despite our resistances) Freud himself, had convinced us that in every human being there lurks [what André Breton called] an unbreakable kernel of night [infracassable noyau de nuit], something that hides behind everyday social routine and cliché, but now and then bursts out with shock and scandal. Such explosions always reveal a truth, and those which gave rise to a freedom seemed especially stunning. We set particular store by all upheavals that laid bare the defects and hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie, knocking down the façades behind which the homes and hearts were hiding.... We were pleased to confirm that our own society was no more enlightened than those it labels "primitive."[76]

In *La force de l'âge*, we accompany Beauvoir and Sartre to an early showing of *Un chien andalou*; we see them agreeing with and absorbing Antonin Artaud's praise of the "non-sens" of the Marx brothers; we go along to the surrealist exhibition of January 1938, with works by Duchamp and others; she describes in particular Salvador Dali's startling installation, a life-size taxicab with a mannequin inside, sitting in a heap of vegetables and snails.[77] The show left its mark.

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[75] *FA* 146. "Le surréalisme m'avait marquée."

[76] "Les cas extrêmes nous attachaient, au même titre que les névroses et les psychoses; on y retrouvait exagérées, épurées, dorées d'un saisissant relief les attitudes et les passions des gens qu'on appelle normaux. Ils nous touchaient encore d'une autre manière. Toute perturbation satisfaisait notre anarchisme; la monstruosité nous séduisait. Une de nos contradictions, c'est que nous niions l'inconscient; cependant Gide, les surréalistes, et, malgré nos résistances, Freud lui-même, nous avaient convaincus qu'il existait en tout être un 'infracassable noyau de nuit'; quelque chose qui ne réussit à percer ni les routines sociales ni les lieux communs du langage mais qui parfois éclate, scandaleusement. Dans ces explosions, toujours une vérité se révèle; et nous trouvions bouleversantes celles qui délivrent une liberté. Nous accordions un prix particulier à toutes les turbulences qui mettaient à nu les tares et les hypocrisies bourgeoises, abattant les façades derrière lesquelles se déguisent les foyers et les cœurs" (*FA* 150–51). "Nous nous plaisions à constater que notre société n'était pas plus éclairée que celles qu'elle appelle 'primitives'" (*FA* 153).

> Amid an aroma of Brazilian coffee, objects emerged from carefully calculated shadows: a table-setting made of fur, a footstool whose supports were a women's legs; human hands came out of walls, doors, vases, everywhere. I don't think surrealism had a direct influence on us, but the air we breathed was heavy with it. It was the surrealists, for instance, who had started the fashion for the flea market, where I often spent my Sunday afternoons with Sartre and Olga.[78]

Never card-carrying members, they nonetheless swam in the same cultural waters and in the same direction.[79] During and after the Second World War they would become close to several members of the original surrealist group, including the poet and ethnographer Michel Leiris, who *had* been a card-carrying member.

> One attraction of the group we became part of was that almost all its members were former surrealists, who had broken with the movement at various times. For Sartre and me, our age, our University education, had kept us aside from the movement which indirectly had counted a great deal for us: we had inherited its contributions and its failures. When Limbour recounted the sessions of automatic writing, when Leiris and Queneau would hark back to the excommunications pronounced by Breton, his diktats and his rages, their accounts were more detailed, more

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[77] *FA* 60, 128–29, 370.

[78] "Dans une odeur de café du Brésil, des objets émergeaient d'une obscurité soigneusement dosée: un couvert en fourrure, une table-tabouret soutenue par des jambes de femme; des portes, des murs, des vases, de partout s'échappaient des mains. Je ne crois pas que le surréalisme ait eu sur nous une influence directe; mais il avait imprégné l'air que nous respirions. C'était les surréalistes, par exemple, qui avaient mis à la mode la foire aux puces où souvent je passais avec Sartre ou Olga mes dimanches après-midi" (*FA* 370).

[79] In *L'invitée*, as war threatens, dramatist Pierre Labrousse (who isn't Sartre exactly, but …) rejects the idea of fleeing France to live abroad: "'I was formed by a whole past,' continued Labrousse. 'The Ballets Russes, the theatre of the Vieux-Colombier, Picasso, surrealism, I'd be nothing without all that. Of course, I want the art of the future to be original, thanks to my work, but it will still be that tradition's future. One can't work in a vacuum, that leads nowhere.'" ["J'ai été formé par tout un passé, reprit Labrousse. Les Ballets russes, le Vieux-Colombier, Picasso, le surréalisme, je ne serais rien sans tout ça. Et bien sûr, je souhaite que l'art reçoive de moi un avenir original, mais qui soit l'avenir de cette tradition. On ne peut pas travailler dans le vide, ça ne mène à rien" (*L'invitée* 324).]

> alive, more true than any book, and they put us into possession of our prehistory. One day on the second floor of the Café de Flore, Sartre asked Queneau what had stayed with him from surrealism. “The impression of having once been young,” he said. His response struck us, and we envied him.[80]

Leiris and his wife Zette became very close personal friends to Beauvoir and Sartre.[81] As the Allies were closing in on Paris, when Camus advised them to go into hiding (one of his associates had named names under torture), they would take shelter briefly in the Leiris apartment, joining a list of Jews and *résistants* who hid out there during the Occupation. The two couples were clearly inseparable during the terrifying but exhilarating days that preceded the liberation of Paris.[82] Leiris was a key member of the group that started *Les Temps Modernes*.[83] Indeed (another strange thing) Beauvoir credits Leiris's autobiographical “essai-martyr,” *L'âge d'homme*, with inspiring the project that became *The Second Sex*;[84] she also credits her conversations with Zette, and some of the other wives of the post-surrealists, with awakening her to the existence of something she calls “la condition féminine,” the situatedness of “relative creatures.”[85]

5 Surrealism and Politics: More Two-Way Streets

Now, some of what is strange about my claim that Beauvoir was politicized by surrealism rests on a strangeness or a fracture that is intrinsic to the surrealist movement itself. This may have been one more instance of Beauvoir's "genius for the inappropriate," although it seems to have been widely shared. For starters, it is not obvious how a mystical aesthetic that involves a *dérèglement* of language, a refusal of visual representativity, an embrace of opacity, could really come together with committed politics, which we might tend to associate with a view of language as transparent and suited to communication. And yet somehow this did happen. The legacy of surrealism was also a strong legacy of anti-colonial political engagement, and of disengagement from nationalist and racist mystification. These moves took place in the real world (it was not simply as a matter of "subversive images"), and this was a two-way street: we can recognize the reciprocal influence between European surrealists and anti-colonialist artistic and militant movements in the French Caribbean and in Africa, resulting in enduring and mutually sustaining cross-cultural alliances.

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[80] “Un des attraits de ce cercle dans lequel nous entrâmes, c'est que les membres en étaient presque tous d'anciens surréalistes dont la dissidence remontait à des temps plus ou moins lointains; notre âge, notre formation universitaire, nous avaient tenus, Sartre et moi, à l'écart de ce mouvement qui indirectement avait pourtant beaucoup compté pour nous; nous avions hérité de ses apports, de ses échecs; quand Limbour nous racontait des séances d'écriture automatique, quand Leiris et Queneau évoquaient les excommunications prononcées par Breton, ses diktats, ses colères, leurs récits, bien plus détaillés, plus vivants, plus vrais qu'aucun livre, nous mettaient en possession de notre préhistoire. Un jour, au premier étage du Flore, Sartre demanda à Queneau qu'est-ce qui lui restait du surréalisme: ‘L'impression d'avoir eu une jeunesse,’ nous dit-il. Sa réponse nous frappa, et nous l'enviâmes” (*FA* 654).

[81] See *FA* 640–41 for details of how the friendship and partnership began and developed.

[82] *FA* 674. The account of “fiestas” or “fêtes” that closes *La force de l'âge* (and the related scene that opens *Les mandarins*) owes a great deal to Leiris's essay on the sacred in everyday life, as well as to the work of Roger Caillois and the Collège de Sociologie.

[83] *FA* 643.

[84] *FCh* 1:135–36.

[85] “[Ê]tres relatifs” *FA* 654.

French surrealists are rightly credited with drawing attention to the value of African and African-American cultural productions, an attention that would be enormously productive for modernism in the visual arts. James Clifford, in *The Predicament of Culture*, also makes a strong case for the value of what he calls "ethnographic surrealism," with Leiris as his prime example. But the group has also been attacked as participating in what critics have called the "negrophilia" of the 1920s, vigorously defined by Petrine Archer-Straw in her book of that name; her examples range from the popular craze for Josephine Baker's banana dance to such serious works such as Picasso's "Les demoiselles d'Avignon." "Negrophilia" as she describes it involved almost a worship of Blackness, based on its supposed connection with the irrational, the "animal" nature of the body, the unconscious, and so forth. Archer-Straw notes that "the receptiveness of Europe's avant-garde toward this anti-aesthetic must be viewed against the background of their disillusionment with the social and political concerns of their own postwar culture"—in other words, this Blackness was really about whiteness.[86]

This is undeniably true: it is child's play to find examples of the sexually tinged "négritude blanche" that functioned as the very sign of the modern, at least as far back as Baudelaire's poems about Jeanne Duval. Surrealism from its very beginning, however, involved *both* a set of overexcited essentializing myths about Africa, the unconscious, the primitive, which we might reasonably find troubling, *and* a radical questioning of bourgeois French nationalism, which saw clearly the links between conservative views about the family and conservative views about "civilizing mission" of the imperialist nation-state.

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[86] Petrine Archer-Straw, *Negrophilia: Avant-Garde Paris and Black Culture in the 1920s*, 87. See also Mariana Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives*. For a different view, see Marjorie Perloff, "Tolerance and Taboo: Modern Primitivisms and Postmodernist Pieties."

One familiar touchstone for this argument is the 1931 surrealist slogan, "Ne visitez pas l'Exposition Coloniale," which protested the European triumphalism that put actual African human beings on display with other "products." The surrealist counter-exposition, mounted in collaboration with the communists, displayed among other things "a group of statues on a table—one of a South Pacific girl wearing a grass skirt; another of a barefoot, Black child begging for money; and the third of the Virgin Mary holding the infant Jesus—with the heading 'Fétiches Européens.'"[87] As Jonathan Eburne puts it, "Éluard and the surrealists argued that the immensely popular exposition, which paraded the 'success' of French colonial ventures in Africa, Vietnam and the West Indies, tacitly extended the legacy of 'villages pillaged and destroyed, crops burned, massacres from a hail of bullets, bombardments from the air, men working chained like beasts, women serving the amusements of commissioned louts.'"[88] The terms of this debate had been set earlier, as in this exchange in 1925 with Paul Claudel, who had said in an interview:

> As for the present movements, not one can lead to a genuine renewal or creation. Neither Dadaism nor surrealism, which have only one meaning: homosexuality. Many are surprised that I am [not only] a good Catholic, but a writer, a diplomat, French ambassador, and a poet. But I find nothing strange about this. During the war, I went to South America to buy wheat, tinned meat, and lard for the army, and managed to save my country some two hundred million francs.[89]

The surrealists responded: "The only homosexual thing about our activity is the confusion it introduces into the minds of those who do not take part in it.... We take this opportunity to dissociate ourselves publicly from all that is French, in words and in actions."[90] Visible in both conservative attack and radical riposte is the inextricable knotting-up of sexual and nationalist politics; Jonathan Eburne nicely describes this as "the ideological closed circuit of contemporary thought in the aftermath of the Great War, with its emphasis on continuity, patriotism, and domesticity."[91] He also notes "a steady stream of [surrealist] political tracts and pamphlets that sought to expose the forms of violence, both explicit and latent, exercised in the name of the state, the family, the middle-class, and even the values of Western humanism." One of these tracts, included in Nancy Cunard's 1934 *Negro Anthology*, was called "Murderous Humanitarianism"; drafted by René Crevel and signed also by Breton and others, it vigorously listed out the crimes of European colonialism, especially in Africa.[92] While Sonia Kruks is right to point out that *Les Temps Modernes* was unusually early in articulating a consistent anti-colonial program, they had important surrealist precursors—one of whom, Michel Leiris, was on their editorial board.

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[87] Linda M. Steer, "Photographic Appropriation: Ethnography and the Surrealist Other," 74.

[88] Jonathan Eburne, *Surrealism and the Art of Crime*, 169.

[89] Quoted in Helena Lewis, *Dada Turns Red: The Politics of Surrealism*, 26.

[90] Maurice Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism*, 194. The reciprocal homophobia is also characteristic. A curious echo of this occurred in 1949, as Martine Reid mentions in her analysis of the responses to the publication of *The Second Sex*. François Mauriac had attacked the surrealists and existentialists together as harmful to the youth of France. The surrealists were not pleased to be put in the same *sac*. "Here, for instance, is the surrealist Jean Schuster: 'First, I challenge you to visit the surrealist continent and to look closely at its flora and fauna. Know that, just like any continent, it has its volcanos, whose eruptions

Another familiar story is the surrealist disruption in 1925 of the Closerie des Lilas banquet to take a position against the Guerre du Rif (French suppression of an anti-colonialist revolt in Morocco), and also to confront the writer Rachilde, who had written a chauvinistic tract arguing that no patriotic French person could marry a German. Supposedly Philippe Soupault swung from the chandelier, sweeping the glasses and plates off the table, and Michel Leiris "almost got himself lynched," in Breton's rather infelicitous words, by shouting "Vive l'Allemagne" out the window. The confrontation with Rachilde in particular emphasizes what seems to me their most radical move: to trouble the

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will not cease to surprise you. Second, we have never had anything to do with Mr. Sartre and Mr. Gide, and we refuse any supposedly dialectical comparison between their thinking and ours.... Third, *we have said over and over that there is nothing in common, except accidentally, between us and the nation (France), and that we are proud to constitute a permanent danger to her institutions*.... Fourth, our aggressive withdrawal from your decaying society, our hostility toward its degrading ideas, find their corollary in our burning zeal to bring erotic hallucination to life.'" [Ainsi le surréaliste Jean Schuster, par exemple: "1° Je vous défie bien de faire le tour du continent surréaliste, et d'en observer de près la faune et la flore. Sachez que, comme tout continent, il possède des volcans dont les éruptions n'ont pas fini de vous surprendre. 2° Nous n'avions jamais rien à voir avec MM. Sartre et Gide et nous nous refusons à toute confrontation prétendue dialectique entre leur esprit et le nôtre ... 3° *Nous avons répété maintes fois qu'il n'y avait rien de commun qu'accidentel entre nous et la nation (la France), et que nous nous flattons de constituer un danger permanent pour ses institutions* ... 4° Notre retranchement agressif de votre société déliquescente, notre hostilité vis-à-vis de ses idéaux dégradants trouvent leur corollaire dans l'ardeur que nous mettons à oniriser érotiquement la vie" (Martine Reid, "Anatomie d'une réception: *Le deuxième sexe*," 211, emphasis added).]

[91] Eburne, *Surrealism and the Art of Crime*, 21.

[92] In Nancy Cunard, *Negro Anthology*, 574–75.

whole idea of "Frenchness" that brought together both patriotism and what the American Claudels of today call "family values." Even their most obscure and experimental work could carry through this political stance: Leiris's *Glossaire j'y serre mes gloses*, a kind of "devil's dictionary" based on exploring puns and linguistic resonances within commonplace words, included "démocratie—la demi-crotte des assis … famille—fameuse charmille d'infamie … national—passionément anal … patrie—tripaille …"[93]

Seen in the context of then-ongoing debates, the surrealist affirmation of "Blackness," self-involved though it may have been, looks like part of a distinctly political and social program, directed against a particular set of mystifications, including patriotic and nationalist ones. But as Edward Hughes observes in his study of twentieth-century French exoticism, "the crucial question is the extent to which … iconoclasm and gesturing toward the other ever becomes relationality."[94] That question is never easy to answer. But rather than continuing to analyse it as a rhetorical *stance*, I want to note that the deployment of Blackness as a strategy of desublimation and *dérèglement* for Western intellectuals could and did lead to genuine commitments of solidarity with anti-racist and postcolonial struggle.

I see the main indication that they are "genuine" in that they were embraced by a number of the poets and legislators of anti-colonialism—who were, surprisingly enough, quite often the same people. Perhaps the oddest example of this was how a visit from André Breton to Haiti triggered (sort of) a political rebellion there. Here is Breton's account, from a interview with Jean Duché included in the book *Conversations.*

> Jean Duché: It seems you had a hand in the Haitian revolution. Could you comment on exactly what happened?
>
> André Breton: Let's not exaggerate. At the end of 1945, the poverty, and consequently the patience, of the Haitian people had reached a breaking point. You have to realize that, on the huge Île de la Gonâve off the Haitian coast, men earned less than one American cent for an entire day's labor, and that, according to the most conservative newspapers, children in the suburbs of Port-au-Prince lived on tadpoles fished out of the sewers. This situation was made all the more poignant by the fact that the Haitian spirit, more than any other, miraculously continues to draw its

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[93] Democracy is half a turd, from comfortably well-off folks; the family is a famous tree-lined walk of shame; to be national is to be passionately anal; the fatherland is a heap of tripe … it's much funnier than this, but the puns are untranslatable, sorry.

[94] Edward Hughes, *Writing Marginality in Modern French Literature*, 168.

> vigor from the French Revolution; that the striking outline of Haitian history shows us man's most moving attempts to break away from slavery and into freedom.
>
> In a first lecture on "Surrealism and Haiti," I tried, both for the sake of clarity and out of deference to the underlying spirit of this history, to align Surrealism's aims with the age-old goals of the Haitian peasantry. In conclusion, I felt driven to condemn "the imperialisms that the war's end has in no way averted and the cruelly maintained game of cat and mouse between stated ideals and eternal selfishness," as well as to reaffirm my allegiance to the motto on the Haitian flag: "Union makes strength." The newspaper *La Ruche*, the voice of the younger generation, which devoted the next day's issue to me, said that my words were electrifying and decided to take an insurrectional tone. Its confiscations and suspension immediately led to a student strike, followed within twenty-four hours by a general strike. Several days later, the government was held hostage. Unions were being started everywhere and free elections were promised.[95]

I am unsure how much credence to give this account, but I note that Breton's own view of his agency is rather modest—"let's not exaggerate"—and, more to the point, that the true causes he assigns behind the revolt are pragmatically materialist. (This is the same set of events I think Beauvoir is referring to when she says, in the introduction to *The Second Sex*, "the Blacks of Haiti have proved" that historically-based oppressions can be overturned.)

T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting calls our attention to early writing by Suzanne Césaire, who studied philosophy in Paris in the 1930s, and founded *Tropiques* with her husband and René Ménil—all three were teachers of Fanon. In a 1942 attack on some Martinican poets she found insipid and overly academic and Parnassian, she wrote, "Martinican poetry will be cannibal or it will not be," appropriating Breton's declaration that "beauty will be convulsive or it will not be." In another essay, she wrote: "Surrealism, with its emphasis on writing from the unconsciousness, gave us back some of our possibilities.… It's up to us to find the rest. By its guiding light."[96] Fanon was right to ask why Breton, in his adulatory preface to Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (*Notebook*

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[95] André Breton, *Conversations*, translated by Mark Polizotti. Quoted in "Breton and Haiti, Again," on *Criticism &c.*

[96] Quoted in T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, "*Tropiques* and Suzanne Césaire: The Expanse of Negritude and Surrealism." For a more detailed discussion of this period, see Lori Cole, "*Légitime défense*: From Communism and Surrealism to Caribbean Self-Definition," and Robin Kelley, who writes in "A Poetics of Anti-Colonialism": "It is not too much to proclaim Suzanne Césaire as one of surrealism's most original theorists."

of a Return to the Native Land), found it necessary to refer to Césaire as a great Black poet rather than simply a great poet.[97] Yet it was not that Breton "appropriated" Césaire: Césaire had already "appropriated" surrealism, not in a "natural" way (as when Chester Himes described his "absurd" life as predating any acquaintance with "absurdist" literature), and not naïvely, but in the sense of James Clifford's story about "the first Thanksgiving": when the Pilgrim Fathers met Squanto, he had just returned from England.[98] We would hardly want to describe the writers and artists of color who participated in these movements as dupes: surely it is better to speak of the relationship of the surrealist and negritude movements as dialectic and mutually nourishing, through a collaborative process and a reciprocal human gaze.[99]

What overall judgement can we come to, though, of the politics (and ethics) of the European surrealists? When Beauvoir took up this question directly in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* her answer was, *it depends*. After the consideration of the "serious man" I discussed above, she describes the radical disorder of the nihilist: her examples include Baudelaire, and Jouhandeau's "demoniacal man" who "stubbornly maintains the values of childhood, of a society, or of a Church in order to trample upon them."[100] The "démoniaque" is still pretty similar to the serious man, though; it is possible to go further, attempting "not just to trample but to annihilate" the world by ruining all projects, including one's own.

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[97] *PNMB* 31, *BSWM* 26.

[98] James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, 16. I am avoiding the terms "hybridity" and "contact zones": it is too easy to lose track of the dimension of power when speaking only of space and not of time.

[99] Sam Bardaouil shows this dynamic at work in his book on the Egyptian surrealist group "Art and Liberty": a confluence of international networks and local political conditions in Cairo led in 1938 to the manifesto "Long Live Degenerate Art." Bardouil refers to

> the risk of situating this study within the exonerating didactic of post-colonial polemics [and of] reducing the case of Art and Liberty into another juxtaposition of so-called centers and peripheries, a binary which was not of concern to Art and Liberty … Instead of picturing them as victims to a marginalizing Western-centrism, it is more adequate to highlight their role as active catalysts who contributed to the evolution and widening up of the formalistic qualities of surrealism at the time.

Bardouil, *Surrealism in Egypt: Modernism and the Art and Liberty Group*, 31–2. Perhaps a similar dynamic informed the writing of the tract, "Murderous Humanity," for Nancy Cunard's *Negro Anthology*, as the group that signed it included Martiniquans Pierre Yoyotte and J.M. Monnerot alongside Paul Éluard, Benjamin Peret, Yves Tanguy, Breton and Crevel. (The piece was translated into English by Samuel Beckett.)

[100] *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* (hereinafter *PMA*) 76–7; *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, translated by Bernard Frechtman (hereinafter *EA*), 52–3. "[L]'attitude du démonique, telle que l'a décrite Jouhandeau: on maintient avec entêtement les valeurs de l'enfance, celles d'une société ou d'une Église, afin de pouvoir les fouler aux pieds."

> [Such] constant negation of the word by the word, of the act by the act, of art by art, took shape in the incoherence of Dadaism: by following strict instructions for disorder and anarchy, one would abolish all courses of conduct; all possible goals; oneself.
>
> But this will to negate is self-refuting, for as soon as it appears it manifests as a presence.... If one is not resigned to suicide, one slides toward a more stable attitude than nihilism's tense refusal. Surrealism provides a historical and concrete example of the different possible developments. Certain initiates, such as Vaché and Crevel, chose the radical solution and killed themselves. Others destroyed their bodies and ruined their minds with drugs. Still others succeeded in committing a sort of moral suicide: by depopulating the surrounding world they found themselves in a desert, reduced to the level of the sub-human; they are no longer just trying to flee, they are fleeing. Then there are those who have gone back to seek the security of the serious man: they have returned to orderly life, choosing at random to take refuge in marriage, politics, or religion. Even those surrealists who have wanted to keep the faith could not help returning to the positive, the serious. Negation of aesthetic, spiritual, and moral values has become an ethics; unruliness [dérèglement] has become a rule. We have witnessed the establishment of a new Church, with dogmas, rites, priests, faithful flock and even martyrs; nothing today remains of Breton the wild destroyer: he's a pope. And since every assassination of painting is still a painted picture, many surrealists have found themselves authors of positive works; from the raw material of their rebellion they've built successful careers. Finally there are some who have been able to realize their freedom in an authentic return to the positive; without disavowing their freedom, they have given it substance. They have engaged themselves, without losing themselves, in political action, in intellectual or artistic research, in family or social life.[101]

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[101] "On peut aller beaucoup plus loin dans le refus, s'employant non à bafouer, mais à annihiler le monde refusé et soi-même avec lui .... La constante négation du mot par le mot, de l'acte par l'acte, de l'art par l'art, s'est trouvée réalisée par l'incohérence dadaïste; en appliquant une consigne de désordre et d'anarchie, on obtenait une abolition de toutes les conduites, donc de toutes les fins et de soi-même.

Mais cette volonté de négation se donne un perpétuel démenti, car dans le moment où elle se déploie elle se manifeste comme présence .... Si on ne se résigne pas au suicide, on glisse facilement vers une attitude plus stable que le refus crispé du nihilisme. Le

The test of any aesthetic theory, then, was not what it *claimed* to do (ethically or politically), but what the claimants actually made of it, what they actually *did* do. Official surrealism may have betrayed its origins and become a religion (note that in mocking André Breton, she speaks almost like a movement insider); but an authentic development from surrealism was still possible. The point is that "surrealism," like Judaism, Frenchness, woman's situation, lesbianism, or anything else, can be lived in various ways, in bad faith or in freedom.

This view (though awfully abstract) has a certain explanatory power: we can account for the non-accidental importance of surrealism to Suzanne and Aimé Césaire, or Wifredo Lam, without extending our political blessing to such careerists of the Void as Salvador Dali (commercial, fascist, etc).[102] When she turns to the more positive portrait of the surrealist who maintains his good faith, she is probably thinking of her new postwar friends, who included the poet and editor Raymond Queneau, and the sculptor Giacometti, whose emergence from the surrealist conception of an art independent of reality, and development of a different kind of experimental realism, she takes up later in her memoir and, transposed onto the character of Marcel, in *Le sang des autres*.[103] But the best candidate for the "good" surrealist is Beauvoir's close friend and collaborator, Michel Leiris.

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surréalisme nous fournit un exemple historique et concret de différentes évolutions possibles. Certains de ses adeptes, tel Vaché, Crevel, ont eu recours à la solution radicale du suicide; d'autres ont détruit leur corps et ruiné leur esprit par les drogues; d'autres ont réussi une sorte de suicide moral; à force de dépeupler le monde autour d'eux, ils se sont trouvés dans un désert, eux-mêmes descendus au niveau du sous-homme; ils n'essaient plus de fuir, ils fuient. Il y en a aussi qui ont recherché à nouveau la sécurité du sérieux; il se sont rangés, choisissant arbitrairement comme refuges le mariage, la politique, la religion. Ceux mêmes des surréalistes qui ont voulu demeurer fidèles à eux-mêmes n'ont pu éviter le retour au positif, au sérieux. La négation des valeurs esthétiques, spirituelles, morales, est devenue une éthique; le dérèglement, une règle; on a assisté à l'édification d'une nouvelle Église avec ses dogmes, ses rites, ses fidèles, ses prêtres et même ses martyrs; plus rien de destructeur aujourd'hui chez Breton: c'est un pape. Et comme tout assassinat de la peinture est encore un tableau, bien des surréalistes se sont trouvés les auteurs d'œuvres positives: leur révolte est devenue la matière sur laquelle s'est édifiée leur carrière. Enfin quelques-uns d'entre eux ont su, dans un authentique retour au positif, réaliser leur liberté; ils lui ont donné un contenu sans la renier; ils se sont engagés sans se perdre dans une action politique, dans des recherches intellectuelles ou artistiques, dans une vie familiale ou sociale" (*PMA* 77–9, *EA* 52–5, translation substantially altered).

[102] James Clifford makes a very similar point when he says that "[s]urrealism coupled with ethnography recovers its early vocation as critical cultural politics, a vocation lost in later developments (Max Ernst devoting his energies to designing an oneiric double bed for Nelson and Happy Rockefeller, the general production of 'art' for the 'art world')" (*Predicament of Culture*, 147).

[103] See *FA* 558–59 and 620.

6 Who Was Michel Leiris?

Michel Leiris began his career as a surrealist poet, fascinated by language, *dérèglement*, women, and Africa, where he traveled as part of the infamous French Dakar-Djibouti "ethnographic" expedition of 1931–33. While that trip was billed as scientific, Leiris himself described it as a search for his own unconscious, as a "cure" for the neurosis that was (as he then saw it) modernity. The Dakar-Djibouti trip was not fieldwork as we now understand it, with participant/observers ethically constrained to minimize disruption; rather it was a collecting trip on behalf of the French government, and the information was gathered more or less in the same way as the objects. Clifford: "the mission's 'booty,' in Rivet and Rivière's term, included among its many photos, recordings, and documents 3,500 objects destined for the Trocadéro museum, soon to become the Musée de l'homme."[104] In the course of the twenty-one months in Sudan and Ethiopia, Leiris became strongly disillusioned with the "mission" even as he helped to carry it out, and he revealed this on his return by publishing his diary of the journey, as *L'Afrique fantôme*. In a letter home, he wrote:

> the methods by which we collect the objects, nine times out of ten, involve forced purchase, not to say requisition. All this casts something of a shadow over my life.… Indeed, I have the feeling that we are caught in a vicious circle: we loot from the Africans, with the pretext of teaching people to know and love them, which is to say, at the end of the day, to train other ethnographers who will go out and "love" them, and loot them, too.[105]

Another well-known quote from the diary itself:

> August 29. While Lutten visits the village, I am working in the administrator's office with the interpreters. The objects arrive. Payment. The little black bag that contains the coins—the bag of tricks—is unknotted and reknotted over and over. The inventory notebook is filling up. It hasn't yet

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[104] Clifford, *Predicament of Culture*, 56.

[105] "Les méthodes de collecte des objets sont, neuf fois sur dix, des méthodes d'achat forcé, pour ne pas dire de réquisition. Tout cela jette une certaine ombre sur ma vie … [J]'ai bien l'impression qu'on tourne dans un cercle vicieux: on pille des Nègres, sous prétexte d'apprendre aux gens à les connaître et à les aimer, c'est-à-dire, en fin de compte, à former d'autres ethnographes qui iront eux aussi les 'aimer' et les piller" (Leiris, *Miroir de l'Afrique*, 204). See also Katharine Conley, "What Makes a Collection Surrealist? Twentieth-Century Cabinets of Curiosities in Paris and Houston."

> happened that we purchase all of a man's or woman's clothing and leave them naked in the road, but that will certainly come.[106]

Neither the uneasiness expressed here, nor the fact that he published *L'Afrique fantôme* over the objections of the mission's organizers, kept him from a successful career as an ethnographer and, ultimately, the director of the Musée de l'homme. He is remembered today mainly for his heterodox multi-volume autobiography, but also as a crusader against colonialism, whose work Fanon cites approvingly in several places.[107]

Looking at Leiris's trajectory can help us contextualize and understand the transformation in Beauvoir's own ideas about Blackness. The passages in her autobiography about negro spirituals, African masks, jazz and *les faits divers* have an exact analogue in Leiris's enthusiastic essays which appeared between 1929 and 1930 in the dissident surrealist magazine *Documents,* describing his enthusiasm for Vidor's *Hallelujah* and Lew Leslie's Black Birds Revue, which visited the Moulin Rouge. It is hard not to flinch when reading, for instance, in "Civilisation":

> Spectacles like the Black Birds take us far deeper than art, to a point of human development where that bastard conception had not yet become overdeveloped.... We suffer from terrible regret, regret that we are so rigidly incapable of such simple and beautiful expression, regret that we are mediocre people living mediocre lives, so flat and ugly compared to these touching creatures who live like trees.... Thus this music and dance, far from lingering on our skin, plunge into us deep, organic roots which penetrate with a thousand branchings, a painful surgery transfusing a stronger blood.[108]

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[106] "29 août. Pendant que Lutten visite le village, je travaille dans le bureau de l'administrateur avec les interprètes. Les objets arrivent, paiement. Le petit sac noir qui contient la monnaie—le sac à malice—est plusieurs fois dénoué et renoué. Le carnet d'inventaire s'emplit. Il ne nous est pas encore arrivé d'acheter à un homme ou une femme tous ses vêtements et de le laisser nu sur la route, mais cela viendra certainement" (*Miroir de l'Afrique*, 184–85).

[107] See *PNMB* 22, 31–2; *BSWM* 16, 26–7. The article Fanon uses is Leiris, "Martinique-Guadeloupe-Haiti."

[108] "Des spectacles tels que la revue des Black Birds nous ramènent très en deçà de l'art, à un point du développement humain où n'est pas encore hypertrophiée cette conception bâtarde .... [N]ous souffrons d'un terrible regret, regret d'être si durement incapables d'une expression aussi simple et aussi belle, regret d'être médiocres, vivant d'une vie médiocre, si plats et si laids devant ces créatures émouvantes comme des arbres.... C'est ainsi que ces musiques et ces danses, loin de s'attarder à notre peau, plongent en nous des

Later, in *L'âge d'homme,* he would speak retrospectively of having found in jazz an "abandon to animal joy," the "myth of Edens of color."[109] Timothy Bewes forthrightly calls this "fetishization of the exotic," which he compares to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, a "reverse racism."[110] Indeed, Leiris himself came to describe his young view that pre-modern cultures were superior to the "green scum" of civilisation as "a kind of inverted racism."[111]

The question is how the writer of those naïvely admiring lines became, in the words of James Clifford, "perhaps the first professional ethnographer to name and analyse colonialism, in 1950, as an inescapable ideological ground," the man whose final understanding of the relationship of the metropole to the "dark continent" was "Africa does not need me."[112] Perhaps ethnography could only be decolonized by those who started with a deep suspicion of civilization and its normativities. Somehow Leiris's trip to Africa and the daily writing he did there, helped him move from a fascination with the racialized Other as a (usefully distorting) mirror of the self, through unease about the relationships of commerce and exploitation this inevitably creates, toward actual relationships of collaboration, reciprocity, and responsibility. The improvisatory autobiographical project that followed—*L'âge d'homme* and the four volumes of *La règle du jeu*—made it possible to dramatize his own "désarroi," and that of his national culture, rather than seeking to cure it by quasimagical means.

The clearest statement of this progress is the essay "L'ethnographe devant le colonialisme," which was first published in 1950 in *Les Temps Modernes*. According to the chronology in the Pléiade edition, this was first delivered as a talk with both Aimé Césaire and Claude Lévi-Strauss in the audience: he was literally facing both of them. And "colonialism" in 1950 was not the abstraction or metaphor it sometimes becomes in literary and cultural studies today. It is clearly understood here as an *economic* system, accompanied by its enabling mystifications to be sure, but distinguishable from them: the issue is not

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racines profondes et organiques, qui nous pénètrent de leurs mille ramifications, chirurgie douloureuse mais nous communiquant un sang plus fort" (*Documents* 4, reprinted in *Brisées*, 31–7). See also Dawn Ades and Simon Baker, *Undercover Surrealism: Georges Bataille and* Documents.

[109] "[A]bandon à la joie animale," "mythe des édens de couleur" (Leiris, *L'âge d'homme*, 189–90).

[110] Timothy Bewes, "From the Shameful Order of Virility: Autobiography After Colonialism." (Bewes references Chinua Achebe's famous essay on Conrad.)

[111] Sally Price and Jean Jamin, "Conversation with Michel Leiris," 162. See also "Jazz: An Interview with Michael Haggerty," 102, and Sally Price, "Michel Leiris, French Anthropology, and a Side Trip to the Antilles."

[112] "[L]'Afrique n'a pas besoin de moi" (*Miroir de l'Afrique*, 89). Quoted in Clifford, *Predicament of Culture*, 173.

cultural “difference,” but brutal economic exploitation, the extraction of resources.

Leiris begins by noting that ethnography developed alongside the spread of colonialism, still (in 1950) functions under its protective aegis, and is inextricably intertwined with it, whether or not the ethnographer wants that to be the case: “like it or not, they are part of the game.”[113] The ethnographer’s subjects of study perceive him as part of the colonial administration, and they are not wrong to do so, since he cannot operate without that administration’s support. Also, his investigations change the culture he is studying. All this gives the ethnographer an inescapable obligation toward the people he studies: he cannot close his eyes or wash his hands. Indeed, properly accurate research requires that he take into account the “perturbations” introduced by colonialism, and study societies in their real and current state, rather than referring back to some imagined idea of cultural “integrity”—imaginary, because even before colonialism no group lived in complete isolation.

Leiris deplores the “vaguely humanitarian veil” under which colonialism spread—pointing out that the Nazis made very similar claims.[114] And yet humanism is central to his argument.

> In spite of differences of color and culture, when we do ethnographic research we are always observing our fellow-creatures and we cannot adopt toward them the same indifference of, say, an entomologist casting a curious eye on insects fighting or devouring one another.[115]

Beyond the obligation of every citizen and every intellectual to speak out against injustices committed in his name, the ethnographer has a particular responsibility to serve as the advocate of the colonized vis-à-vis the metropole. But in working to safeguard the cultures they study, ethnographers should be careful not to confuse this with preserving them in some sort of intact state in order to continue to study them: culture is inseparable from history, not a static but a moving thing.[116] The existentialist language, the echo of Hegel, should be familiar to my reader by now:

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[113] “[I]l est, bon gré mal gré, intégré à ce jeu” (“L’ethnographe devant le colonialisme,” 85).

[114] “[V]oile vaguement humanitaire” (ibid., 83). Note the echo of the surrealist manifesto, “Murderous Humanitarianism.”

[115] “En dépit des différences de couleur et de culture, quand nous faisons une enquête ethnographique ce sont toujours nos semblables que nous observons et nous ne pouvons adopter à leur égard l’indifférence, par exemple, de l’entomologiste qui regarde d’un œil curieux des insectes en train de se battre ou de s’entredévorer” (ibid., 85).

[116] “[C]ette culture n’est pas une chose figée mais une chose mouvante” (ibid., 91).

> Once all of culture appears to us as a perpetual becoming, as the object of continual *dépassements* through which the underlying human group makes itself new, a desire to preserve the cultural particularisms of a colonized society no longer means anything. Or rather, such a desire means, practically, opposing oneself to that culture's very life.[117]

Attempts to preserve "traditional" cultures through a system of "reservations" are especially unacceptable: "There is something shocking about putting a society under a bell jar, treating human beings like animals penned in a zoo or isolated for a lab experiment,"[118] and the idea that the people would be "happier" in that situation is a ruse: "We are only too eager to describe as 'happy' a people who make *us* happy when we look at them, because the spectacle gives us a poetic or aesthetic feeling."[119] (This is the same distinction we saw, in both Beauvoir and Wright, between "happy" and "free.")

What is at stake here, in part, is the meaning of the term "culture": Leiris is opposed to the idea of culture as frozen into folklore for tourists (or scholars). And, as Bewes explains, for Leiris "the most 'authentic' Africans … may be those who are more rather than less 'adulterated' by contact with the West—that is to say, those who are aware of their status as colonized people, and who become promoters of an emancipation articulated in universal terms, informed by a sense of solidarity defined 'less by race than by condition.'"[120] According to Leiris, it is especially with this group—the group we might call "subalterns" but who were then called "évolués"—that the ethnographer must stand in a (non-paternalistic) solidarity, including by encouraging the development of archives and indigenous ethnographers. And it is important for ethnographers in the metropole to be encouraged to study societies "in their entirety"—including studying the whites, and the relationships involved in colonialism itself, and seeing "rituals" and the like as embedded in social contexts and "everyday life." In short, Leiris in 1950 proposed a kind of solidarity that understood cultures as dynamic and developing, that recognized the situation of the colonized person as always mediated and mediating, and that left the destiny of indigenous peoples in their own hands. It is not so much a question of "working on," and more a question of "working with."

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[117] "Or, dès l'instant que toute culture apparaît comme en perpétuel devenir et faisant l'objet de dépassements constants à mesure que le groupe humain qui en est le support se renouvelle, la volonté de conserver les particularismes culturels d'une société colonisée n'a plus aucune espèce de signification. Ou plutôt une telle volonté signifie, pratiquement, que c'est à la vie même d'une culture qu'on cherche à s'opposer" (ibid., 92).

[118] "[I]l y a quelque chose de choquant dans le fait de mettre une société sous cloche (car c'est traiter des hommes comme des animaux qu'on parque dans un zoo ou qu'on enferme en vase clos pour une expérience de laboratoire)" (ibid., 94).

[119] "[L]'on n'est que trop porté à regarder comme heureux un peuple qui nous rend, nous, heureux quand nous le regardons, en raison de l'émotion poétique ou esthétique que son spectacle nous donne" (ibid., 95).

[120] Bewes, "From the Shameful Order of Virility," 464.

If we leave aside the Hegelian language of "dépassement" and "devenir," this essay may seem like a simple statement of what anthropologists now generally believe. At the time, however, it was directly opposed by none other than Pierre Bourdieu, who began his own fieldwork in Algeria as part of the occupying French army;[121] and the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss was continuing in a rather different direction, away from the affirmation of human relationships and values, and toward a rather static, abstract conception of culture.[122] Both Bourdieu and Lévi-Strauss are major figures to anthropology students today, unlike Leiris; for example, "L'ethnographe devant le colonialisme" has never been translated into English. And we might be less sanguine about "what anthropologists now generally believe" if we thought about the many anthropologists employed by the World Bank, and those embedded with armies in places like Iraq and Afghanistan.

But *can* we leave aside that existentialist language, that dynamic Hegelian sense of authenticity that speaks of "dépassement" and "devenir"? For anthropology in particular the sense of "progress" and improvement may feel embarassing, especially in the light of the many failures of decolonialization in Africa and elsewhere. (The hopeful tone of Leiris's comments about Mao now have a particular ring of unintended irony.) On the other hand, if one thinks of this from the point of view of a colonized subject, a dynamic sense of culture could well be an improvement over a static sense of structure, and wouldn't that be the viewpoint we should seek to adopt? Perhaps it is impossible to decide this question as a general matter. "L'ethnographe devant le colonialisme" is an existentialist ethics and, as Beauvoir said, an existentialist ethics has to be anchored in a concrete human situation. There are no recipes.[123]

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[121] See Derek Robbins, "The Responsibility of the Ethnographer: An Introduction to Pierre Bourdieu on 'Colonialism and Ethnography,'" 11–12, and Jane Goodman and Paul A. Silverstein, *Bourdieu in Algeria: Colonial Politics, Ethnographic Practices, Theoretical Developments*.

[122] See Sally Price, "Michel Leiris, French Anthropology, and a Side Trip to the Antilles." See also Clifford, *Predicament of Culture*: "The great narrative of entropy and loss in *Tristes tropiques* expresses an inescapable, sad truth. But it is too neat, and it assumes a questionable Eurocentric position at the 'end' of a unified human history, gathering up, memorializing the world's local historicities" (14).

[123] PMA 194, *EA* 134. See chapter 3 above.

While some Leiris scholars have seen his postwar transformation, and many of the ideas in this essay, as a result of Sartre's influence, I would argue as usual for more of a two-way street, less an appropriation or an influence than a collaboration and a dialogue. Long before Leiris met Sartre and Beauvoir, he was already an example of what they were working toward, or hoping for—an ethics of movement that would not degrade into the fixed content of the bourgeois serious man, a freedom that would move beyond theory (or fantasy) to find a purchase on, a genuine participation in and with, a demystified but meaningful world. Much of Leiris's mature literary work involves the reader in dizzing series of oscillations, digressions, and ironies which (unlike in Beauvoir's resolutely realist "metaphysical" novels) do not work toward or look for resolution.[124] As Beauvoir put it in the long passage I quoted above, the idea was to "become engaged, without getting lost."[125] How to do that, though? How to take yourself seriously without taking yourself too seriously, how to accept responsibility for your weight on the earth without turning into the "serious man" who clings to a set of unrevisable fixed ideas, with which he defends himself against all comers?[126]

7 Beauvoir and Surrealism: *L'invitée* (Again)

In my view, Beauvoir followed a similar path to her good friend Leiris in leaving voyeuristic "negrophilia" behind and moving toward a fully responsible attention to colonial histories, an evolution that begins to be visible in the moral period, and solidifies with *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947* and *The Second Sex*. Such attention certainly animated Beauvoir's committed collaborative work with *Les Temps Modernes*, and her crucial and risky public anti-colonialist activism during the Algerian war and afterward. One thing *we* can learn, perhaps, from Leiris, is that the quest to isolate genuine or authentic "difference" is, not just an unattainable fantasy, but actively dangerous, and at odds with real possibilities for effective relationship and solidarity.

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[124] It is gratifying to see that Leiris's mature works are now getting the English translations they have so long deserved, by the wonderful Lydia Davis. Leiris *mattered.* It is rarely noted that one of Derrida's earliest forays into deconstruction, "Tympan," takes off from a long quoted passage from Leiris … and even the short passages I quoted from *Glossaire j'y serre mes gloses* should suffice to indicate a broader indebtedness. Indeed, observing the contortions Derrida went through, at the end of his life, to articulate the kind of stable, committed ethical "position" he had done so much to render inarticulable, I might be tempted to … a further digression, sorry.

[125] *PMA* 79, *EA* 55.

[126] In *Nuits sans nuit et quelques jours sans jour* [nights with no night and some days without sun], which Leiris published in 1961, he drew on notebooks and files to record in chronological order, with minimal comment, a series of dreams starting in the 1920s. Here in his nightmares is the real horror of the Occupation, and also of colonial life, along with more personal terrors. Here too he revisits, and revises, some of the troubling sexualized and racialized images I discussed earlier. He dreams in 1942 of a *revue nègre* like the Black Birds—which leads to boats full of corpses and rotting fish; in 1946, after the inauguration of an exhibit on Madagascar, he dreams that his "patron" Paul Rivet (the founding director of the Musée de l'homme) is directing a traveling circus or Buffalo Wild West traveling show in which he must perform … Leiris, *Nuits sans nuit*, 140, 166.

If I pose to Beauvoir (as it were) the question Sartre asked Queneau—what remained to you from surrealism—one answer might not be entirely dissimilar: there is an association with youth, with books that shocked her parents, with an iconoclastic anti-rationalism and a critique of the West and of civilization, that was particularly helpful as a corrective to the aridity of the idealist philosophy she was learning at the Sorbonne, and as a liberating "déclic" to shake off the influence of two writers, Barrès and Claudel, who *looked* radical, but were actually quite right-wing. (Both had been important to her in girlhood, along with Gide; Barrès, forgotten today, wrote a very influential and terribly anti-semitic book called *Les déracinés*.)[127] Surrealism itself, though, wouldn't be allowed to serve as any kind of alibi: in *Quand prime le spirituel*, it is the con-man and masher Denis who pushes Marguerite to read the "Manifestos of Surrealism" and praises the idea of the *acte gratuit* as an explanation for his own bad faith and bad behavior. (There's more than a little of cousin Jacques in Denis as well.) It's important to keep in mind that the autobiographical works record a process of *Bildung*, of development and change—that same *devenir* and *dépassement*, in a way—and this is true not just for the first volume, but perhaps even more for *La force de l'âge:* an important theme is, how mistaken Beauvoir and Sartre both were, before the war, in not truly understanding the political stakes of their own privilege. Insofar as Beauvoir links her lingering taste for surrealist poems and African masks with a nostalgia for the absolute, she marks the process of leaving that behind: the pursuit of a totality, without limits, is not what a grown-up existentialist ought to do.

Perhaps the writing of *L'invitée* involved a similar process. She records an encounter during the Occupation, while she was writing it, with the avant-garde playwright Arthur Adamov (he was associated with the surrealists and with the Theatre of the Absurd).

> I was working, just as I used to do, in a booth at the back [of the Café Dôme], but there were no more refugees reading the papers or playing

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[127] See Altman, "Necessity but [unintelligible]."

> chess; most of the foreigners had disappeared, and almost all the faces I knew. From time to time Adamov would loom up by my table, his eyes growing wider and wider, endlessly questioning everything…. "What are you writing?" he asked me once. I was brave enough to confess: "A novel." "A novel?" he repeated. "A real novel? With a beginning, a middle, an end?" He seemed as dumbfounded as my father's friends had been, long ago, by the poems of Max Jacob.[128]

Adamov might well have been surprised to see her writing "a real novel," that is to say, a traditional one, after the explosions of surrealism had (supposedly) demolished referentiality—not to mention, in the middle of a war. This is additionally surprising as we've seen Beauvoir's own tastes, at least as a reader, put her in sympathetic contact with the movement whose slogan was "destruction et poésie," and which had declared such novels dead and buried. But interestingly, when *L'invitée* was published, to general acclaim, Adamov did not dislike it.

> I anticipated that Adamov would be scornful. "So," I said to him, "have you seen it? A real novel with a beginning, a middle, and an end, do you utterly despise it?" He shook his head and looked at me gravely: "I wouldn't go that far. There's Xavière," he said. "There is Xavière."[129]

Indeed, Xavière functions a bit like Breton's Nadja, or the unnamed woman in Philippe Soupault's *Dernières nuits à Paris*, as that "infracassable noyau de nuit," the silent, mysterious, possibly mad object whom the other characters passionately attempt and fail to "read," understand, possess. Pierre calls her a "perle noire," a black pearl:

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[128] "Je travaillais, comme autrefois, dans un des boxes du fond, mais il n'y avait plus de réfugiés occupés à lire les journaux ou à jouer aux échecs; la plupart des étrangers avaient disparu, et presque tous les visages que je connaissais. De temps en temps, Adamov surgissait devant ma table, les yeux de plus en plus écarquillés, dans une interrogation sans fin…. 'Mais qu'est-ce que vous écrivez?' me demande-t-il une fois. J'avouai courageusement: 'Un roman.—Un roman? répéta-t-il, un vrai roman? Avec un commencement, un milieu, une fin?' Il avait l'air aussi abasourdi que les amis de mon père, autrefois, devant les poèmes de Max Jacob" (*FA* 543).

Max Jacob, the friend of Picasso and Apollinaire, was a precursor of surrealism and a favorite of Beauvoir's cousin Jacques. See *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*, hereinafter *MJFR*, 279–80, 312–13.

[129] "Je m'attendais au dédain d'Adamov. 'Alors, lui dis-je, vous avez vu? C'est un vrai roman avec un commencement, un milieu, une fin; ça vous déplaît bien fort?' Il hocha la tête, son regard s'alourdit: 'Pas tant que ça. Il y a Xavière, dit-il. Il y a Xavière'" (*FA* 637–38).

> "Everything about her is so pure, and so violent."
>
> "Why black?" asked Françoise.
>
> "Because there's a kind of perversity about her. It's as if she has a need, sometimes, to do harm, to do herself harm and make herself hated."[130]

Xavière is associated with "mysterious perturbations" and obscure, self-absorbed rituals: along with "perversité," the words "sorcière" and "sorcellerie," witch and witchcraft, accompany her throughout the novel.[131] Where Françoise initially sees an "enfant capricieuse," a capricious child, Pierre sees "a fierce and exacting soul": "I find it moving, this inability of hers to form human relationships with people."[132] Pierre treats Xavière as a "Pythie," a Pythian priestess or sybil, and a "living question mark."[133] Françoise comes to espouse his view to the point of being distressed that Pierre himself will destroy it: "This black pearl, this austere angel, with his caressing man's hands Pierre will turn her into a swooning woman … [Françoise] looked on with a kind of horror."[134]

In their more rational moments, the adult tête-à-têtes for which Xavière jealously despises them, Pierre and Françoise debate whether Xavière's refusal or inability (but which is it?) to work or study, to make plans or keep appointments, to consider the feelings or needs of others, and her insistence that anything *but* living in the moment is "bourgeois," constitute a genuine alternative ethic ("morale"), a challenge to the rules for living Pierre and Françoise have carefully worked out for themselves—or whether it is simply "veulerie" (spinelessness). Pierre argues that "when inertia is taken to such an extreme point, one can't go on calling it spinelessness; it takes on a kind of power of its own."[135] (At one point Pierre and Françoise, listening at her door, hear her making non-human moaning sounds, a "plainte animale," and are afraid to go in.)[136] And insofar as Françoise finally does buy into this, Xavière's power becomes real. "This sorceress had made off with her image and subjected it to the worst of spells, just as she pleased."[137] (One way to understand Françoise's over-the-top murderous solution: if what she's up against is *voodoo*, sending Xavière back to Rouen won't make a bit of difference. Witches can fly.)

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[130] "Tout est si pur en elle et si violent.

—Pourquoi noire? dit Françoise.

—À cause de cette espèce de perversité qu'elle a. On dirait que c'est un besoin chez elle par moments de faire du mal, de se faire mal et de se faire haïr" (*L'invitée*, 164).

[131] "[D]e mystérieuses perturbations" (*L'invitée,* 45). See also for instance *L'invitée* 164, 190, 226, 253.

[132] "[Â]me exigeante et farouche" (*L'invitée,* 164). "[Ç]a me touche, cette incapacité où elle est d'avoir des rapports humains avec les gens" (164).

[133] "[U]ne Pythie" (*L'invitée,* 140); "un vivant point d'interrogation" (156).

[134] "[C]ette perle noire, cet ange austère, avec ses mains caressantes d'homme, Pierre en ferait une femme pâmée; déjà il avait écrasé ses lèvres contre les lèvres douces … Elle le regarda avec une espèce d'horreur" (*L'invitée,* 260).

[135] "[Q]uand on pousse l'inertie jusqu'au point où elle la pousse, le nom de veulerie ne convient plus, ca prend une espèce de puissance" (*L'invitée,* 163).

[136] *L'invitée,* 386.

The uncanny connection between the heart of darkness that is Xavière and actual dark-skinned people from warm places is also explicit throughout *L'invitée*. Her irrational, alluring, but dangerous sensuality is especially on view in four bar scenes involving dancing, one set in the famous Bal Nègre, two in a "café maure" (moorish café) with belly-dancing, and one in a Spanish flamenco establishment, to which the trio is introduced by an accomplished actress and dancer, Paule Berger: it is there that Xavière appears most seriously disturbed, burning her own hand studiously with her cigarette, a gesture that Pierre finds "sacrée" and "expiatoire."[138] Three of the four scenes have the same structure Beauvoir described when evoking the Bal Nègre in her memoir: Xavière watches the dancers, absorbed, envious, wanting to become them, nearly succeeding (but not quite); Françoise enjoys herself but does not dance. She watches Xavière. In chapter 2, we are introduced both to the moorish café and to Xavière:

> "I wish I knew how to dance like that," said Xavière; her shoulders shivered, a slight undulation ran over her body. Françoise smiled at her. She was sorry the day was coming to an end; Xavière had been charming.
>
> "In Fez, in the red-light district, Labrousse and I saw some of them dancing naked," said Françoise, "but it was a bit too much like an anatomy lesson."
>
> "What things you've seen!" said Xavière, with a touch of resentment...[139]
>
> The dancer moved toward the middle of the floor; her haunches undulated, her belly rippled to the rhythm of the tambourine.
>
> "It's as if a demon was trapped in her body and trying to escape," said Xavière. She leaned forward, fascinated. Françoise settled deeper into the

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[137] "[C]ette sorcière s'était emparé de son image et lui faisait subir à son gré les pires envoûtements" (*L'invitée*, 298).

[138] See Toril Moi, "*L'invitée*: An Existentialist Melodrama." As I said in chapter 2, I am not in sympathy with the psychoanalytic "payoff" of Moi's reading, but her analysis of this scene is a powerful one.

[139] "Assises au fond du café maure sur des coussins de laine rêche, Françoise et Xavière regardaient la danseuse arabe.

—Je voudrais savoir danser ainsi, dit Xavière; ses épaules frémirent, une ondulation légère parcourut son corps. Françoise lui sourit, elle regrettait que la journée s'achevât; Xavière avait été charmante.

—À Fez, dans le quartier réservé, nous en avons vu, Labrousse et moi, qui dansaient nues, dit Françoise, mais ça ressemblait un peu trop à une démonstration anatomique.

—Vous en avez vu des choses! dit Xavière avec une nuance de rancune" (*L'invitée,* 21).

> cushions; she, too, was touched by all this cheap glitter, but what delighted her more than anything was that she'd brought Xavière's sad little existence into her own life.[140]

The scene in the Bal Nègre itself—labelled the "Bal colonial" by a sign on its door—uses some of the very same language as the autobiographical passage I quoted above.

> In that wide room with its pale frescos, banal as a banqueting hall, nearly all one saw were faces of color; all shades of skin were there, from ebony black to rose-ochre. These Blacks danced with lewd abandon, but such pure rhythm was in their movements that even the rumba, crude and naïve as it was, retained the sacred character of primitive ritual. The whites who mixed with them did less well; the women in particular resembled stiff wind-up toys, or hysterics having fits. All except Xavière, whose perfect grace flew in the face of both decency and indecency.[141]

But Xavière, as usual, is not satisfied. "They have the devil under their skin, these *négresses*,"[142] she said angrily. "I'll never be able to dance like that." Françoise disagrees. "You know, you dance very well [drôlement bien]."[143]

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[140] "La danseuse s'avança vers le milieu de la salle; ses hanches ondulaient, son ventre tressaillit au rythme du tambourin.

—On dirait un démon qui cherche à s'échapper de son corps, dit Xavière. Elle se pencha en avant, fascinée.... Françoise s'enfonça dans les coussins; elle aussi, elle était touchée par tout ce clinquant facile, mais ce qui l'enchantait surtout s'était d'avoir annexé à sa vie cette petite existence triste...." (*L'invitée*, 22–3).

[141] "Dans cette grande pièce décorée de fresques pâles et qui ressemblait dans sa banalité à une salle de noces et banquets, on ne voyait guère que des visages de couleur: du noir d'ébène à l'ocre rosé, on trouvait là toutes les nuances de peau. Ces noirs dansaient avec une obscénité déchaînée, mais leurs mouvements avaient un rythme si pur que dans sa rudesse naïve cette rumba gardait le caractère sacré d'un rite primitif. Les blancs qui se mêlaient à eux avaient moins de bonheur; les femmes surtout ressemblaient à de raides mécaniques ou à des hystériques en transes. Il n'y avait que Xavière dont la grâce parfaite défiât à la fois l'obscénité et la décence" (*L'invitée*, 310).

[142] As in my discussion of *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947* above, I have decided to leave the words *négresse* and *nègre* in French because there is no way to get this right. Today's dictionary leaves no doubt that the terms are "injurieux," insulting, in the same way that "Negro" would be in today's United States. But language changes; it is less clear whether either of these terms would have been insulting in the 1940s; probably it depended on context; any choice on my part would be tendentious.

[143] "D'un signe de tête, Xavière déclina une nouvelle invitation et elle revint s'asseoir à côté de Françoise.

—Elles ont un diable dans la peau, ces négresses, dit-elle avec colère. Jamais je n'arriverai à danser comme ça.

Now, if we were in American literature, or some Vian-like imitation thereof, Xavière's uncanny dancing ability and the way she is drawn to the dance floor might foreshadow a revelation that she had some "Black blood," was, in short, a tragic mulatto, like Faulkner's Joe Christmas. But that's not where this is going.

> "You dance really well, you know," said Françoise.
>
> "Yes, not too bad for a civilized person,"[144] said Xavière in a disdainful tone. She was staring at something in the middle of the dance floor. "She's dancing with that little Creole again," she said, pointing to Lise Malan with her eyes. "She hasn't let go of him since we got here. He's shamefully pretty."
>
> It's true he was charming, slim as could be in his tight brown jacket. An even more plaintive moan slipped from Xavière's lips:
>
> "Ah! she said, I would give a year of my life to be that *négresse* for one hour.... Or else, one would have to be rich enough to buy her and lock her up," said Xavière. "Isn't it Baudelaire who did that? Imagine, when you go home, instead of a dog or a cat, to find this sumptuous creature purring beside a wood fire?"[145]

Actually, Baudelaire did *not* do this: for the record, the Haitian-born dancer Jeanne Duval was his mistress, his "Vénus noire," and his "muse" (as Wikipedia puts it); but he never literally "owned" or confined her. He had hardly any more

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Elle trempa ses lèvres dans son verre.

—Que c'est sucré! Je ne peux pas le boire, dit-elle.

—Vous dansez drôlement bien, vous savez, dit Françoise" (*L'invitée*, 311).

[144] See also the following exchange: "'In the end you'll dance just as well as the *négresse* does.' 'Alas, it's impossible,' said Xavière." [Vous finirez par danser aussi bien que la négresse.—Hélas! ce n'est pas possible, dit Xavière (*L'invitée*, 315).]

[145] "—Vous dansez drôlement bien, vous savez, dit Françoise.

—Oui, pour une civilisée, dit Xavière d'un ton méprisant. Elle regardait fixement quelque chose au milieu de la piste.

—Elle danse encore avec ce petit créole, dit-elle; ses yeux désignaient Lise Malan. Elle ne l'a pas lâché depuis que nous sommes arrivées. Elle ajouta d'un ton plaintif: il est honteusement joli.

C'est vrai qu'il était charmant, tout mince dans une veste cintrée couleur bois de rose. Des lèvres de Xavière s'échappa un gémissement plus plaintif encore:

—Ah! dit-elle, je donnerais un an de ma vie pour être pendant une heure cette négresse.... Ou alors, il faudrait être assez riche pour l'acheter et pour la séquestrer, dit Xavière. C'est Baudelaire qui avait fait ça, n'est-ce pas? Vous imaginez, quand on rentre chez soi, au lieu d'un chien ou d'un chat, trouver cette somptueuse créature en train de ronronner au coin du feu de bois!" (*L'invitée*, 311).

money than she did, by the end. Objectified, yes; enslaved, no.[146] One suspects Françoise knows the difference, but she is not in a pedagogical mood.

> A Black naked body stretched out before a wood fire … was this what Xavière dreamed of? How far did her dream go?[147]

Now, this whole novel is about looking, about the Look of the Other and its power to steal the world. (Pierre is amazed at Françoise's ability to experience a philosophical issue in such a visceral manner: but she does, and so, apparently, did her creator.)[148] For now, though, suppose we focus not on what happens when Xavière's ability to look back at Françoise contests Françoise's monopoly of the subject position, but what happens when that (Sartrean) either/or power problematic intersects (so to speak) with something that is problematic for *us*: the well-sedimented tendency for white people to see people of color, particularly entertainers of color, as objects who exist purely for our viewing pleasure, like zoo animals. To answer Petrine Archer-Straw's question, what I need to decide is first whether Françoise shares, or merely envies, Xavière's problematic "gaze";[149] and then, whether "Beauvoir," or at least the novel as a whole, shares in it, or merely describes it. There is, indisputably, "negrophilia" in this scene. Whose negrophilia is it?

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[146] Angela Carter, who retold their story from Jeanne's point of view in "Black Venus," summarized it in a 1985 interview: "He treated her, as they say, 'Quite well,' except that he appears not to have taken her in any degree seriously as a human being" (Kerryn Goldsworthy, "Angela Carter," 11).

[147] "—Un corps noir et nu couché de tout son long devant un feu de bois … était-ce cela que Xavière rêvait? Jusqu'où allait son rêve?" (*L'invitée*, 311, ellipsis in original).

[148] See *L'invitée*, 376. Margaret Simons has drawn attention to a line from Beauvoir's student diary, where she is reflecting on the difference between herself and Merleau-Ponty, a fellow student: "those problems that he lives in his mind, I live them with my arms and my legs" (Beauvoir, *Diary of a Philosophy Student*, 2). Any reading of Beauvoir's letters and autobiography certainly bears out this claim.

[149] The issue of "sexual tourism" with respect to the Bal Nègre and desire between women is very well discussed in Michel Lucey, "Simone de Beauvoir and Sexuality in the Third Person," using the methodology of literary pragmatics. As I wrote in chapter 2 above, the possibility of lesbian intersubjectivity (between Xavière and Françoise) is expressed in scenes like these (and there are others) where both women together look at *other* women, and assess them from a physical point of view. These involve both objectification and desire (obviously), but there's often, as here, a blurring or slippage between a competitive, comparing gaze, and desire *tout court*, that is between the desire to *be* and the desire to *have* what one is looking at. I suspect Beauvoir saw this as a stable feature of the condition of women: even Pierre's aggressively heterosexual sister Elisabeth indulges in it.

I think a case can at least be made that Françoise takes a step, or a half-step, back from her own attraction to the "letting go" of the Bal Nègre and from the nexus of association that brings dark skin, and Xavière herself, closer to the animal kingdom than to civilization. Like Leiris in Africa, Françoise deplores her own ability to "let go," but in the end it is Françoise's consciousness, and consciousness *tout court*, that is to say, consciousness rather than the dark night of the Unconscious ("l'infracassable noyau de nuit"), which must triumph, as a matter of life and death. If we want to talk about violence, it is the hyper-rational, over-civilized Françoise who suddenly becomes a killer. So the end of the book leaves me in a similar quandary as the end of *J'irai cracher sur vos tombes*: Wait, what? Where are my sympathies supposed to be here? *What is this book trying to say?*

The turning point, I think, comes when a friend, the dancer Paule Berger (who is a serious artist, as well as a woman with enviably fluid command of her body) invites the trio for an evening at the Spanish club: it reminds Françoise of trips she and Pierre used to take to Seville, and Paule notes with pleasure that there is no "faux pittoresque"—this is an authentic place where real Spanish people go. The musicians and especially the flamenco dancers are described in terms that recall the Arab dancer in the moorish café and the *négresses* of the Bal Nègre:

> "These women are astonishing," said Françoise. "They have layers and layers of paint on their faces, and yet it doesn't make them look artificial, the face stays quite lively and animal."[150]

Xavière, as usual, is entranced: "Her cheeks were pink, she was no longer in control of her own face and her eyes followed the movements of the dancer, dazed with rapture."[151] But when Françoise next looks at her, she has turned inward and is torturing herself, slowly and deliberately burning her hand with the glowing end of her own cigarette: "a bitter smile curled back her lips, an intimate solitary smile like the smile of a madwoman, the voluptuous tortured smile of a woman gripped by pleasure, one could hardly bear to look at her."[152]

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150 "—Elles sont étonnantes, ces femmes, dit Françoise. Elles ont des couches de fard sur la peau et pourtant ça ne leur donne pas l'air artificiel, leur visage demeure tout vivant et animal" (*L'invitée*, 351).

151 "Ses pommettes étaient roses, elle ne contrôlait plus son visage et ses regards suivaient les mouvements de la danseuse avec un ravissement hébété" (*L'invitée*, 353).

152 "[U]n sourire aigu retroussait ses lèvres; c'était un sourire intime et solitaire comme un sourire de folle, un sourire voluptueux et torturé de femme en proie au plaisir, on pouvait à peine en soutenir la vue" (*L'invitée*, 354).

This is Xavière's most "Nadja" moment.[153] Pierre interprets the gesture as sacred: Françoise, however, has had enough. By the end of the chapter she will have decided, once and for all, that Xavière's "extase hystérique" reveals an "enemy presence," and that what she feels for Xavière henceforth will deserve the name of hate.[154]

But before Françoise reaches that point, the *novel* has had enough: the stage set falls apart and reality breaks through, in a long, very moving passage about the Fascist destruction of Spain.

> A young woman stood up from a neighboring table and began to recite a Spanish poem in a harsh voice; a vast silence fell over the room and all eyes were fixed on her. Even without understanding the meaning of the words one was gripped to one's guts by this passionate tone of voice, this face distorted by pathos and ardor; the poem spoke of hatred and death, perhaps also of hope, and through its rising and falling tones of grief it was Spain, Spain torn to pieces, that was suddenly present to every heart. Gunfire and blood had driven the guitars, the songs, the gay shawls, and the fragrant flowers from her streets; the dancing-schools were in ashes, and bombs had burst the goatskins full of wine; in the gentle warmth of the evening, hunger stalked those streets, and fear. The flamenco, the intoxicating taste of the wine, were funereal echos of a dead past.[155]

Something is happening, and it's not about them. From this point on, the novel deserts fantasies of escape into Otherness for the morning-after bitterness of adult life. Even Xavière feels it. Françoise tries to rescue the evening, sounding a false note of social good manners:

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[153] There is even a reference to the beauty of ghosts (*L'invitée*, 360).

[154] "[Cette] présence ennemie," *L'invitée*, 363. In Françoise's final rage, which ends both the novel and Xavière's life, the *myth* of Xavière dies first: "'the black pearl, the precious one, the spell-binder. Just a female [animal],' she thought, passionately." [La perle noire, la précieuse, l'ensorceleuse, la généreuse. Une femelle, pensa-t-elle avec passion (*L'invitée*, 491).]

[155] "À une table voisine, une jeune femme venait de se lever et elle commençait à déclamer d'une voix rauque un poème espagnol; un grand silence se fit et tous les regards se posèrent sur elle. Même si l'on ne comprenait pas le sens des mots, on était pris aux entrailles par cet accent passionné, par ce visage que défigurait une ardeur pathétique; le poème parlait de haine et de mort, peut-être aussi d'espoir, et à travers ses sursauts et ses plaintes, c'était l'Espagne déchirée qui se faisait soudain présente à tous les cœurs. Le feu et le sang avaient chassé des rues les guitares, les chansons, les châles éclatants, les fleurs de nard; les maisons de danse s'étaient effondrées et les bombes avaient crevé les outres gonflées de vin; dans la chaude douceur des soirs rôdaient la peur et la faim. Les chants flamencos, la saveur des vins dont on se grisait, ce n'était plus que l'évocation funèbre d'un passé défunt" (*L'invitée,* 362–63).

> "We still have some time …. Paule was right, it's a good place."
>
> Xavière let out a bizarre laugh.
>
> "Don't you think we looked like American tourists visiting 'Paris at Night'? We sat down, off to the side, so as not to get dirty, we looked, without touching anything …"
>
> Pierre's face darkened.
>
> "What, you would have liked us to snap our fingers and shout *Olé*?"[156]

(When Pierre was offered a wineskin to drink, and showed how to do it "properly," he choked and got wine all over his tie.) It *is* a good place, a "real" place, as Paule had promised; but they don't belong there.

A bit later, Françoise and Xavière return to the Moorish café, but it has lost its magic. "'How sad it's become,' Xavière said."[157] The *danseuse* is no longer beautiful.

> "What big thighs she has," said Xavière with disgust, "she's gotten fat."
>
> "She was always fat," said Françoise.
>
> "It's very possible," said Xavière. "It used to be so easy to dazzle me."[158]

Was this novel, then, sadly "of its time" in its images of people of color, and how it uses those images? Or is something more complex going on?

It does seem fair to say that both Beauvoir and Sartre in their early literary works made use of Blackness as an avant-garde and anti-establishment *trope*. So, in the early pages of *La nausée*, a *nègre*, dressed in yellow socks, a green hat, and a raincoat, comes whistling around a streetcorner in the middle of the afternoon. Just then, a woman in a sky-blue coat is running backwards down the street, laughing, waving a handkerchief; right under an unlit street lamp, she crashes backwards into his arms. He almost seems like a refugee from an absurdist painting, an objective correlative for the narrator's state of mind, a sign that the perceptual world has gone slightly out out of whack (but only slightly).[159] We've never seen these people before and we'll never see them again. The blues song "Some of These Days" will fill a similar gap at the end of *La nausée*: it is something *from far, far outside* that nonetheless, uncannily, penetrates the narrator to the core, in the way Leiris described the dancers of the Black Birds revue. Xavière certainly seems to participate in the same dynamic, as in an early scene when the two women are eating sandwiches in Xavière's room.

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[156] "[N]ous avons encore du temps devant nous, c'est plaisant d'être ici. Elle se tournait vers Xavière: N'est-ce pas? Paule n'avait pas menti, c'est un bon endroit.

Xavière eut un rire bizarre.

—Vous ne trouvez pas qu'on a l'air de touristes américains en train de visiter 'Paris la Nuit.' Nous sommes installés un peu à l'écart, pour ne pas nous salir, et nous regardions, sans toucher à rien …

Le visage de Pierre s'assombrit.

—Quoi! vous voudriez que nous fassions claquer nos doigts en criant: 'Ollé!' dit-il" (*L'invitée,* 361, ellipsis in original).

[157] "—Comme c'est devenu triste, dit Xavière" (*L'invitée,* 422).

[158] "—Comme elle a de grosses hanches, dit Xavière avec dégoût, elle a engraissé.

—Elle a toujours été grosse, dit Françoise.

—C'est bien possible, dit Xavière. Il en fallait si peu autrefois pour m'éblouir" (*L'invitée,* 425).

> "Something very lucky just happened to me," said Xavière in a confiding tone.
>
> "And what was that?" asked Françoise.
>
> "The beautiful *nègre* dancer!" said Xavière. "He spoke to me."
>
> "Be careful, or the blonde will scratch your eyes out," said Françoise.
>
> "I passed him on the stairs, as I was going up with my tea and all my little packages." Xavière's eyes lit up. "He was so nice! he was wearing a light-coloured raincoat and his hat was pale grey, which goes so well with that dark skin. All the packages fell out of my hands. He picked them up and gave them back to me with a big smile and he said to me, 'Good evening, Mademoiselle, bon appetit.'"
>
> "And what did you say back to him?"
>
> "Nothing!" said Xavière, as if she'd heard something scandalous. "I ran away."
>
> She smiled.
>
> "He's graceful like a cat, so unconscious, and so sly."[160]

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[159] "[T]out l'invraisemblable … tout ce qui ne pourrait pas être cru dans les cafés, on ne le manque pas. Par exemple samedi, vers quatre heures de l'après-midi, sur le bout du trottoir en planches du chantier de la gare, une petite femme en bleu ciel courait à reculons, en riant, en agitant un mouchoir. En même temps, un Nègre avec un imperméable crème, des chaussures jaunes et un chapeau vert, tournait le coin de la rue et sifflait. La femme est venue le heurter, toujours à reculons, sous une lanterne qui est suspendue à la palissade et qu'on allume le soir. Il y avait donc là, en même temps, cette palissade qui sent si fort le bois mouillé, cette lanterne, cette petite bonne femme blonde dans les bras d'un Nègre, sous un ciel de feu" (Sartre, *La nausée*, 22).

[160] "—Il m'est arrivé un grand bonheur tout à l'heure, dit Xavière d'un ton de confiance.
—Et quoi donc? dit Françoise.
—Le beau danseur nègre! dit Xavière. Il m'a adressé la parole.

A better illustration of the failure of intersubjectivity Edward Hughes was warning about would be hard to find: Xavière has had a marvelous *encounter*; she hasn't had a human *interaction*, and seems barely able to conceive such a thing.

But there is more to this *nègre* than to *La nausée*'s one-dimensional whistler: he speaks, though his speech is not "recognized." And we see more sides to him than Xavière does. It was Françoise who first mentioned him to Xavière in the early days of introducing her to the varied *gens du quartier*. (They were sitting with Pierre's sister Elizabeth in a place called the Prairie, which the older women frequented in their youth.)

> "See that woman at the bar with the turned-up nose? She lives in my building. She slinks around the hallways for hours, in a sky-blue nightgown; I think she's trying to seduce the *nègre* who lives in the apartment above mine."
>
> "She's not that pretty," said Xavière. Her eyes grew wide. "There's a brown-haired woman next to her who is really beautiful."[161]

The *nègre* doesn't have much of a speaking part in the novel, and he doesn't affect the plot, but he certainly (for lack of a better term) *exists*, for himself and for *autrui*. He lives in their building; he has friends, he has a girlfriend, maybe. At one point, Françoise sits down to work but has troubling concentrating:

—Prenez garde que la blonde ne vous arrache pas les yeux, dit Françoise.

—Je l'ai croisé dans l'escalier comme je remontais avec mon thé et tous mes petits paquets. Les yeux de Xavière s'illuminèrent. Qu'il était plaisant! Il avait un pardessus tout clair et un chapeau gris pâle, c'était si joli avec cette peau sombre. Mes paquets m'en sont tombés des mains. Il me les a ramassés avec un grand sourire et il m'a dit: 'Bonsoir, Mademoiselle, bon appétit.'

—Et qu'est ce que vous avez répondu? dit Françoise.

—Rien! dit Xavière d'un air scandalisé. Je me suis sauvée.

Elle sourit.

—Il est gracieux comme un chat, il a l'air aussi inconscient et aussi traître" (*L'invitée*, 169).

[161] "Regardez au bar, la blonde au nez retroussé; elle habite dans mon hôtel; elle traîne pendant des heures dans les couloirs, en chemise de nuit bleu ciel; je crois que c'est pour aguicher le nègre qui habite au-dessus de ma tête.

—Elle n'est pas jolie, dit Xavière; ses yeux s'agrandirent. Il y a une femme brune à côté d'elle qui est bien belle" (*L'invitée*, 33–4).

> In the next room the *nègre* was giving the blonde hooker a tap-dancing lesson; a little Spanish woman who tended bar at the Topsy was with them, too. Françoise recognized their voices.[162]

On another occasion Françoise is sick in bed:

> A door slammed on the landing and someone went down the corridor, slippers dragging; it must be the blonde hooker, who was just waking up; in the room above, the *nègre*'s phonograph was softly playing "Solitude."[163]

This *nègre* is the subject of his own story, going on in another part of the building; he and his story are real in ways that don't depend on Françoise or Xavière. He's not a "symbol" of anything. (Perhaps he was based on a real person, like the intersexed refugee from Nazi Germany who also fascinates Xavière, and who shows up also in *La force de l'âge*.) In the end, how important is any of this? My answer has to be, it's actually not important at all, that's the point. A Black man lives in my apartment building, he's good-looking and kind of nice, and (unlike us) he has a phonograph. So what?

Now, obviously Sartre's thinking on race did not end with *La nausée*'s whistling Negro. It would be possible to chart the shifts in his thinking about race by comparing the one-dimensional use of "local color" in his early fiction to the fullfledged anti-racism of *La putain respectueuse*: a melodrama, for sure, but a politically correct one. After a great deal of assistance from Richard Wright, that play's "nègre," though he still lacks a name, is certainly a man and not a myth. What I'm describing was in those years a common trajectory; and at the time of *L'invitée*, I think, Beauvoir was somewhere in the middle of it. If *L'invitée* cannot quite stage a passage from fascination to solidarity, at least it achieves the recognition of the racial other as an everyday human being, the recognition that is a necessary (though not a sufficient) ground for solidarity.

It's worth noting also that at least some of its earliest readers seem to have experienced *L'invitée* as a critique, rather than a celebration, of the avant-garde mystique it puts on display. To finish the passage I quoted earlier:

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[162] "Dans la chambre voisine le nègre donnait une leçon de claquettes à la putain blonde; il y avait avec eux une petite Espagnole qui était barmaid au Topsy, Françoise reconnaissait leurs voix" (*L'invitée*, 138).

[163] "Une porte claqua sur le palier et quelqu'un traversa le couloir en traînant des savates, ça devait être la putain blonde qui se levait; dans la chambre du dessus, le phonographe du nègre jouait doucement: 'Solitude'" (*L'invitée*, 217).

> I anticipated that Adamov would be scornful. "So," I said to him, "have you seen it? A real novel with a beginning, a middle, and an end, do you utterly despise it?" He shook his head and looked at me gravely: "I wouldn't go that far. There's Xavière," he said. "There is Xavière." Because of Xavière, some of the habitués of the Café de Flore allowed for extenuating circumstances, but the great majority saw me in an unfavorable light; they complained to Olga, to Mouloudji: I had spoken in a very mediocre way of the Bal Nègre and its splendid animality. They did not find any of their myths in the novel, and the character of Françoise exasperated them.[164]

For the *gens du Flore*, as for Xavière herself, the novel's negrophilia (or whatever) does not go far enough; present-day readers may still feel it goes a bit too far. But the novel overall includes an awareness that there is something impossible, and also something vaguely sick, about making use of the Other in that way.

Within *L'invitée* these *gens du Flore* are associated with the "clan Péclard" that Gerbert has outgrown,[165] and who are faintly suspicious of Pierre's experiments as a dramatist.[166] Pierre's sister, Elizabeth, who incarnates artistic bad faith (and every other kind) describes herself as working in the surrealist tradition, but in a way that doesn't make much sense.[167] To use Beauvoir's phrase from *La force de l'âge*, surrealism is the air the novel breathes. But both ethically and aesthetically speaking, it doesn't inhale.

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[164] "Je m'attendais au dédain d'Adamov. 'Alors, lui dis-je, vous avez vu? C'est un vrai roman avec un commencement, un milieu, une fin; ça vous déplaît bien fort?' Il hocha la tête, son regard s'alourdit: 'Pas tant que ça. Il y a Xavière, dit-il. Il y a Xavière.' À cause de Xavière, quelques habitués du Flore m'accordaient des circonstances atténuantes; mais la grande majorité me regardait d'un mauvais œil; ils se plaignirent à Olga, à Mouloudji: j'avais piètrement parlé du Bal nègre et de sa splendide animalité. Ils ne retrouvaient dans ce roman aucun de leurs mythes et le personnage de Françoise les exaspérait" (*FA* 637–38).

[165] "[Gerbert] crossed the place Saint-Germain-des-Prés; [Pierre and Françoise] had arranged to meet him at the café de Flore; the spot amused them because they rarely went there, but as for him, he'd had it up to here with that whole enlightened elite." [Il traversa la place Saint-Germain-des-Prés; ils lui avaient donné rendez-vous au café de Flore; l'endroit les amusait parce qu'ils n'y venaient pas souvent, mais pour lui, il en avait par-dessus la tête, de toute cette élite éclairée" (*L'invitée*, 317).]

[166] See *L'invitée*, 112.

[167] Pierre says she is right to give up realism in treating of war subjects. "Yes, you see the direction I'm working in now, she said. I'm trying to use the incoherence, the freedom, of the surrealists, but to remain in control." [Tu as vu, c'est dans ce sens-là que je travaille maintenant, dit-elle. J'essaye d'utiliser l'incohérence et la liberté des surréalistes, mais en les dirigeant" (*L'invitée*, 275).]

As Doris Ruhe has discussed, Beauvoir left the drafting of literary manifestos to Sartre, and rarely even published books reviews. But *L'invitée* makes an implicit critique on the level of literary form. If Xavière is Nadja—and both Toril Moi and Susan Suleiman agree with the *gens du Flore* that she is[168]—then *L'invitée* also explores what happens when the mysterious surrealist Other turns out after all to have *une vie à elle* and something to say. A surrealist "novel" is not really a novel as such: it never has more than one real character. Beauvoir would later explain, in her debate with Blanchot, her own sense that novels, at least good ones, operate dialectically, to provide the texture of the real.[169] She came to prefer *L'invitée*, and even more so *Les mandarins*, which stages an unresolvable political argument among many voices, to *Le sang des autres*, a "thesis novel" whose voice came too close to the didactic hectoring of the moral period essays with which she groups it. It would be a particular error, then, to take these café scenes, the image-repertory they make use of, the allusion to a common context, nexus, discourse, as "Beauvoir."

Insofar as *L'invitée* engages with race, it does so on the level of myth, not on the level of politics (or even ethics). But I think we must see it as reporting on the myths rather than sharing in or succumbing to them—much as Beauvoir will do in *The Second Sex*, where the question of "myth" is, obviously, extremely salient.

8 Myths and Travels

Thinking about the extremely diverse and heterogeneous material she discusses in *The Second Sex* under the heading of "mythes" reminds us that a myth is not just any old story that turns out not to be true: it is a culturally powerful story that despite, or even because of, not being true has an enormous hold on people ("je sais très bien, mais quand même … "). And it seems important that Beauvoir's take-down of Breton occurs at toward the end of her long section about "*myths* of woman." When second-wave American feminist criticism picked up on the methodology (so to speak) of *The Second Sex*, they (we) tended to speak of "*images* of women" in works of art by men. But there's a difference. If Beauvoir had just been looking for "negative images" of the female body in surrealist and post-surrealist literature, there are actually plenty of examples from Leiris's literary work that could have given Breton a run for his money. She does draw on his autobiographical *L'âge d'homme* for some fairly striking descriptions of the female body; in the course of discussing how Christian "puritanism" has afflicted men's view of sexuality, she quotes Leiris's description of his symptom: "I have a tendency to consider the feminine organ as a dirty thing or a wound, not less attractive though for that, but dangerous in itself, as everything that is bloody, viscous, and contaminated."[170] However, she makes an interesting distinction.

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[168] See Moi, "*L'invitée:* An Existentialist Melodrama," 123: "As the repressed unconscious, the mysterious X that always escapes a final, controlling interpretation, Xavière comes across as a traditional patriarchal representation of femininity in modernist garb: Xavière's closest fictional sister is surely André Breton's Nadja. Her power to stir and unsettle all fixed representations, to incarnate a certain revolutionary hysteria, may also awake associations from Freud's Dora to Marguerite Duras's Lol V. Stein. But where Breton and Duras—in widely different ways, to be sure—*valorize* the transgressive, disordering power of their heroines, Beauvoir feels deeply threatened by it: not for her the delights of unconscious femininity or the jouissance of the disruptive sliding of the signifier." I would dissent only from the psychoanalyzing word "threatened" here: I think Beauvoir made this decision in full conscious lucidity.

[169] This has been so well discussed by Ruhe ("Beauvoir, Blanchot, et Sartre"), Moi ("What Can Literature Do?"), Fallaize (*The Novels of Simone de Beauvoir*), and others that there is no reason to belabor it here.

> Myth must not be confused with the grasp of a meaning [signification]; meaning is immanent to the object; it is revealed to consciousness in a living experience, whereas a myth is a transcendent Idea that escapes any conscious awareness. When Michel Leiris in *L'âge d'homme* describes his vision of female organs, he shows us meanings and does not develop any myth. Wonderment at the sight of a woman's body or disgust for menstrual blood are apprehensions of a concrete reality. There is nothing mythical in the experience of uncovering the voluptuous qualities of womanly flesh, and one does not turn the experience into myth by trying to express these qualities through similes, as flowers or as pebbles. But to say that Woman is Flesh, to say that Flesh is Night and Death, or that she is the splendor of the Cosmos, is to leave earthly truth behind and fly off into an empty sky. After all, man is also flesh for woman, and woman is more than a fleshly object; and the flesh takes on singular meanings, for each person, in each encounter.[171]

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170 "Michel Leiris écrit dans *L'âge d'homme*: 'J'ai couramment tendance à regarder l'organe féminin comme une chose sale ou comme une blessure, pas moins attirante pour cela, mais dangereuse en elle-même, comme tout ce qui est sanglant, muqueux, contaminé'" (*DS* 1:279). The other example Beauvoir gives is from Faulkner's *Light in August*.

171 "Il ne faut pas confondre le mythe avec la saisie d'une signification; la signification est immanente à l'objet; elle est révélée à la conscience dans une expérience vivante; tandis que le mythe est une Idée transcendante qui échappe à toute prise de conscience. Quand dans *L'âge d'homme* Michel Leiris décrit sa vision des organes féminins, il nous livre des

I don't find this distinction easy to understand, to be honest. But the point seems to be that not every negative apprehension of the female body, and not every use of the female body as metaphor, is a problem for Beauvoir. Leiris in her example does those things, but as part of his attempt to chronicle and analyse his own singular subjective experience: we might say he doesn't theorize, or he doesn't totalize, his experiences. He remains a good phenomenologist; what he uncovers in himself is often as tough to take for the reader as it was and is for him (*L'âge d'homme* is called an "essai-martyr," remember).[172] Perhaps Beauvoir's own engagement with images of women we find troubling can be understood in the same way.

Or perhaps the distinction between developing a myth and reporting on one is not, in the end, as clearcut as she (and we) would like such things to be.

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Fall 2010. I am sitting on the floor in the middle of the night, surrounded by a chaos of books and papers relating to Michel Leiris. I am supposed to be packing for my sabbatical trip. Instead, I am watching King Vidor's 1929 film, *Hallelujah.* (It needs to go back to Netflix, like, yesterday.) The film seems to have been enormously important to Leiris and Beauvoir both, that is a point of

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significations et n'élabore aucun mythe. L'émerveillement devant le corps féminin, le dégoût du sang menstruel sont des appréhensions d'une réalité concrète. Il n'y a rien de mythique dans l'expérience qui découvre les qualités voluptueuses de la chair féminine et on ne passe pas au mythe quand on tente de les exprimer par des comparaisons avec des fleurs ou des cailloux. Mais dire que la Femme, c'est la Chair, dire que la Chair est Nuit et Mort, ou qu'elle est la splendeur du Cosmos, c'est quitter la vérité de la terre et s'envoler vers un ciel vide. Car l'homme aussi est chair pour la femme; et celle-ci est autre qu'un objet charnel; et la chair revêt pour chacun et dans chaque expérience des significations singulières" (*DS* 1:398).

[172] How Beauvoir could, after reading that intimate exploration of a man's difficulties in coming to sexual maturity, have concluded that male adolescence was *easy*, is one mystery I cannot fathom.

Leiris makes two other appearances in *The Second Sex*. In a discussion about the powers (beneficent and/or threatening) given to the Mother, she quotes in a footnote a long section of his disturbing poem "La mère," commenting on "why rebels attack the mother-figure so furiously; in scorning her, the appointed guardian of custom and morality, they refuse the pre-given values society seeks to impose." [[C]'est pourquoi aussi tous les révoltés s'acharnent sur la figure de la mère; en la bafouant, ils refusent le donné qu'on prétend leur imposer à travers la gardienne des mœurs et des lois (*DS* 1:286).] And in the section on "Formation," when explaining what is terrifying of a girl's first sexual experience, she reaches for his bull-fighting metaphor of the bed as a "terrain de vérité"—literally a "place of truth," this refers to the part of the ring where either the bull or the matador will die (*DS* 2:158).

connection between them: I'm looking for a neutral point to judge their response. But I can't make head or tail of what's been written about the film. Some commentators describe a stunningly beautiful, dignified evocation of African American life, others find an embarrassing collection of racist stereotypes.

So I watch it. And I still can't make up my mind. I watch the commentary that comes with it on the DVD: the scholars, who seem unusually ill at ease, can't seem to make up their minds whether the film is retrograde or revolutionary, either. (The film itself seems unsure whether it is a documentary or a melodrama.) Outdated ethnocentrism? Lost beauty? It is very compellingly *both*. (Could I prove that? How would one begin to go about proving such a thing?) What I can say is that it is definitely still worth watching.

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There's a scene in *Les mandarins* where Paule rather pathetically asks Anne, as they are getting ready for a high-society party, whether she should wear her African necklace. Anne thinks, you know, probably not: the necklace represents the defiance/eroticism of a previous era, which Paule is vainly trying to recapture.[173] Henri in that novel's opening pages is longing for the East, to feel the sun on his face as he used to do before the war … and he, too, attempts to recapture the past by locating it east and south (Portugal), and going to Portugal with a different, younger woman, Nadine. But it doesn't work. Neither Henri nor Nadine can avoid noticing, first the abundance of food (compared with the wartime austerity of Paris) and then—worse—that amid this plenty most of the Portuguese, too, are starving. Henri's vacation time is swallowed up by the very sort of political conversation he had hoped to escape.[174]

The political commitment to which Henri returns at the end of that book is very much anti-colonial. In *L'invitée* the East and South are still, to some extent, barely distinguished, mysterious and alluring realms of desire; by the time of *Les mandarins*, the colonized world has become a political sphere about which Henri informs himself, with respect to which he takes on certain political responsibilities. So to my mind, as with Leiris, the question is, not whether the initial sources of Beauvoir's interest were pure, but what she made of them.

It would be fair to say that when she embarked for the United States, it was not the land of White but the land of Black that she contemplated seeing with the greatest fascination, as though she were about to take a trip to the bottom of the Unconscious.

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[173] *Les mandarins*, 2:80.

[174] *Les mandarins*, 1:138–58.

> So for us America was first, a saraband of images, on a background of raucous voices and jagged rhythms: the trances and dances of Hallelujah, the buildings reared up against the sky, prisons in revolt, high smokestacks, strikes, long silky limbs, locomotives, planes, wild horses, rodeos. When we looked away from this bric-à-brac, we thought of America as the country where capitalist oppression was triumphing most detestably; we hated it for exploitation, unemployment, racism, lynchings. Nonetheless, beyond good and evil, life there had something giant and wild that fascinated us.[175]

Note, however, that Beauvoir retrospectively characterizes what she anticipated seeing as a "sarabande des images" and as "ce bric-à-brac." It seems like the trip to America—the real trip to the real United States, which Boris Vian by the way never took—operated as a kind of cure "dans le vrai," and was theoretically and politically productive.[176]

In *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947* Beauvoir records a long conversation she and Wright had, while they were eating barbecue in Harlem, where Wright was very critical of whites who "go to Blacks" in order to appreciate their supposedly greater musical abilities, their sensual power, and so on. Wright uses the language of psychology (projection, neurosis) to condemn even such well-meaning "amis des noirs" as the jazz musician Mezz Mezzrow for missing the point about racial oppression.

> Wright deplores, among many other things, the sort of attraction many whites in the North and especially in New York feel with regard to Blacks. They define them as the antithesis of American civilization: magnificently gifted in music and dance, rich in animal instincts and especially an extraordinary sexual potency, insouciant, unconscious, dreamers, poets, open to religious sentiments, undisciplined, child-like, such is the

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175 "Ainsi l'Amérique, pour nous, c'était d'abord, sur un fond de voix rauques et de rythmes brisés, une sarabande d'images: les transes et danses des noirs d'*Hallelujah*, des buildings dressés contre le ciel, des prisons en révolte, des hauts fourneaux, des grèves, de longues jambes soyeuses, des locomotives, des avions, des chevaux sauvages, des rodéos. Quand nous nous détournions de ce bric-à-brac, nous pensions à l'Amérique comme au pays où triomphait le plus odieusement l'oppression capitaliste; nous détestions en elle l'exploitation, le chômage, le racisme, les lynchages. Néanmoins, par-delà le bien et le mal, la vie avait là-bas quelque chose de gigantesque et de déchaîné qui nous fascinait" (*FA* 162).

176 The closing scene of *La nausée,* too, evokes New York in a way that would no longer be possible once Sartre had *been* there.

> conventional image of Blacks they are happy to hold. And they "go to Blacks" because they have projected onto them what they themselves wish to be and are not; but the most fascinated are those who feel themselves most profoundly deficient; so that these "nigger-lovers," as southerners would call them, are for the most part bitter, sick, neurotic, ravaged by inferiority complexes. That Mezzrow goes to live in Harlem and systematically prefers Blacks to whites stems from this attitude; Wright finds it harmful, because it hangs onto the gulf between Blacks and whites. The evident differences between the two castes come from differences in historical, economic, social, cultural situation, which could—at least theoretically—be abolished. But this is one of the truths which even the most well-meaning Americans do not want to hear.[177]

Wright's view here is quite close to Fanon's in the opening pages of *Peau noire masques blancs*: "To us, the man who adores the Negro is as 'sick' as the man who abominates him."[178] It was a lesson she'd take fully on board.

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[177] "Tout en mangeant des côtes de porc et des frites, buvant de l'eau—car ces endroits modestes n'ont pas la licence qui permet de vendre des spiritueux—nous sommes naturellement ramenés à discuter encore de la question noire. Wright déplore entre autres le genre d'attirance que beaucoup de blancs dans le Nord et spécialement à New York éprouvent à l'égard de noirs. Ils les définissent comme l'antithèse de la civilisation américaine: magnifiquement doués pour la musique et la danse, riches d'instincts animaux et entre autres d'une extraordinaire puissance sensuelle, insouciants, étourdis, rêveurs, poètes, ouverts au sentiment religieux, indisciplinés, enfantins, telle est la conventionnelle image qu'ils se font volontiers des noirs. Et ils 'vont aux noirs' parce qu'ils ont projeté en eux ce qu'ils souhaiteraient être et ne sont pas; mais les plus fascinés sont ceux qui sentent en eux-mêmes les plus profondes déficiences; si bien que ces *nigger-lovers*, comme les appelleraient les gens du Sud, sont pour la plupart des aigris, des malades, des individus névrotiques, des faibles rongés de complexe d'infériorité. Que Mezzrow aille vivre à Harlem et préfère systématiquement les noirs aux blancs relève de cette attitude: Wright la trouve néfaste, parce qu'elle tend à maintenir l'existence d'un fossé entre les noirs et les blancs. Les différences évidentes entre les deux castes viennent de différences de situation historique, économique, sociale, culturelle qui pourraient—du moins théoriquement—être abolies. Mais c'est là une des vérités dont les Américains blancs, même les plus bienveillants, n'aiment pas se laisser convaincre" (*AJ* 485–86).

[178] "Pour nous, celui qui adore les nègres est aussi 'malade' que celui qui les exècre" (*PNMB* 6; *BSWM* 2). The passage continues, "Conversely, the Black man who wants to turn his race white is as miserable as he who preaches hatred for the whites. In the absolute, the Black is no more lovable than the Czech, and really, it's time to let the man go." [Inversement, le Noir qui veut blanchir sa race est aussi malheureux que celui qui prêche la haine du Blanc. Dans l'absolu, le Noir n'est pas plus aimable que le Tchèque, et véritablement il s'agit de lâcher l'homme (*PNMB* 6; *BSWM* 2, translation altered).] We should hear resonances of the nursery rhyme—"if he hollers, let him go"—which Chester Himes took as title for his novel.

In short, two notions of authenticity were in play in the post-war period: an existentialist one, and one around race. My unsurprising conclusion is that these were both productively and problematically interwoven, and that it seems to have taken Beauvoir a certain amount of time to sort them out as she moved toward a position of solidarity with the international anti-colonial movement that included both Fanon and Wright.

9 Meanwhile, Back in New York…

What *Les Temps Modernes* valued about Richard Wright's analysis was however increasingly devalued back home. The first American writer of color to really be a best-seller, he quickly fell from critical favor in the United States, and for several decades his work, especially the writing he did after he emigrated to Europe, received little attention or was disparaged. Michel Fabre, Wright's French biographer, was surprised, when he began his research in the early 1960s, that many of Wright's books, though readily available in French translation, had gone out of print in the United States, and that the American academics he met with in the course of his research were dismissive.[179] The tendency to see Wright as a pathetic, superseded figure whose late work was ruined by going to Europe and encountering a philosophy he couldn't understand, while losing touch with his "roots" and his "material" (the "folk"), persisted for a long time, as both Gilroy and Simons note.[180] In 1991 the Library of America brought out the "definitive" edition of his works, clearly intended to rehabilitate and honor Wright by restoring material cut by original publishers as too "daring"; the editor, Arnold Rampersad, also chose to include an early unpublished novel, *Lawd Today*, which is indeed stunningly good and shows Wright's connection to naturalist writers of the Chicago school (including one Nelson Algren). But the bias against Wright as a political thinker continued: almost nothing was included from his European period, none of the essays and travel writing from his internationalist political phase, and none of his writing about Africa.[181] This presents a seriously skewed picture and (whatever one thinks of Wright) it is surely irresponsible to pass over these omissions in silence. Louis Menand's *New Yorker* review of Rampersad's selection magnified and broadcast Rampersad's erasure of Wright's politics by describing Wright's development as "Nietzschean" and basically deploring the "protest" element of his work.[182] I am trying *not* to say "*It is no accident that*" the Library of America edition *does* include his powerful indictment of the Communist party in *American Hunger.*[183] (There's no clearer give-away of what used to be called vulgar Marxism than a sentence that starts, "*It is no accident that,*" is there. And the Cold War is over. Isn't it?) But if Wright's non-fiction prose works, like *The Color Curtain* and *Black Power*, which combine "travel writing" with theory and political analysis, were until recently no better appreciated by American audiences than *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947* was, perhaps this was for some of the same reasons. Fortunately, more recent scholarly work has appeared that does take Wright and his ideas seriously, both politically and philosophically, and that sees him, and other writers about the Black experience in the United States, as *part* of Existentialism with a capital E.[184]

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[179] Michel Fabre, *The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright*. He discussed this surprise in the preface to the first (1973) edition, which appears in the second (1993) edition as xxi-xxii.

[180] Perhaps this relates to a tendency to see *existentialism* as a set of faded and pathetic once-trendy dogmas which "we," having had the benefit of post-structuralism, now see beyond. As must be clear by now, I don't agree with that judgment.

[181] Gilroy discusses Rampersad as an advocate for the American Richard Wright and connects this to a particular idea of "authenticity," which Gilroy wants to call into question (*The Black Atlantic*, 153–57). According to Gilroy, Wright's "Blueprint for Negro Writing"

But wait a minute, you say: wasn't Richard Wright a terrible misogynist?

(1937) "only implies what would later become one of his favorite themes, namely that differences between the groups we know as races are associated with the repression of differences within those races" (154); "an elaborate body of philosophically-informed reflection on the character of western civilization and the place of racism within it … [is] filtered through the mesh provided by his combination of fervent anti-communism and passionate anti-capitalism" (155).

182 Louis Menand, "The Hammer and The Nail."

183 Something similar might be said about the missing Red chapter from most people's understanding of Langston Hughes. Might there be more to the fact the best biography of Wright to date was written by a French man than the "Jerry Lewis problem"?

184 The silence Fabre complained of is over, and he deserves some of the credit; it was he, for instance, who organized the archive, and he discovered the manuscript of what became *American Hunger* and worked with Ellen Wright to get it into print. Among the excellent work now ongoing I'd single out the work of Abdul JanMohammed (particularly *The Death-Bound-Subject: Richard Wright*'s *Archaeology of the Dream*), and two edited collections, James B. Haile III, *Philosophical Meditations on Richard Wright* and William E. Dow, Alice Mikal Craven, and Yoko Nakamura, *Richard Wright in a Post-Racial Imaginary*, for their attention to issues discussed here. (I was initially dubious about the latter anthology's term "post-racial." As used here, though, the muting of a relentlessly *binary* idea of race does not remove the critique of domination, but rather complicates it, and makes class and also geography more visible.) Also interesting is Alice Mikal Craven and William E. Dow, eds., *Richard Wright: New Readings in the 21st Century*. See also now Jane Anna Gordon and Cyrus Ernesto Zirakzadeh, eds., *The Politics of Richard Wright: Perspectives on Resistance,* and Lori Marso, *Politics with Beauvoir: Freedom in the Encounter*, 122–147, which includes extensive discussion of Wright's European and African travels, and persuasively puts his book *12 Million Black Voices* in conversation with *The Second Sex*.

The question of Wright's "misogyny" is not one I can fully discuss here, much less settle. How can we balance his support of Gwendolyn Brooks with his conspicuous lack of support for Zora Neale Hurston? Gilroy, who is a vocal member of the "not a misogynist" camp, notes that Wright began his speech at the first *Présence Africaine* congress by lamenting the absence of women from the event.[185] Barbara Foley has discovered in Wright's papers an unpublished manuscript from the early 1940s; one draft, for which he did research with domestic workers, dealt with the difficult life of a woman trafficked from South to North; but Foley's description, while making it clear that this text (which explores fascism's appeal to the oppressed) does give voice to some feminist ideas, also makes it sound unlikely that publication of "Black Hope" would settle the "misogyny" debate one way or the other.[186]

But was Wright mistaken in preferring Brooks to Hurston, a complex figure whose contrarianism went so far as refusing to support *Brown v. Board of Education*?[187] Hazel Carby, who first became well-known for a piece titled "White Woman Listen," thinks Wright had a point:

> In returning to and recreating the moment of her childhood, Hurston privileges the nostalgic and freezes it in time. Richard Wright, in his review of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, accused Hurston of recreating minstrelsy. Though this remark is dismissed out of hand by contemporary critics, what it does register is Wright's reaction to what appears to him to be an outmoded form of historical consciousness. Whereas Wright attempted to explode the discursive category of the Negro as being formed, historically, in the culture of minstrelsy, and as being the product of a society structured in dominance through concepts of race, Hurston wanted to preserve the concept of Negroness, to negotiate and rewrite its cultural meanings, and, finally, to reclaim an aesthetically purified version of blackness. The consequences for the creation of subaltern subject

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[185] Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 176. Wright said, apparently, that "black men will not be free until their women are free," and called for an "effective utilization of negro womanhood in the world to help us mobilize and pool our forces," which is terrific, except for the possessive pronoun.

[186] Barbara Foley, "A Dramatic Picture of Women from Feudalism to Fascism: Richard Wright's *Black Hope*." According to Foley's article, the Wright estate was opposed to the idea of publication at that time.

[187] See Glenda R. Carpio and Werner Sollors, "The Newly Complicated Zora Neale Hurston," and Hazel Carby, "The Politics of Fiction, Anthropology, and the Folk: Zora Neale Hurston."

> positions in their works are dramatically different. The antagonism between them reveals Wright to be a modern, and leaves Hurston embedded in the politics of Negro identity.[188]

Perhaps what we're seeing isn't "misogyny" but a genuine difference of opinion. What's at stake between them isn't (or isn't just) gender politics, but (also) a disagreement about how to value and advance Black culture, comparable to the different views about négritude offered by Léopold Senghor on the one hand and by Fanon and Césaire on the other.

The Gwendolyn Brooks poem that appeared, thanks to Wright's mediation, in the very first issue of *Présence Africaine* turns out to be "The Ballad of Pearl May Lee," an angry mock-joyful poem in which a dark-skinned Black woman says she is *glad* that her husband is being lynched, for going along with a white woman who seduced him and then cried rape.[189] (The refrain is, "You had it coming surely.") If there ever was a poem that showed why it was hasty to collapse the subject positions or "standpoints" of Black women and Black men, *or* of Black women and white women, this would be it; considering that Wright himself was married to a white woman, his support for this (stunning) poem and poet speaks strongly in favor of his awareness that the issues involved were complex, and that the claims involved were incommensurable and perhaps finally irreconcilable.

Wright would also have been very familiar with debates within the Communist Party of the United States on "the woman question." As with race issues, the CPUSA was for a time more progressive about women's issues than mainstream America; Kate Weigand has shown that the contribution of Old Left women to second-wave feminism was long understated, mainly due to McCarthyism.[190] Barbara Foley's archival work has also discovered that Wright owned Mary Inman's "In Woman's Defense," an important analysis of women's domestic labor which synthesized feminism and Marxism; the Party leadership later attacked it (and Inman). Foley and Gilroy both point to one of the stories in Wright's *Eight Men*, in which a man cross-dresses to get work as a maid and discovers that the work is physically too hard for him (shades of *The Salt of the Earth*!) and that he is vulnerable to sexual harassment. None of this helps us know how to read the "existential" violence against women that is central to much of Wright's fiction.[191] All I can do here is suggest that posing the question as "misogynist, yes or no" obscures more than it illuminates.

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[188] Ibid., 79.

[189] The poem also appears in Brooks's *A Street in Bronzeville* and is reprinted in *Blacks*, the fullest available collection of her work, 60–63.

[190] See Kate Weigand, *Red Feminism: American Communism and the Making of Women's Liberation.*

But how does it happen that "Richard Wright, Political Thinker" and "The American Richard Wright" seem to be two different people?

The urbanely condescending tone of Menand's appraisal of Wright struck me as depressingly familiar. Though he might deny this, Menand is in many ways the heir of the very people who most annoyed Beauvoir on her first visit to New York City: a loose group literary historians refer to as "The New York Intellectuals," who first gathered around the *Partisan Review*.[192] Meeting them at a party, Beauvoir describes them as "the editorial team of a review that calls itself leftist and avant-garde, whose aggressive tone surprises me.... They hate Stalinism with a passion that reveals them as former Stalinists."[193] In a letter to Sartre, she was even franker: "They would burn the world to ashes to keep their stupid rag alive."[194] They first take her to task for Merleau-Ponty's article, "Le yogi et le prolétaire," which had just appeared in *Les Temps Modernes*:

> Perhaps because we were drinking, we didn't weigh our words very carefully. My remarks were judged worthy of an agent of the Soviet Secret Police; but it would be easy to mistake these free spirits for American imperialists. Halfway through the conversation the tall, insolent young man declared, "After all, it wasn't the Russians who sent you food to live on; it's America who created the UN Relief Agency." If even these so-called leftist intellectuals are so proud of the tinned milk their government sends, how can we be surprised by the arrogance of the capitalist press, by the tone of condescension toward France I've observed pretty much everywhere, which is beginning to annoy me?[195]

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[191] See Jan-Mohammed, *The Death-Bound-Subject*, for a fuller discussion.

[192] See Louis Menand, "Browbeaten: Dwight MacDonald's War on Midcult." I'm aware as I write this that the term "New York Intellectuals" may have little current resonance beyond the Upper West Side. But if you have seen Margarethe von Trotta's film about Hannah Arendt, you have met these people.

[193] "[L]'équipe d'une revue qui se dit de gauche et d'avant-garde et dont l'agressivité me surprend.... Ils haïssent le stalinisme avec une passion qui me fait comprendre que ce sont d'anciens staliniens" (*AJ* 59–60). See also 45, 59–60, and 78–81, about American literature.

[194] "Ils incendierait le monde pour que leur mauvais torchon vive" (*Lettres à Sartre*, 296).

[195] "Je pense que l'alcool aidant nous mesurons mal nos paroles; il paraît que mes propos sont dignes d'un agent du Guépéou: mais on prendrait facilement ces esprits libres pour des impérialistes américains. Le grand jeune homme insolent déclare au milieu de la conversation: 'Ce ne sont quand même pas les Russes qui vous envoient de quoi manger; c'est l'Amérique qui a crée l'UNRA.' Si même les intellectuels dits de gauche sont si fiers des

In a long discussion toward the end of *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947*, Beauvoir shows her detailed understanding of the different tendencies among this group—for instance, around the time of her visit, Dwight Macdonald and Mary McCarthy had broken off to found a journal called *politics*, which was a bit further left. Not all of the New York Intellectuals would become as conservative as Norman Podhoretz or Sidney Hook; the *New York Review of Books*, which the group would found in 1963, was always recognizably more open-minded than *Commentary*; their direct descendants include Susan Sontag as well as Norman Mailer.[196] But Beauvoir's overall diagnosis of the dangers implicit in their "pessimistic individualism," as part of the "*parti pris* of inertia"[197] in the face of McCarthyist sabre-rattling that she saw all across the United States, especially on college campuses, is borne out by a reading of the symposium "Our Country and Our Culture" organized by the *Partisan Review* in 1952. As it happens, "vulgar Marxist propaganda" claims that the CIA itself was behind many of their institutions, such as the Congress for Cultural Freedom and the journals *Encounter, Perspectives USA,* and *Preuves*, later turned out to be literally true.[198]

It is very difficult to explain why this group matters to anyone who doesn't already think so; in retrospect, their nasty internal quarrels seem unbelievably

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boîtes de lait condensé que leur gouvernement nous dispense, comment s'étonner de l'arrogance de la presse capitaliste, de ce ton de condescendance que j'ai observé un peu partout à l'égard de la France et qui commence à m'exaspérer?" (*AJ* 60–1).

[196] Some would see the *New Yorker* of the 1940s and 50s as part of this "group" and others would disagree. When Arendt's husband says in von Trotta's movie, "Hannah, das kannst du im *New Yorker* nicht sagen!" (Hannah, you can't say that in *The New Yorker*!), he's expressing a view that the mass-market magazine was somehow gentler and more "midcult" (Macdonald's word) than the others. But Hannah could, and Hannah did. *The New Yorker* also dedicated a whole issue to John Hersey's *Hiroshima.*

Despite their lack of unanimity on just about any question, and the sheer nastiness of some of their internal bickering, I can't help agreeing with Beauvoir that the group shares a particular subjectivity, or self-concept, or ethos: taking principled left positions about *certain* things makes it unnecessary to examine one's complicity with the dominant culture in *other* respects. Of course it's easier to spot this in someone else than in oneself. "And this is hell, nor are we out of it."

[197] "Individualisme pessimiste," "parti pris de l'inertie" (*AJ* 474, 472). "Parti pris" can mean a bias, or a prejudice, but it is also used for someone who has taken a theoretical stand. Beauvoir here means both, I think: like the serious man, the Americans she's talking about have turned their inclination to passivity into a system of life.

[198] The literature on the New York Intellectuals is vast, but see Alan Wald, *The New York Intellectuals: The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left from the 1930s to the 1980s*, and Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters*. For a discussion of how Cold War categories continue to shape intellectual debates, see Michael Denning, *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds*.

petty, and they can't possibly actually matter as much as they thought they did. But the reach of the *Partisan Review* was broad.[199] In spite of the 1960s, which most of them astringently deplored, somehow such "intellectual life" as there is in the United States outside universities still seems marked by the terms they set. For me, Menand's faintly genteel distaste for protest retains the ring of Lionel Trilling's *The Liberal Imagination* (1950), smug in its claim to articulate progressive values through the Great Tradition and yet equally proud of its distance from anything that looks like it might genuinely upset the applecart. Garcia gives a very clear account of how the New York Intellectuals used a language of psychological "maturity" and aesthetic "complexity" to explain first their own turn away from the radicalism of the 1930s and later their disdain for the unwashed youth movements of the 1960s. For instance, despite their early support for James Baldwin—they particularly liked "Everybody's Protest Novel," his attack on Richard Wright—they largely missed the boat when it came to Civil Rights.[200] Hannah Arendt's failure to see the forest for the trees in her piece on Little Rock, the frank racism of Saul Bellow's *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, Norman Mailer's ghastly "White Negro" essay, are symptomatic.[201] Some of them joined in protesting the war in Vietnam (Mary McCarthy's hard-hitting reportage on what she saw there is still worth reading), but fighting racial injustice was not part of their agenda. Their influence on the "consensus" view that came to dominate the nascent field of American studies was especially profound.[202]

I'm too much of a "Tenured Radical" (as their heirs would put it) to be a "New York Intellectual." Still—full disclosure here—it's hard for me to imagine life without the *New Yorker* and the *New York Review of Books*; and as time wears on it gets harder to extricate myself from that discourse of "maturity." Every time one finds oneself saying (internally) "such and such a group has a valid point, of course, but they *go too far*" or "X is right but *does she have to say it like that?*" or "by demanding Y before the time is ripe they are *hurting their own cause…*" Or: "existentialism had its impact, certainly, but it's not really philosophy, it's something people outgrow after their sophomore year, like Ayn Rand." Or: "Bernie Sanders, now that would really be something. But he's a throwback, he couldn't possibly win." And there's often more than a grain of truth in these thoughts, isn't there?[203] But there's also a whiff of bad faith, a nagging sense that perhaps these, too, are self-fulfilling prophecies. I'll put my cards on the table: when Beauvoir speaks of the American "parti pris d'inertie," I think she really had their number, and ours as well. The insouciance about the coming of war with the USSR that she saw in American college students, that Sartre found in his discussion with a Ford Foundation official: "But you have no common border, where will you fight?" "Oh, we will fight them in Europe."[204] In the end, they fought them in Asia. And I remember going into the bar on 9/11 and hearing Don Henley's "The End of the Innocence" and thinking well, you can call it innocence if you like…

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[199] For instance, Stanley Cavell notes in his autobiography that "[t]he legacy, if I may call it that, of anti-Stalinist socialist aspirations living somehow with a commitment to high modernism, is one for which I am permanently grateful" (*Little Did I Know: Excerpts from Memory*, 231). The word "somehow" is characteristically apt.

[200] They soured on Baldwin, too; by 1957, *Commentary* was accusing Baldwin of "an anachronistic attitude toward race" (Garcia, *Psychology Comes to Harlem*, 163).

[201] An analysis of the parallels between Mailer's "White Negro" and Firestone's *Dialectic of Sex* might be illuminating. It was Bellow who famously asked, "Who is the Tolstoy of the Zulus?" See also Barber, "Phenomenology and the Ethical Basis of Pluralism." Barber makes an interesting argument that while the two different philosophical approaches taken by Beauvoir and Arendt "cashed out" differently in terms of their ability to read the immediate situation, *both* are ultimately necessary to a fully adequate solution of real-world problems. See also now Gines, *Arendt and The Negro Question*.

[202] See Geraldine Murphy, "Romancing the Center: Cold War Politics and Classic American Literature," and Michael Denning, *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds*.

Beauvoir says thousands and thousands of Americans don't fit the picture she is drawing, and she has plenty of negative things to say about French intellectual and public life. But I can't help be stung by some of what she says, myself. Is it is the sting of non-recognition or the sting of recognition?[205] bell hooks once visited the campus where I work, and I wrote down something she said in her closing remarks to the students: "You tell me that you live in a free country, and then you say that you can't say what you really think because your friends in the fraternity and sorority won't like you any more."

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[203] "Possibly by the time you read this, the last statement will already have proven right," I wrote at this point, in the summer of 2016. 2017: well, yes, no kidding. 2019: or maybe not?

[204] "Au cours d'un déjeuner, le directeur des *Public relations* de Ford avait évoqué avec bonne humeur la prochaine guerre contre l'URSS. 'Mais vous n'avez pas de frontière commune, où se battra-t-on?' avait demandé une journaliste du PC. 'En Europe,' répondit-il avec naturel" (*FCh* 1:55).

[205] Patriotism surfaces embarrassingly at odd moments. Is *any* version of national character offensive? It is bound to give offense, certainly, but that is not my question. Is this something one should ethically or politically forbid oneself? But it's really hard, especially when you're traveling. (How stupid they think us. On the other hand, how right they are.)

10 Beauvoir Reads America, America Reads Beauvoir

In any case, the fact that the New York Intellectuals were not able to find common ground with *Les Temps Modernes*, and vice versa, says a great deal, not just about the context of Wright's American reception, but also Beauvoir's—including the American reception of *The Second Sex*, and its repercussions for second-wave American feminism, which is my reason for dwelling on it here.[206]

Beauvoir's critique of the American paradox went far beyond that group. In New Mexico she tells us what the headlines say about what Truman is doing, and then notices how few people (other than some French people she happens to meet on the way) seem to be talking about it. She refers twice to a comment made to her by someone at the *New York Times*:

> [T]he top manager leans back in his swivel chair; he looks down on me ironically, from the height of his own power and of American power generally. So France is amusing itself now with existentialism? Of course, he knows nothing about existentialism, his contempt is aimed at philosophy in general, and even more broadly at the sheer effrontery of an economically impoverished country claiming to think; isn't it laughable to go on thinking when one hasn't the advantage of running a major American newspaper, which anyhow renders thinking unnecessary? "Yes," says he, "in France you pose problems, but you don't solve them. Here, we don't pose them, we resolve them." The creaky armchair swivels back and forth….[207]

"In France, you pose problems; in America, we resolve them." For me this rhymes with a throwaway comment Paul de Man made in 1986, which stuck in my head: "in Europe, one is of course closer to political and ideological questions, while on the contrary, in the States, one is a lot closer to professional questions. So the ethics of the profession are very different."[208]

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[206] I'll have some more examples when I come to discuss Beauvoir's writing about China below.

[207] "[L]e grand manager se balance sur son fauteuil tournant; du haut de sa puissance propre et de la puissance américaine en général il me jette un regard ironique: ainsi la France s'amuse à l'Existentialisme? Bien entendu, il ne sait rien de l'Existentialisme, son mépris vise la philosophie en général et plus généralement encore l'outrecuidance d'un pays économiquement pauvre et qui prétend penser; n'est-ce pas dérisoire de vouloir penser quand on n'a pas l'avantage d'être une des têtes d'un grand journal américain, ce qui d'ailleurs dispense de penser? … 'Oui, dit-il, en France vous posez des problèmes: mais vous ne les résolvez pas. Nous, nous ne les posons pas: nous les résolvons.' Le fauteuil tourne et craque" (*AJ* 63). Ellipsis in original.

But the New York Intellectuals were right to see that they were a particular target, and they returned the favor, especially with Mary McCarthy's very nasty review, "Mlle. Gulliver en Amérique," which has been picked up in the Beauvoir scholarship, and largely uncritically.[209]

What Mary McCarthy truly hated about *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947* is that Beauvoir did what Americans since *Daisy Miller* had done to Europe: made the American reader feel like a Lilliputian by reversing the direction of the ethnographic gaze. Like Françoise in *L'invitée*, McCarthy felt "the look of the Other that steals my world," and made a valiant attempt to seize it back, through character assassination and mockery if not by actual murder. Accompanied by a mystifying ugly caricature of a seated woman who seems to be part robot machine and part ersatz Dogon statue, "Mlle. Gulliver en Amérique" proceeds in McCarthy's characteristic manner not by argument but by mockery and an appeal to what "everyone" knows, without overly concerning itself about what is meant by "everyone."

> Peering down at himself, the American discovers that he has "no sense of nuance," that he is always in a good humor, that "in America the individual is nothing," that all Americans think their native town is the most beautiful town in the world, that an office girl cannot go to work

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[208] A comment that sounds rather chilling, now that we know what de Man did during the Second World War. (And we make excerpts, and assign handbooks, lest our student evaluations complain: "Too Long; Didn't Read.") Stephano Rosso, "An Interview with Paul de Man," 788.

[209] McCarthy, "Mlle. Gulliver en Amérique." Elaine Marks reprinted McCarthy's attack in the 1987 *Critical Essays on Simone de Beauvoir*. See also Penelope Deutscher, *Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Ambiguity, Conversion, Resistance*, 65–6, and Deirdre Bair, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 334–35, 386. Deutscher reproduces McCarthy's points without dissent; Bair at times sounds positively gleeful, and seems to have sought out further snide remarks from those she interviewed about Beauvoir's American visit. Her chronology of the visit is unreliable, and she dismisses the political side of *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947* entirely, as something Beauvoir added in afterwards to seduce a French audience, much less interesting than the unfashionableness of what the subject of her biography *wore*.

McCarthy's was not the only counterattack from the partisans of the *mauvais torchon*, either: William Barrett, who would become the most influential popularizer of existentialism in America (while explaining that Sartre was actually only a minor moment in its history, and removing all the political bite), had some choice words in his intellectual autobiography, *The Truants*. Probably the best-known result of this whole sorry map of misprision was Norman Mailer's use of "existentialism" to justify rape and murder in *An American Dream*.

> in the same dress two days running, that in hotels “illicit” couples are made to swear that they are married, that it almost never happens here that a professor is also a writer, that the majority of American novelists have never been to college, that the middle class has no hold on the country’s economic life and very little influence on its political destiny, that the good American citizen is never sick, that racism and reaction grow more menacing every day, that “the appearance, even, of democracy is vanishing from day to day,” and that the country is witnessing “the birth of fascism.”[210]

Each of these clauses is a malicious twist on a small observation Beauvoir makes, often in the context of a larger narrative of something she witnessed. McCarthy also flattens out the *development* of Beauvoir’s views, ignoring what Robert Bernasconi has described as her “self-correcting method.”[211]

Writing before the English translation appeared, McCarthy dismisses the well-evidenced discussion of segregation and is particularly outraged by Beauvoir’s claim that the idea of America as a “classless society” was a “mystification.”

> She has preserved enough of Marxism to be warned that the spun-sugar façade is a device of “the Pullman class” to mask its exploitation and cruelty: While the soda fountains spout, Truman and Marshall prepare an anti-Communist crusade that brings back memories of the Nazis, and Congress plots the ruin of the trade unions….[212]

Finally, McCarthy charges Beauvoir with entertaining a paranoid fantasy, “the petrifaction of a fear very common in Europe today—a fear of the future….”[213]

But McCarthy’s defense of America reveals precisely the blind optimism Beauvoir diagnosed. McCarthy even goes so far as to defend the suburbs, which elsewhere in her writing appear as a blight and an abomination.[214] She writes:

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[210] McCarthy, “Mlle. Gulliver en Amérique,” 34.

[211] Robert Bernasconi, “The Smell of Hatred in the Air: Simone de Beauvoir’s Account of Anti-Black Racism in the United States.”

[212] Ibid., 36.

[213] Ibid., 37.

[214] Indeed, her real view of the suburbs slips out later in “Mlle. Gulliver en Amérique”: “the American problem … is not one of inequity, as she would prefer to believe, but its opposite. The problem posed by the United States is, as Tocqueville saw, the problem of equality, its consequences, and what price shall be paid for it. How is wealth to be spread without the spread of uniformity? How create a cushion of plenty without stupefaction of the soul and the senses? It is a dilemma that glares from every picture window and whistles through every breezeway” (36–7).

> The society characterized by Mlle. de Beauvoir as "rigid," "frozen," "closed" is in the process of great change. The mansions are torn down and the real-estate "development" takes their place: serried rows of ranch-type houses, painted in pastel colors, each with its picture window and its garden, each equipped with deep freeze, oil furnace, and automatic washer, spring up in the wilderness. Class barriers disappear or become porous; the factory worker is an economic aristocrat in comparison to the middle-class clerk; even segregation is diminishing; consumption replaces acquisition as an incentive. The America invoked by Mlle. de Beauvoir as a country of vast inequalities and dramatic contrasts is rapidly ceasing to exist.[215]

Now, the G.I. Bill that built the suburbs was a very good thing (I grew up in one of those little boxes myself), but Black people didn't have access to the G.I. Bill, and those new towns were deliberately segregated. The sharecroppers that Beauvoir saw, she saw. Her description of the censorship trial she attended, of a novel about homosexuality that had been targeted by the Society for the Suppression of Vice, she didn't make up (I checked).[216] The poll tax and the literacy tests and the systematic intimidation that prevented southern Blacks from voting were real. Fifth Avenue existed (exists) and not everyone can afford to shop there (still can't). The menace of McCarthyism was real; the people Beauvoir met in Hollywood, who spoke to her of the blacklist, were not lying. The atom bomb, too, was not a science fiction fantasy. "Class barriers disappear …." Well, precisely, and who "disappeared" them? Now, I don't enjoy thinking of myself as a member of "the Pullman class" either, but, well, *ça n'empêche pas d'exister. Even* Life Magazine *knew that Myrdal was right*! (But of course the New York Intellectuals looked down on *Life Magazine* as "midcult.")

L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947 fared better in the *Journal of Negro History*, where a detailed positive review by the distinguished scholar (and future US ambassador) Mercer Cook concludes: “it is less ephemeral than its title would suggest. Few contemporary studies offer Americans a better opportunity to see ourselves as others see us.”[217] (He did feel that Beauvoir had understated the opposition to segregation among college students.)

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[215] The essay ends, "For Europeans of egalitarian sympathies, America *is* this dilemma, relentlessly marching towards them, a future which 'works,' and which for that very reason they have no wish to face. Hence the desire, so very evident in Mlle. de Beauvoir's impressions and in much journalism of the European Left, not to know what America is really like, to identify it with 'fascism' or 'reaction,' not to admit, in short, that it has realized, to a considerable extent, the economic and social goals of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and of progressive thought in general" (ibid., 37). That McCarthy would pick up and turn around, apparently without irony, Lincoln Steffens's famous (and in retrospect, embarrassing) line about the Soviet Union, "I have seen the future, and it works" shows how fully she—can I be about to say "brainwashed"?

[216] The book in question was Calder Willingham's *End as a Man*, based on his experiences at the Citadel.

All this is especially disappointing because Beauvoir and McCarthy had so much in common. To the generation of women who came of age in the 1950s and 1960s, both stood for the rare combination of intellectual prowess and sexual freedom. Each had flourished personally and professionally as the only woman in a very male and fairly aggressive intellectual atmosphere; scholars of women’s autobiography have often discussed them together, because they describe shuffling off the shackles of Catholic upbringing in very similar ways; both were seemingly fearless truth-tellers, including when they wrote about heterosexuality from the woman’s point of view.

And yet the antipathy between them seems to have been immediate, visceral, and lasting, as Eugenia Zimmerman details (drawing on Carol Brightman’s biography).[218] Beauvoir refers to McCarthy as “that beautifully cold novelist who has already gone through three husbands and several lovers in the course of a cleverly laid out career,”[219] and McCarthy, as Zimmerman says, “returned the compliment … nearly thirty years after the ‘Prettiest Existentialist’ first visited New York. In 1980, six years before Beauvoir’s death, McCarthy expressed herself thus: ‘How *dare* she talk about injustice to women, and how as a woman she’s been deprived when she has put herself on the map solely by attaching herself to Sartre, *solely. Sartre et moi.* He *made* her … She’s not utterly stupid … she would be a good “B” student somewhere in the intellectual world.…’”[220]

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[217] Mercer Cook, “Review of *America Day By Day*.” Mercer Cook (1903–87), future US ambassador to Senegal and the Gambia, Professor of French and English, translator of Senghor, head of Romance Languages at Howard, received his teaching diploma from the Sorbonne in 1926. Cook also notes omissions from the translation, and takes mild issue with Wright’s statement (quoted by Beauvoir) that Blacks are conscious of racism “every single moment.” The same issue of *The Journal of Negro History* contains a positive review of Richard Wright’s *The Outsider*.

[218] See Eugenia Zimmerman, “Simone de Beauvoir, Mary McCarthy and The ‘Woman’ Intellectual,” Carol Brightman, *Writing Dangerously: Mary McCarthy and Her World*, and Francis Kiernan, *Seeing Mary Plain: A Life of Mary McCarthy*. In an interesting article, Tina Chanter has discussed McCarthy’s violent hatred of Beauvoir under the rubric of “abjection,” which she sees as generally characteristic of later feminist responses to Beauvoir (“Abjection and Ambiguity: Simone de Beauvoir’s Legacy”).

[219] Brightman, *Writing Dangerously*, 346.

[220] Ibid., 342; Brightman’s italics. McCarthy didn’t like Sartre any better, though, and Zimmerman quotes John Gerassi to the effect that Sartre “carefully avoided [McCarthy] because, he said, she was an ‘arrogant imperialist witch.’” Zimmerman comments further: “Mary McCarthy was part of the cultural furniture of a New York adolescence in the 1950s.

Writing to Sartre after she met McCarthy, Beauvoir called McCarthy "typique," and of course no one likes to be "typical."[221]

Brightman's diagnosis that "McCarthy's 'deep ambivalence' for the 'new America' is project[ed] onto Simone de Beauvoir" is an apt one: McCarthy's review of Beauvoir tells us more about her own confusions than about Beauvoir's book.[222] Like Macdonald and others of the group, she held an inconsistent—not to say incoherent—view of American mass culture. They liked to think of New York as a branch of Europe; visits from actual Europeans showed them they weren't as different as they believed from the Babbitts they mocked. To expose the complicity of New York Intellectuals with American cold warriors was to challenge their sense of themselves as cosmopolitan: if Beauvoir was right, McCarthy's whole stance in the world, the story she has been telling herself, was a lie.

The thing is, I *like* Mary McCarthy. She was whip-smart, and a very good writer, and nothing about that extraordinarily aggressive group cowed her.[223] Stories from *The Company She Keeps* (1942) broke open a whole host of taboos about sex; when *The Group* appeared in 1963 (the same year as *The Feminine Mystique*) it was, I've argued elsewhere, a contribution to the feminist arguments McCarthy herself wasn't quite willing to make.[224] Like Doris Lessing, McCarthy laid out all the data, but balked at drawing the conclusion.[225]

McCarthy was a good friend to Hannah Arendt when Arendt needed one, and she was, herself, intellectually up to the job of translating Simone Weil's "The *Iliad*, or the Poem of Force" and editing Arendt's *The Life of the Mind* for posthumous publication. She was famous for her wicked tongue—"[t]orn animals were removed at sunrise from that smile," as an *Esquire* profile had it—and

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Simone de Beauvoir offered—or appeared to offer—that same generation of bookish young women the image of a life in which conventional and iconoclastic choices could be integrated and reconciled: love and work, the emotional and the intellectual, a man and a career" (Zimmerman, "The 'Woman' Intellectual," 113).

[221] Beauvoir, *Lettres à Sartre*, 301.

[222] Brightman, *Writing Dangerously*, 338.

[223] Delmore Schwartz, for instance, used to refer to her writings as "Tidings from the Whore." From Elizabeth Hardwick's introduction to McCarthy's *Intellectual Memoirs* (128): "An evening at the Rahvs' was to enter a ring of bullies, each one bullying the other." A line from one of Robert Lowell's poems—"How we wish we were friends with half our friends!" nails the overlay of personal and literary politics rather well ("Ulysses," in *Selected Poems*, 225).

[224] See Altman, "Beyond Trashiness."

[225] What Beauvoir noticed at Vassar—drawing McCarthy's ire—is quite close to what McCarthy would later satirize about her alma mater in *The Group.* (Perhaps Vassar really was like that. See also Muriel Rukeyser, "More of a Corpse Than a Woman.")

many of the people she bit royally deserved it. She was no friend to feminists, as Zimmerman explains: "McCarthy not only denounced Beauvoir *per se*, she also denounced feminism for its 'self-pity, shrillness and greed'; 'feminism is bad for women … [I]t induces a very bad emotional state.'"[226] Neither, for that matter, was Arendt, who is known to have remarked that "Women's Liberation just does not say hello to me at all," and later, "What will we lose if we win?"[227]

McCarthy tends to disavow her own early radicalism as the skittishness of a boy-crazy misfit, presenting herself retrospectively as a kind of accidental Trotskyite. "It was not difficult, after all, to be the prettiest girl at a party for the sharecroppers."[228] At the time she met Beauvoir, the splinter group formed with Dwight Macdonald, Nicola Chiaramonte, and a few others were attempting more or less what *Les Temps Modernes* stood for, to be a non-Communist voice on the left. But if there wasn't much space for that in Paris, there was even less in the United States. Anna Bogic tells us:

> In the *Nation*, Patrick Mullahy wrote that *The Second Sex* "is in many ways a superb book, brilliantly written with a broad scope and keen psychological insight"; however he warned that "because of certain political leanings Mme. de Beauvoir has to be read with critical caution."[229]

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[226] Brightman, *Writing Dangerously,* xviii, 343.

[227] Elizabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World*, 513. Bair (332) reports Arendt as having told William Phillips (according to the latter) that he would have gotten on better with Beauvoir if he had flirted with her, as opposed to attempting a discussion. But a turning point, as marked in the McCarthy/Arendt correspondence, occurs when Robert Lowell leaves Elizabeth Hardwick, who had stuck with him for many decades despite his serious manic-depressive episodes, and … other difficulties. McCarthy wrote, "I feel very sorry for Cal and troubled about him, and yet this final piece of arrogance makes me almost angry. Women's lib" (Carol Brightman, *Between Friends: The Correspondence of Hannah Arendt and Mary McCarthy*, 273).

Lori Marso calls Arendt and Beauvoir "unrecognized allies" (41) in a highly illuminating comparison of Beauvoir's 1946 account of Robert Brasillach's treason trial, "Oeil pour œil" (An Eye for an Eye) to Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (*Politics with Beauvoir*, 41–65). On the level of political theory, she is convincing; but the reasons why the two didn't "recognize" one another as "on the same side," either personally or politically, still seem important.

[228] Mary McCarthy, *The Company She Keeps*, 112. See also Hardwick's introduction to McCarthy's *Intellectual Memoirs*, 66. There is something so arch, so *knowing* about McCarthy's tone, so much the opposite of the "earnestness" of the angry young man—"he's fair and he's true and he's boring as hell," in the words of Billy Joel. (And he *is* all those things.) And yet when an arch and knowing skeptic is actually roused to anger, as McCarthy was by Vietnam and Watergate, it's a powerful weapon.

[229] Bogic, "Uncovering Hidden Actors: The 'Making' of *The Second Sex*," 175.

Another prominent New York Intellectual was Elizabeth Hardwick, whose very strange review of *The Second Sex* in the *Partisan Review* could stand in for the initial American response.[230] This reviewer hid her awareness that Beauvoir's book was, in the main, astute, in so much mockery and scolding that her piece reads like a bitter attack. Here's how it starts:

> Vassal, slave, inferior, other, thing, victim, dependent, parasite, prisoner—oh, bitter, raped, child-swollen flesh doomed to immanence! Sisyphean goddess of the dust-pile! Demeter, Xantippe, Ninon de Lenclos, Marie Bashkirtsev, and "a friend of mine…." Cave to café, boudoir to microscope, from the knitting needles to the short story, this potency of pages, this foreshortened and exaggerated mysterious and too clear relief, this eloquent lament and governessy warning, this poem and doctoral thesis—I suppose there is bound to be a little laughter in the wings at the mere thought of this madly sensible and brilliantly confused tome on women by Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*.[231]

Hardwick's review mainly chronicles her own bewilderment and defensiveness: that same arch and knowing New York Intellectual *tone* is in full cry, but I find her overall *argument* as difficult to parse as she found *The Second Sex*.[232] Much later, after she'd produced a feminist novel and *Seduction and Betrayal* (1974), one of the first significant books of feminist criticism to appear in the United States, Hardwick was asked, "would you still stand on that?" and replied, "no. No, I wouldn't. It's a wonderful, remarkable book. Nothing that has come since on the matter of women compares to it."[233] Such a *décalage* between first and later reading is a pretty common experience—it was, in fact, mine. But Hardwick's original piece from the 1950s, like McCarthy's, continues to be anthologized and cited.

The question I have is, why did Hardwick find this book opaque and confused, when Lorraine Hansberry found it brilliantly clear and comprehensive?

Hansberry herself is unsparing in explaining why there had not been more uptake of the book: she refers to the "American myth of the *already* liberated woman of all classes," and gives short shrift to those who provide gossip about the writer instead of analysis.[234] "Women who can't read such a long work reflect their historical experience of utter intellectual impoverishment as a class …"; they can't understand it "any more than I should imagine a slave prior to the civil war could have understood intellectually the nature of his bondage.… The overwhelming majority of American women (like the overwhelming majority of American men) do not read books."[235] This is true even of intellectuals: "We are a people, as oft noted elsewhere, who have grown accustomed to thought reduced on the tabloid sheet to far below its least common denominator."[236] She does, however, praise the women of the left. "That so much of the fight against 'male supremacy' in the American communist movement can be so negatively described is not the fault of the women."[237]

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[230] For a fuller discussion, see Judith Coffin, "Historicizing *The Second Sex*," and Jo-Ann Pilardi, "The Changing Critical Fortunes of *The Second Sex*."

[231] Elizabeth Hardwick, "The Subjection of Women," 321.

[232] "I take up the bewildering inclusiveness of this book, because there is hardly a thing I would want to say contrary to her thesis that Simone de Beauvoir has not said herself" (ibid., 322).

[233] Elizabeth Hardwick, "The Art of Fiction No. 87."

But Hansberry's understanding that *The Second Sex* was a political book was rare. As Rosie Germain has shown,[238] *The Second Sex* was received in the United States primarily as a work of social science—indeed as a work of "sexology."[239] Partly this was because Blanche Knopf had it marketed that way (as she wrote to Parshley, existentialism was a "dead duck" from a commercial point of view).[240] But also, by 1953, when *The Second Sex* was discussed in *Time* magazine and other widely read outlets, "women's 'fulfilment' was already, and would continue to be, a popular topic of debate."[241] But "fulfillment" and its antithesis, frustration, were being discussed in a way that entirely left out "feminism," which Germain sees to have been a truly dead duck.[242]

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[234] Hansberry, "Simone de Beauvoir and *The Second Sex*: An American Commentary," 129, 128.

[235] Ibid., 129, 132.

[236] Ibid., 133.

[237] Ibid., 132.

[238] Rosie Germain, "Reading *The Second Sex* in the 1950s."

[239] Ibid., 1048–1052.

[240] Ibid., 1044. See also Anna Bogic, "Why Philosophy Went Missing: Understanding the English Version of *The Second Sex*," 160.

[241] Germain, 1045. As Germain shows, "[t]he reception of *The Second Sex* … fits awkwardly into the historiography of the 50s. Much of this historiography has focused on the question of whether this should be seen as a culturally 'conservative' or 'progressive' decade" (1046). Perhaps my analysis can contribute to an understanding that that is, in fact, the wrong question. For a debunking of the idea of supposedly dead time "between the waves," see also Joanne Meyerowitz, *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945–1960*, Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, and Wini Breines, *Young, White and Miserable: Growing Up Female in the Fifties*.

[242] Germain notes that while British readers read exactly the same book (Parshley's translation), there was no comparable popular interest in social science, no vogue for sexology—most British public intellectuals were economists, who did not review the book, and British publisher Jonathan Cape "had, in striking contrast to Knopf, actually requested that

It was this term, "fulfillment," that would carry over so powerfully into *The Feminine Mystique*, written by a woman who had trained as a psychologist during the heyday of functionalist social science. Friedan built a feminism within the comfort zone of middle-class femininity, much as Elizabeth Cady Stanton had done a century earlier. The differences between Beauvoir and Friedan were well-cataloged as early as 1980 by Sandra Dijkstra, who described Friedan as "a translator who could boil down its ideas, and its theory, into less radical, more readable journalese," making both problems and solutions more individualistic, thus more palatable.[243] Friedan did not admit Beauvoir's influence on her work until 1975, and then rather grudgingly; a meeting between them was a dialogue of the deaf, since Beauvoir wanted to abolish the family and Friedan wanted to save it, through basically reformist solutions that involved *thinking* about things differently. In Dijkstra's words, Friedan "eliminated the radical core"; Beauvoir's response was that she intended "to sap this regime, rather than play its game."[244]

Friedan describes her trip to Paris as a pilgrimage to consult a movement "Goddess," seeking advice because the American movement had lost its way. (Some of this is quite bizarre, to be honest.) "In the last two years in America," she tells Beauvoir,

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some of de Beauvoir's references to sexual intimacy be cut" ("Reading *The Second Sex* in the 1950s," 1061). It was reviewed mainly by literary writers and was received as a feminist text, for instance in the suffrage journal *Time and Tide*, which was still publishing.

Germain also shows that, while "*The Second Sex* was … to some extent, a transatlantic work from inception, particularly so when seen in the context of social science," American reviewers, proudly invested in American ideal of "modernity," were quick to attribute the parts of *The Second Sex* they didn't like to national differences (1043). She quotes among others psychiatrist Clara Thompson: "If [Beauvoir's] picture is true of present day France, then France is about fifty years behind us" (1054). Beauvoir's portrait of American women as smugly certain that they are already emancipated seems to be borne out. (The label of "modernity" was also a pretty good way to sell kitchen appliances.) Ironically, Judith Coffin ("Historicizing *The Second Sex*") found that the negative reviews in France tended to complain that *The Second Sex* was too *American*!

[243] Sandra Dijkstra, "Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan: The Politics of Omission." See Betty Friedan, "Sex, Society and The Female Dilemma."

[244] Dijkstra, "The Politics of Omission," 298. In *Tout compte fait*, Beauvoir would call *The Feminine Mystique* an "excellente livre" (an excellent book), but would deplore the lack of radicalism in the National Organization of Women, calling it "soon irrelevant" (bientôt dépassé) (618). She describes the American feminist scene with an accuracy that shows her to be well informed, and details her points of agreement and disagreement with various groups and writers.

> there has been a diffusion of energy in an internal ideological dispute. Women began to realize their potential power with the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment right before the '72 elections and the Supreme Court's decision on abortion. At that point, forces on the far right began a well-financed campaign to prevent ratification of ERA in the States and to overturn the abortion decision. From testimony at the Watergate hearings, we suspect that *agents provocateurs* were also at work within the Women's Movement, fomenting disruption and extremism, fanning the divisive note of sexual politics—"down with men, childbearing and motherhood!" The attempt to make a political ideology out of sexual preferences, out of lesbianism, has diverted energies from the political mainstream and hindered the political momentum of the Women's Movement.[245]

Beauvoir replied, "well, of that, I'm not sure," and things went rapidly downhill from there. Friedan asked about work, Beauvoir answered that the women in the Lipp factory … but that wasn't what Friedan meant by work. Beauvoir refused to endorse the idea of "wages for housework," and so on. In the end, the pilgrim, disappointed at not getting the answers she wanted, turned on the goddess as cold, overly dependent on Sartre, etc: "And then I recognized the authoritarian overtones of that supposedly Maoist party line I've heard before from sophomoric, self-styled radical feminists in America…."[246]

Since Dijkstra wrote, it has been asserted that Betty Friedan under-reported the radical leftist background of her own thinking and practice. Daniel Horowitz's book, *Betty Friedan and the Making of* The Feminine Mystique,[247] is unsatisfactory in a number of ways: I'm not sure he can be exonerated from the charge of red-baiting, though that may not have been his intention. However, if, as his archival work does appear to show, Friedan deliberately minimized class analysis, and sanitized her own history by failing to mention her communist-related activities, in order to reach a broader audience of women, she would hardly have been the only one.[248] This actually strengthens my view of the importance of Cold War contexts in the separate development of American and European feminisms—and provides evidence of their persistence. Whatever Friedan's intention or reasoning was, it seems obvious that if *The Feminine Mystique* had been more "radical" it would not have reached the broad audience it did. And again, this is a self-fulfilling and self-perpetuating prophecy: but that doesn't make it an inaccurate one.

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[245] Friedan, "Sex, Society and the Female Dilemma," 14.

[246] Betty Friedan, "No Gods, No Goddesses," 17.

[247] Daniel Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and The Making of* The Feminine Mystique.

[248] See Weigand, *Red Feminism*.

Certainly Beauvoir's contribution to feminist theory does not reduce to an intervention in Cold War politics. But I am arguing that the reception of her work can't be well understood apart from that frame, which (to put it schematically) acted on *The Second Sex* like a screen, or a strainer, to the point that when Spelman looked into the bowl there was nothing to see.

However, when American readers (hostile, friendly, or passive-aggressive) understood *The Second Sex* as a work of *psychology*, they were not wrong, exactly.

In one of the infrequent passages in *Les mandarins* where Anne refers to the book she is working on, she describes it as an attempt to reconcile Marx and Freud. It would be over-reaching to say that the book Anne is quietly writing turns out to be *The Second Sex*; for one thing, Anne is not primarily interested in understanding women. A practicing psychoanalyst who works with Holocaust survivors, many of them children, she is looking for a way to help heal trauma that would not require repudiating the real horrors of the war, a way to honor the victims of war without sacrificing one's own future to survivor guilt. This will require working politically toward a better world; a "private solution" will not be enough, indeed the real pain of these others demands more than a "private solution." To "cure" is, as she sees it, a mutilation; yet to understand the intimate injuries that result from collective injustices, to look for "techniques" to heal them, strikes her as an honorable task.[249] We do not hear much more about Anne's book: indeed, when Scriassine asks her whether she writes, her response is to laugh and say, "God, no!"[250] But those two projects—work on the self, work on the world—in tension yet indissoluble, like the "I" and the "we," animate Beauvoir's political thinking, from the Liberation onwards. This was something important she had in common with Richard Wright. It was also something they both had in common with Frantz Fanon. All three shared the view that oppression creates psychologically and morally defective forms of subjectivity, which are artifacts of situation rather than intrinsic defects (though the results may look the same); oppression must thus be fought simultaneously on several fronts, and with a complex, sometimes contradictory, set of instruments.[251]

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[249] See *Les mandarins* 1:73, 91–3. As Beauvoir says in her memoirs, it is a mistake to take Anne as a stand-in for the author; she put as much or more of herself into Henri. "He resembles me at least as much as Anne does, and perhaps more." [Il me ressemble autant qu'Anne au moins, et peut-être davantage (*FCh* 1:367).] But it is also too simple to accept the separation Beauvoir makes in those retrospective pages between Henri-the-writer-and activist and Anne-the-"être relatif."

[250] "Ils écrivent tous, n'est-ce pas?
—Tous.
—Vous, vous n'écrivez pas?
Je dis en riant: 'Grand Dieu non!'" (*Les mandarins,* 1:49).

11 Reading Beauvoir with Fanon

One quick way of saying what *The Second Sex* "is about" is that it attempts to demystify and liquidate the notions of femininity that cause women to be treated as "Other" by culture, by men, and by themselves. That urgent task of demystification is a major parallel with Frantz Fanon's first book, *Peau noire masques blancs*, which appeared only three years later, and which is a powerful analysis of the psychological and cultural effects of racism. I first began thinking about this when I noticed that Fanon has a chapter called, "L'expérience vécue du noir" (The Lived Experience of the Black), which recalls the title of volume 2 of *The Second Sex*.[252] That's a small point in itself, but there are many other signs that the project of inquiry was similar. In the words of Toril Moi (probably the first to have commented on the resemblance), "where Beauvoir… construct[s] a highly complex theory of female alienation under patriarchy, Fanon mobilizes the same thinkers to theorize Black alienation in a racist society."[253] Both Beauvoir and Fanon offer strongly Hegelian accounts of the subject's struggle for recognition in the face of a hostile, "othering" gaze. Both make serious use of psychoanalysis while remaining alert to the biases that can infect it, to the way it can work as a tool of social coercion; both books are centrally concerned with sexuality as a social and cultural force, and both have some forthright and uncomfortable things to say about the bourgeois European fantasy-world. Both draw examples and arguments indiscriminately from a range of disciplines and discourses, importantly including literary texts as well as personal narrative, though in Beauvoir's case the "I" is more often veiled.[254] Both deploy a range of methodological tools and rhetorical strategies, which they are nonetheless willing to criticize. Max Silverman writes about Fanon that "[d]iscourses of liberation such as psychoanalysis, the Hegelian dialectic and phenomenology are adopted as useful tools for prising open the nature and extent of white oppression but are also exposed as false universalisms when confronted by the specificities of 'the lived experience of the black man.'"[255] If we substitute "women" for "the black man," that sentence fits Beauvoir. Fanon presents himself as a psychoanalyst—sort of—and Beauvoir presents herself as a philosopher—sort of—but both in fact draw on all sorts of evidence for their positions, and are no respecters of disciplinary purity.[256]

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[251] Again, see now Lori Marso, *Politics with Beauvoir* (94, 97–121) for an extended comparison with Fanon. Marso engages (as I do not) with affect theory and with political theories of violence, and she concentrates most fully on *Les damnés de la terre* where I have emphasized *Peau noire masques blancs*, but I am substantially in agreement with her conclusions.

[252] The origin of the French phrase is with Merleau-Ponty. It was unhelpfully translated by Charles Lam Markmann as "The Fact of Blackness," in a parallel to Parshley's mistranslations, and with parallel unhelpful effects on Anglophone Fanon scholarship. In both cases, what is lost is not simply the indebtedness to Merleau-Ponty but the intentionally subjective nature of the accounts given: this is the lived reality of an embodied consciousness, told from the inside out. David Macey also criticizes the way in which the American translation of *Peau noire masques blancs* in 1967 dislocates Fanon from a Francophone context and, through mistranslation, transforms him into the archetypal Negro from the American deep South (Macey, "Adieu Foulard, Adieu Madras," 17). And Nigel Gibson points out that Markmann obliterated the distinction Fanon makes between "Noir" and "nègre" (*Rethinking Fanon: The Continuing Dialogue*). The English versions in my book are based on Markmann's, but I have altered them, in some cases significantly, so the responsibility for any errors should properly be mine.

[253] Moi, *Making of an Intellectual Woman*, 204.

Rather obviously, both Beauvoir and Fanon had serious intellectual engagements with Sartrean existentialism, and both importantly dissented from and struggled with aspects of his thinking, though Fanon marked his struggle with Sartre explicitly in his text and Beauvoir chose not to. Each also helped move Sartre himself past some impasses at key points in his intellectual and political development. Both also had important intellectual engagements with the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, whose lectures Fanon attended in Lyon while studying for his medical degree.[257]

Both Fanon and Beauvoir are extremely critical of members of the oppressed group they belong to whom they see as complicit with their oppression—both texts foreground criticism of complicity and of inadequate self-justification, including through sarcasm and mockery. And both call, in very explicit terms, for the subjects of history to reinvent themselves, as Beauvoir's "independent woman"—"the free woman is just being born"—or the fully decolonized "new man" of whom Fanon says, "il faut faire peau neuve."[258] This may be why both were and continue to be inspiring, energizing books for all sorts of readers, even though the picture they paint is a bleak one, and even though neither is what you'd call an easy read.

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[254] Both Beauvoir and Fanon were partly writing to understand who they were by understanding their place in the world, but neither makes this explicit: both essays open (as indeed did Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*) by stating that the writer is not angry, that the time for anger is past. In all three cases this opening move to conciliate or reassure the reader is revealed to be a lie, but not in a manipulative fashion: it is as if the writer discovered her or his own anger through the process of writing the book.

[255] Max Silverman, "Introduction," in *Frantz Fanon's* Black Skin, White Masks: *New Interdisciplinary Essays*, 3.

[256] See David Macey, "The Recall of the Real: Frantz Fanon and Psychoanalysis." Lewis Gordon notes that it is "not written in a way that one could readily identify what kind of work it is," and cites Jane Anna Gordon, who calls this way of writing "creolized" (Lewis Gordon, *What Fanon Said: A Philosophical Introduction to His Life and Thought*, 73). Gordon sees "methodological fetishism and disciplinary decadence" as having impeded a clear understanding of Fanon's work (ibid., 74).

[257] Ibid., 13.

Writing in 1994, Moi rightly noted that the influence of Beauvoir on Fanon had been underacknowledged—beginning, it must be said, by Fanon himself.

> Fanon himself makes absolutely no reference to *The Second Sex.* Nor does he seem even remotely interested in the question of women's liberation. Writing his essay as a medical student in Lyons, Fanon was influenced by existentialism, and—judging by his footnotes—clearly an assiduous reader of *Les Temps Modernes*. In 1948 and 1949 the existentialist journal published many excerpts from *The Second Sex*, yet Fanon fails to mention any of them. Nor does he refer to the full-length book, although he could hardly have been unaware of its publication and the outraged response it provoked in France in 1949 and 1950. Unfortunately, Fanon's explicit invocation of Sartre and his total neglect of Beauvoir exemplify the usual response of male intellectuals to existentialism [and] … it would seem that present-day colonial and post-colonial critics have done nothing to change this unhappy state of affairs.[259]

Fortunately, the last point is no longer true. Among others, Lewis Gordon's 2015 book *What Fanon Said* forthrightly explores Beauvoir's "presence at the level of ideas but exclusion at that of citation" which he calls "a form of epistemic sexism" and finds he "cannot excuse."[260] Gordon begins by noting

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[258] Literally, "make a new skin," usually translated by "turn over a new leaf" (Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre*, 305).

[259] Moi, *Making of an Intellectual Woman*, 204.

[260] Gordon, *What Fanon Said*, 32. Perhaps another parallel is that despite all the books on Fanon already in existence, a book with that title was still badly needed. Gordon's first chapter is devoted to the ways Fanon has been reduced to his biography, or read as a tissue of influences, which flow in one direction: why is Fanon seen as Sartrean when Sartre is not seen as Senghorian or Wrightian? And Gordon's discussion of how *Peau noire masques blancs* has been read through various disciplinary agendas leads him to an impatience much like my own about *The Second Sex*: could people please just *read the book*? See also Henry Louis Gates: "Frantz Fanon, not to put too fine a point on it, is a Rorschach blot with legs" ("Critical Fanonism," 252).

> the insight, which Fanon erroneously attributes to Nietzsche, that (in Fanon's paraphrasing) "Man's misery (*le Malheur*) is that he was once a child."[261] The actual source was Simone de Beauvoir's *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1947), a text that, along with *The Second Sex* (1949), as Matthieu Renault informs us, reveals affinities between Beauvoir and Fanon … Although at first an observation on the human condition, Beauvoir subsequently brought it to bear on specific modes of embodiment, identities, and the longing human beings may have for times before such ways of being were realized. Her observation in *The Second Sex* of not being born but instead becoming a woman is premised on this insight and clearly prefigures Fanon's thesis of the black as a white construction, that blacks are *made* or constructed. As Beauvoir scholarship reveals Jean-Paul Sartre's indebtedness to her for crucial concepts such as the Look and discussions of concrete relations with others in *Being and Nothingness*, it is clear that Fanon, too, is influenced by her thought on at least the philosophical anthropology of human development, the limitations of Hegelian dialectics of recognition, and the importance of psychoanalysis in his inaugural work.[262]

Amey Victoria Adkins has argued similarly that "a close reading of Fanon's groundbreaking analysis in *Black Skin, White Masks* reveals a pattern of analysis uncannily similar to Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*."[263] She takes Fanon to task for his "erasure" and "silencing" of his debt to Beauvoir, connecting this to his "use of the universal masculine" and negative portrayals of women.[264] Her comparison starts from an eloquent reading of Fanon's famous confrontation with the white child: "Look! A Negro!"—"the shattering shared experience of blackness and black being in a white world" which catalyses a "crucial, crucifying perspectival shift." She compares this to Beauvoir's equally harrowing

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But of course we are all reading the same books, really. Maybe the distinction I've been trying to draw is between a *clever* reading, which seizes on some arcane and little-noticed aspect of a familiar text as an occasion for display of the critic's own brilliance, political acumen, or whatever, versus a *sound* reading, which foregrounds an attempt to account for the thought of the textual other in a full and responsible way.

[261] *PNMB* 8. Beauvoir herself attributes the idea, not to Nietzsche, but to Descartes.

[262] Gordon, *What Fanon Said*, 31. The article Gordon references (Matthieu Renault, "Le genre de la race: Fanon lecteur de Beauvoir") is truly excellent: only my determination to keep issues about "readings of Hegel" from taking over my project prevents me from engaging with it further here. Renault confirms that Fanon owned (at least) the first volume of *The Second Sex*, and annotated it.

[263] Amey Victoria Adkins, "Black/Feminist Futures: Reading Beauvoir in *Black Skin, White Masks*," 698.

[264] Ibid., 698, 700.

analysis of what it is to be "taken to be a woman," interpellated at birth (now, even *before* birth) by the announcement, "it's a girl!" and indoctrinated, from one's earliest moments, into the shame of being "seen" that results in a similarly crippling self-alienation.[265]

To bring these two insights together is a powerful move. But what stays with me is not so much the question of who the insight originates with, or belongs to, as the power of the insight itself. The texts resonate and live because their description of this moment of being "Other" describes an experience that very many women, and very many people of color, *have actually had*—and that is a truth about the world we live in that no writer, no person, "owns." Here's an understated version, called "Incident," published in 1925, from Harlem Renaissance poet Countee Cullen:

Once riding in old Baltimore,
Heart-filled, head-filled with glee,
I saw a Baltimorean
Keep looking straight at me.

Now I was eight and very small,
And he was no whit bigger,
And so I smiled, but he poked out
His tongue, and called me, 'Nigger.'

I saw the whole of Baltimore
From May until December;
Of all the things that happened there
That's all that I remember.

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[265] The example Adkins gives in illustration comes from Beauvoir's "Formation" section; as she observes, it is one among (very) many. "'A man, sniggering, made a comment about my fat calves. The next day, my mother made me wear stockings and lengthen my skirt, but I will never forget the shock I suddenly felt in seeing myself *seen*.' The little girl feels that her body is escaping her, that it is no longer the clear expression of her individuality; it becomes foreign to her; and at the same moment, she is grasped by others as a thing: on the street, eyes follow her, her body is subject to comments; she would like to become invisible; she is afraid of becoming flesh and afraid to show her flesh." ["Un homme a fait en ricanant une réflexion sur mes gros mollets. Le lendemain, maman m'a fait porter des bas et allonger ma jupe: mais je n'oublierai jamais le choc ressenti soudain à me *voir vue*." La fillette sent que son corps lui échappe, il n'est plus la claire expression de son individualité; il lui devient étranger; et, au même moment, elle est saisie par autrui comme une chose: dans la rue, on la suit des yeux, on commente son anatomie; elle voudrait se rendre invisible; elle a peur de devenir chair et peur de montrer sa chair (*DS* 2:65, quoted in Adkins, "Black/Feminist Futures," 703–4).]

Examples (for people of color, and for women of all races) might be multiplied almost indefinitely, drop by drop, until they become a seething sea of pain and outrage.[266] Some such encounters are immediately deadly (see also under, Baltimore), some are damaging in more insidious ways.... Did Fanon read Countee Cullen? He could have. Did Countee Cullen read Hegel? In a way, *who cares?*[267] The next time I am in my office with a first-year student to whom *that exact thing* has happened *that very day*, shall I act like Mariah in the Jamaica Kincaid story and say to her, "oh, here's a book that analyses what just happened to you"? (And *which* book shall I offer?) And will I be surprised if the student looks at the book, and looks back at me as though I am, literally, crazy?

Sorry. The politics of citation *is* important, and not just for those with careers to make: writers who are not given credit for their ideas fall out of view, and their thinking is lost to us; intellectual history then seems whiter and maler than it actually was, which can be unnecessarily daunting to those not white and male who seek to enter it; and then there's the question of scholarly ethics.[268] But if the task is actually to engage with the *world*, and not just texts, we need to keep before our eyes that the politics of citation is not the only politics that there is. When I ask myself why scholars (including myself) have been more concerned with protecting Beauvoir's intellectual property rights than she ever was herself, I remember that an over-obsessiveness about whether people cite one's own work is the mark of the Serious Man (and we've all met him, if only as "reviewer number two"). Perhaps Beauvoir thought of her intellectual and political work less as a product, and more as a *project*, which would mean an endeavor that is valuable only insofar as it is *shared*.[269] That could be a good idea to try.

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[266] See Coates, *Between the World and Me*; see Baldwin, *No Name in the Street*; see ... the newspaper ...

[267] He easily could have: he went to Harvard ... his father-in-law was a prominent American Hegelian named W. E. B. DuBois... But he certainly hadn't read Hegel before the age of eight.

[268] Nobody's footnotes are perfect, though. Adkins's discussion of Richard Wright doesn't credit Margaret Simons' work, and her citation of Buck-Morss's *Hegel and Haiti* is misleading: that book, wonderful as it is, does not mention Beauvoir on page 20, or anywhere else. And I'm sure I have not eliminated all such errors from this book, either.

Maybe there's a bigger picture, though. I suggested in chapter 1 that the most powerful influences on Beauvoir's thought were the ones she cites least: perhaps that is also true of influences on Fanon? Perhaps it is true more generally? Suleiman ("Breton ou la poésie") makes a similar point about Beauvoir's influence on feminist literary criticism, including her own.

[269] Beauvoir's history with *Les Temps Modernes* makes clear that she cared less about getting her name on the masthead than about making sure the work of speaking truth to power actually got done. One could contrast this with what she had to say about the *Partisan*

Gordon's discussion of Fanon's relationship to Beauvoir makes a lot of sense to me. While noting that the catalogue of Fanon's library shows he owned two of Beauvoir's books,[270] Gordon also underlines the importance of Richard Wright to both Beauvoir and Sartre, and the importance of Wright and Sartre to both Beauvoir and Fanon.

> This circle of thought reveals an evolving community of ideas in which each influences the other, through which to draw on the resources of one is to evoke the other. There is, in other words, a fundamental relationality of ideas through which speaking of race in terms of gender reveals a symbiosis of each. Acknowledging Beauvoir means, in other words, also evoking Wright, and reading through Fanon should, then, bring forth Beauvoir and the many exemplars of existential critical work on oppression.[271]

Whether a certain idea passed from Wright to Beauvoir to Fanon, or from Wright to Fanon directly, and what role was played in all of that by Sartre's ideas about Jews, matters less than the ideas themselves.[272] And worrying about who "invented" the social construction of the oppressed consciousness seems liable to distract us from the force of that insight in *all* their work: we are free to change. Why haven't we? Are we going to? How? If not now, when?

Why I started down this road is that reading Fanon and Beauvoir together brought some things about each of them into clearer view.[273] One has to do with the history and uses of psychoanalysis: like Beauvoir, Fanon brings to bear

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Review group's approach to their *mauvais torchon*. There's also the rule of thumb that one can get a great deal done provided one does not care about getting credit for it.

[270] Gordon doesn't say which two: Fanon's reference (*PNMB* 148, *BSWM* 141) to Beauvoir walking with Wright in New York City (and being harassed by a white passerby) tells us he read *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947*, at least, though he gives no footnote. Large sections of that book, and of *The Second Sex*, were serialized in *Les Temps Modernes*.

[271] Gordon, *What Fanon Said*, 33.

[272] An exemplary reading along these lines is Annabelle Golay, "Féminisme et postcolonialisme: Beauvoir, Fanon, et la guerre d'Algérie." Golay situates the face-to-face encounter between the two in Rome in 1961, as recounted by Beauvoir in *La force des choses*, in the light of carefully contextualized readings of Fanon's late texts about the veil and Beauvoir's writing about the case of Djamila Boupacha. I'll engage with this further in chapter 5.

[273] And I suppose I also hoped to show that if the methods and insights that were useful to her were also useful to such a person as Fanon, she cannot be as bankrupt from the point of view of race and class analysis as some commentators believe. I can spot the excluded middle in that reasoning, really. But it is curious that the routine denunciation of Beauvoir as "Hegelian" is not matched by comparable criticisms of Fanon: that the latter starts from, and then revises, the "master-slave" trope is taken as a matter of course.

certain strands of psychoanalytic thinking, certain psychoanalytically-based arguments, that are unpopular today. Like Beauvoir, he does so in order to use psychoanalytic tools of description and analysis, while refusing the teleology that would keep every problem on an individual level, as the unfolding of an individual story.

The task Fanon set himself was, as I said, one of demystification:

> White civilization and European culture have imposed on the Black an existential deviation. We shall demonstrate elsewhere that often what people call the Black soul is a white construction.[274]
>
> We here indict both those who have been swindled and those who swindled them … [There are] a certain number of realities to whose liquidation we wish here to contribute.[275]

Unlike many of his day, he does not plan to do this by making a case for the *value* of Black culture or the full humanity of people of color.

> Oh yes, as we see, by appealing to humanity, to a sense of human dignity, to love, to charity, it would be easy for us to prove, or to win the admission, that the Black is the equal of the white. But our goal is quite different: to help the Black man to free himself of the arsenal of complexes that has sprouted up from the colonial situation.[276]

But as Gwen Bergner cogently puts it, "[t]he difficulty is to recognize the psychic damage caused by racism without representing oppressed minority subject positions as essentially compromised."[277] Fanon thus describes his project both as a “procès” (a case at law, an indictment) and as a “sociodiagnostique.” Psychology does not unfold in a vacuum.

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[274] "La civilisation blanche, la culture européenne ont imposé au Noir une déviation existentielle. Nous montrerons ailleurs que souvent ce qu'on appelle l'âme noire est une construction du Blanc" (*PNMB* 11; *BSWM* 6, translation altered).

[275] "Nous faisons ici le procès des mystifiés et des mystificateurs" … "un certain nombre de réalités à la liquidation desquelles nous voulons ici contribuer" (*PNMB* 25; *BSWM* 19–20, translation altered).

[276] "Oui, comme on le voit, en faisant appel à l'humanité, au sentiment de la dignité, à l'amour, à la charité, il nous serait facile de prouver ou de faire admettre que le Noir est l'égal du Blanc. Mais notre but est tout autre: c'est aider le Noir à se libérer de l'arsenal complexuel qui a germé au sein de la situation coloniale" (*PNMB* 24; *BSWM* 19, translation altered).

[277] Gwen Bergner, "Politics and Pathologies: On the Subject of Race in Psychoanalysis," 223. Fanon is clear in his disdain for the sort of psychoanalysis that concludes by proving to man "that he is nothing"; the problem will have to be proposed carefully, and differently (*PNMB* 17–18, *BSWM* 12).

> Before the trial opens, we must insist on a few points. The analysis we undertake is psychological. It remains nonetheless evident that for us the true disalienation of the Black implies an abrupt bringing-to-consciousness of social and economic realities. If there is an inferiority complex, it is the outcome of a double process:
> —first, economic;
> —subsequently by interiorization or, to say it better, epidermalization, of this inferiority.
>
> Reacting against the constitutionalist school of the late nineteenth century, Freud, through psychoanalysis, insisted that the individual factor be taken into account. He substituted an ontogenetic perspective for the phylogenetic theory. As we shall see, the Black man’s alienation is not an individual question. As well as phylogeny and ontogeny, there is sociogeny.[278]

Fanon’s terms—“sociogénie,” “sociodiagnostic”—seem reasonable descriptors also for the project of *The Second Sex*, with its ultimate refusal to choose between (a modified version of) Marx and (a modified version of) Freud.

The concept of a Black “inferiority complex,” which Fanon uses as a jumping off point, is drawn from the work of “Professor Westerman”[279] and especially from Octave Mannoni; his chapter 4, “Du prétendu complexe de dépendance du colonisé” (On the So-Called Dependency Complex of Colonized Peoples) is an epic takedown of Mannoni’s study of Madagascar, *Psychologie de la colonisation.* Where Mannoni thought he saw a Black “inferiority complex” that supposedly predated colonialism, Fanon saw the psychic effects of the colonial situation itself: "[i]t is the racist who creates his inferior."[280]

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[278] “Avant d’ouvrir le procès, nous tenons à dire certaines choses. L’analyse que nous entreprenons est psychologique. Il demeure toutefois évident que pour nous la véritable désaliénation du Noir implique une prise de conscience abrupte des réalités économiques et sociales. S’il y a complexe d’infériorité, c’est à la suite d’un double processus:
—économique d’abord;
—par intériorisation ou, mieux, épidermisation de cette infériorité, ensuite.
Réagissant contre la tendance constitutionnaliste de la fin du XIX^{e} siècle, Freud, par la psychanalyse, demanda qu’on tînt compte du facteur individuel. À une thèse phylogénétique, il substituait la perspective ontogénétique. On verra que l’aliénation du Noir n’est pas une question individuelle. À côté de la phylogénie et de l’ontogénie, il y a sociogénie” (*PNMB* 8; *BSWM* 4, translation altered).

[279] *PNMB* 19; *BSWM* 14.

> [W]hy does [Mannoni] try to make the inferiority complex something that existed before colonization? We recognize here the explanatory mechanism that, in psychiatry, would yield: there are latent forms of psychosis that manifest following a trauma. Or, in surgery: the appearance of varicose veins in a certain individual does not arise from his being compelled to spend ten hours a day standing up, but really from a constitutional weakness in the walls of his veins; his working conditions are only a facilitating factor. And the insurance compensation expert to whom the case is submitted will find the responsibility of the employer extremely limited.[281]

Fanon makes short work of Mannoni's apologetics, and his claim that French colonialism was somehow "less racist" than other countries; he reanalyses Mannoni's data (including the dreams of children) in the light of the real massacres that conditioned the fear Mannoni described.

> What must be done is to restore this dream *to its proper time*, and this time is the period during which eighty thousand natives were killed—that is to say, one of every fifty persons in the population; and *to its proper place …*[282]

> The Senegalese soldier's rifle is not a penis but in truth a model 1969 Lebel rifle.[283]

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[280] "[C]'est le raciste qui crée l'infériorisé" (*PNMB* 75, *BSWM* 69).

[281] "[P]ourquoi veut-il faire du complexe d'infériorité quelque chose de préexistant à la colonisation? Nous reconnaissons là le mécanisme d'explication qui, en psychiatrie, donnerait: il y a des formes latentes de la psychose qui deviennent manifestes à la suite d'un traumatisme. Et en chirurgie: l'apparition de varices chez un individu ne provient pas de l'obligation pour lui de rester dix heures debout, mais bien d'une fragilité constitutionnelle de la paroi veineuse; le mode de travail n'est qu'une condition favorisante, et le sur-expert requis décrète très limitée la responsabilité de l'employeur" (*PNMB* 68–9; *BSWM* 62–3, translation altered).

[282] "Il s'agit de replacer ce rêve *en son temps*, et ce temps c'est la période pendant laquelle quatre-vingt mille indigènes ont été tués, c'est-à-dire un habitant sur cinquante; et *dans son lieu*" (*PNMB* 84, *BSWM* 70).

[283] "Le fusil du tirailleur sénégalais n'est pas un pénis, mais véritablement un fusil Lebel 1916" (*PNMB* 86; *BSWM* 79, translation altered.)

Fanon then juxtaposes to Mannoni's dream accounts a long and devastating excerpt from a trial document, detailing torture at Tananarive. (Note his use, like Beauvoir's, of long quotations from original material; summary cannot do justice to the effect this is meant to have, and does have, on the reader. No, we will not be permitted to look away from this, from the real.)[284]

I see Fanon's de-Freudianized Freud as a darker version of Beauvoir's insistence that what little girls "envy" is not the penis, but the whole sphere of human activity that is denied to them because they don't have one. Like her, he rejects psychoanalytic "explanations" when real explanations will do. Just as it's useless to wonder why a woman "imagines" that birds are attacking her when birds really are attacking her, why women fear rape when the threat of rape is all around them, one need not wonder why a Black man would dream of becoming white in a culture that ceaselessly affirms to him that white culture is superior and that he can achieve nothing. The purchase of this on today's problems should be clear: it makes no more sense to blame students of color for their lack of "resilience" than to blame their elders for their high blood pressure.[285] The same is true for the trauma of rape, and of the constant threat of rape that hangs in the air, and of the existential hatred directed at non-ideal female bodies (which is to say, at female bodies *tout court*).[286] Nonetheless, the damage done is manifest, and it is urgent not to pretend it away, but to seek or invent a therapeutic, one component of which must somehow involve an activist awareness that goes beyond the individual.[287]

Another parallel to Beauvoir: Fanon's appropriation of psychoanalysis is eclectic, and some of the authorities he cites are not household names. People tend to notice his occasional mentions of Lacan. But the Lacan cited by both Beauvoir and Fanon was not yet Lacan with a capital L: both the power plays by which he and his followers would come to dominate the institutions of French psychoanalysis, and the uptake by Americans that would make him the darling of (Anglo-American) "French theory," lay in the future.[288] Lacan appears in both their texts as one among many authorities, and not the most interesting. Rather, we encounter names no one knows today, but whose work is indeed more appropriate, or at least more productive and open for appropriation. In Fanon's text, one is the Swiss Charles Odier:

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[284] See Nigel Gibson, "Losing Sight of the Real: Recasting Merleau-Ponty in Fanon's Critique of Mannoni."

[285] And yet both are done, explicitly or implicitly, a tradition going back to Moynihan and well beyond.

[286] See Fiona Vera-Gray, *Men's Intrusion, Women's Embodiment*. And of course some people experience both simultaneously and synergistically, as Tamara Beauboeuf-Lafontant has shown.

[287] "What emerges then is the need for a combined action, on the individual and on the group. As a psychoanalyst, I should help my patient to *conscientize* his unconscious, to stop seeking a hallucinatory lactification, but rather to take action toward changing the social structures." [Ce qui apparaît alors, c'est la nécessité d'une action couplée sur l'individu et sur le groupe. En tant que psychanalyste, je dois aider mon client à *conscientiser* son inconscient, à ne plus tenter une lactification hallucinatoire, mais bien à agir dans le sens d'un changement des structures sociales (*PNMB* 80; *BSWM* 74, translation altered).]

> Man's tragedy, Nietzsche said, is that he was once a child. None the less, we cannot afford to forget that, as Charles Odier has shown us, the neurotic's fate remains in his own hands.[289]

Another is Germaine Guex, whose work he cites copiously in the analysis of the neurotic Jean Veneuse (the hero of a novel by René Maran), which constitutes the second part of his chapter "L'homme de couleur et la blanche" (The Man of Color and the White Woman).[290]

Who was Germaine Guex?

Germaine Guex was a Swiss psychoanalyst who rose briefly to prominence with a 1950 book called *La névrose d'abandon*, later reissued as *Le syndrome d'abandon*. She wrote it in isolation, during the war; she was married to Odier, and worked as a research assistant to Jean Piaget. The book describes a neurosis that differs from, has been absent from, classical Freudian accounts because it does not derive from the repression that arises from the Oedipus complex; rather, it stems from a pre-Oedipal lived "vécu" involving abandonment (real or imagined), a "vécu" which has not been worked through (and thus continues to recur), but has also not been repressed. The memories are thus consciously available to the patient, not just as memories, but as if they were happening now, with disastrous consequences for the patient's conduct of his or her present life.[291]

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[288] See Élisabeth Roudinesco, *Histoire de la psychanalyse en France*, and David Macey, *Lacan in Contexts*.

[289] "Le malheur de l'homme, disait Nietzsche, est d'avoir été enfant. Toutefois, nous ne saurions oublier, comme le laisse entendre Charles Odier, que le destin du névrosé demeure entre ses mains" (*PNMB* 8; *BSWM* 4).

[290] Another way Fanon follows Beauvoir is in his seamless uptake of literary example as if it were "clinical evidence"—though of course Freud did this too.

[291] "We will use the term 'abandonnique' to refer to the neurotic who sees everything and everyone, beginning with himself, from the point of view of the abandonment he experienced, or dreads." [*Abandonnique* signifiera le névrosé qui envisage tout et tous, à commencer par lui-même, du point de vue de l'abandon vécu ou redouté (Germaine Guex, *Le syndrome d'abandon*, 19).]

Guex seems to have been concerned less with theoretical innovation than with compassionate and effective treatment for those whom a more conventional treatment had failed to help; there is some similarity between her ideas and those of Donald Winnicott, Jeanne Lampl de Groot, perhaps Melanie Klein; but (apart from her use by Fanon) the book was, from the point of view of intellectual history, a dead end.[292] However, when the book came out it was a bestseller; it would appear that many people recognized themselves in this portrait, including many who had already undergone a traditional psychoanalysis, even become analysts themselves, but were still unhappy. I am tempted to compare it to Alice Miller's book, *The Drama of the Gifted Child*, which was similarly popular with a lay audience, and which also calls for a more compassionate psychoanalytic *practice*, as from one human being to another.[293] Perhaps one reason Guex's book had so little lasting impact was that Jacques Lacan disliked it very much. He commented to a seminar in 1958:

> The tremendous popularity of the "névrose d'abandon" has been not so much due to the young analysts as to certain sick people, who use it to prop up their neurotic-delusional claims.[294]

Part of what was a lightbulb for some and a professional red flag for others was Guex's view that there was no point in seeking the source of neurosis in unconscious repression of experiences—the patient was aware of them already: indeed, ceaselessly ruminating on his childhood abandonment is a key symptom, along with a complete "lack of self-esteem," crippling anxiety, "a sharp sense of catastrophe," and an affective "avidity" and "aggression" that stem from a chronic state of fear.[295] The patient's inability to trust anyone results in conduct that alienates others, "proving" that he was right all along. Therefore the neurosis must be treated, as she puts it, "dans le vrai" (in the real), by careful attention to "le vécu," what is lived: a classically abstinent analysis, where the doctor shows no emotional connection with the patient, will be counterproductive. As she says, the task is delicate, and if following Fanon one adds politics to this it becomes even more delicate: not to deny the real roots of historical and ongoing trauma (what really happened, really did happen) but yet to move forward, without imposing a *new* set of ideological mystifications … not to dismiss the manifestations of trauma as (individual) "neurosis" and yet, to find a way forward for those who are in pain … to undertake the urgent work of repair without promising a cure that it is not in the power of therapists or teachers to give … to find a way that does not require not listening to what people actually say, or assuming that one knows them better than they know themselves. (David Macey cites Fanon's later mentor François Tosquelles: "Useless to offer psychotherapy to a dead man, it's too late. Useless also to interpret his oral fixation to someone who is hungry, or his castration complex to a man with a wooden leg."[296]) This is very much related to the problem Anne Dubreuilh confronts in her therapeutic practice at the start of *Les mandarins*, and it emerged from the same experiences of wartime displacements, dislocations, real-world tragedies.

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[292] Or almost: Reiner Stach mobilizes Guex's description of the "abandonnique" quite convincingly in his recent biography, *Kafka: The Early Years* (71–4).

[293] While ordinary readers found both books helpful in understanding their own histories and conditions, neither book was written to be "used" in that way: they are addressed very much to the practitioner.

[294] "Le grand succès de la névrose d'abandon n'est pas tellement auprès des jeunes analystes que chez certains malades qui y trouvent un support pour leur revendication névrotico-délirante" (Lacan, "Interventions sur l'exposé de J. Favez-Boutonnier: Abandon et névrose, Société Française de Psychanalyse," 3). René Henny, writing the introduction to the 1973 edition, was almost as hostile: "How many patients have been led to psychotherapy by a naïve reading of this book? And, indeed, it does not leave one unmoved." [Combien de patients n'ont-ils pas été conduits à la consultation psychothérapique par la lecture naïve de ce livre? Il ne laisse en effet pas indifférent" (9).] He notes that it was a "great success in the bookstores, which is probably why the publishers have insisted on a new edition in spite of the author's reticence." [[U]n succès de librairie, d'où probablement l'insistance de l'éditeur à une nouvelle édition, en contrepoint de la réticence de l'auteur (9).]

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[295] "[N]on-valorisation de soi," "un sens aigu de la catastrophe," "état chronique de peur" (Guex, *Le syndrome d'abandon*, 47). "Affective non-valorization always leads the *abandonnique* to an extremely painful and obsessive feeling of exclusion, of being at home nowhere and unwanted everywhere, affectively speaking. The need to belong, a primary deep need of every human being, has remained unsatisfied since infancy, because the subject did not feel strongly connected to someone, a mother or father whose love was lacking, nor really integrated to the family milieu. Since then, the subject has generally stood apart from any real affective tie or milieu, believing himself excluded by others, but in truth excluding himself, whether from a feeling of unworthiness, or on account of his many fears. Mistrust, aggressiveness, and passivity combine with lack of self-esteem to impose on the abandonnique a severely restricted reserve." [La non-valorisation affective amène toujours l'abandonnique à un sentiment extrêmement pénible et obsédant d'*exclusion*, de n'avoir nulle part sa place, d'être de trop partout, affectivement parlant. Le besoin d'appartenance, besoin primaire et profond chez tout être humain, est demeuré insatisfait dès l'enfance, du fait que le sujet ne s'est pas senti fortement lié à tel être, mère ou père, dont l'amour lui à fait défaut, ni réellement intégré au milieu familial. Dès lors, le sujet est généralement resté en dehors de tout lien ou de tout milieu réellement affectif, se croyant exclu par les autres, mais en fait s'excluant lui-même, tant par sentiment d'indignité, que sous l'effet de peurs multiples. Méfiance, agressivité et passivité se joignent à la non-valorisation pour interdire à l'abandonnique de sortir d'un quant-à-soi sévèrement protégé (ibid., 45).]

[296] "Inutile de faire de la psychothérapie à un mort, c'est trop tard. Inutile aussi d'interpréter son oralité à quelqu'un qui a faim, ou son complexe de castration à l'homme qui a une jambe de bois" (Macey, "Adieu Foulard," 25.)

I think it must be the insistence on “le vécu,” on addressing the neurotic’s problems in the here and now, that appealed to Fanon in Guex’s work; she herself is not concerned in the least with racial politics, or any other kind,[297] but Fanon seems to have found the combination of Guex and Maran useful for thinking through his own subject position and that of the Black man in a white world more generally.[298] Guex believes in what she calls a “constitutional” factor in neurosis, which leads her to caution against blaming parents. (This seems to be a big reason why the mainstream of psychoanalysis set her work aside.)[299] But Fanon found it a productive view.

> There can be no argument: in the domain of psychoanalysis as in that of philosophy, the organic, or constitutional, is a myth only for him who can go beyond it [celui qui la dépasse]. If from a heuristic point of view one must totally deny the existence of the organic constitution, the fact remains, and we can do nothing about it, that some individuals insist on belonging to pre-established categories. Or, no, actually we *can* do something about it.[300]

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[297] Some of Guex’s descriptive analyses are reminiscent of Beauvoir’s, as when she remarks that apparent devotion to someone else may become a form of tyranny, or when she says that “one could write a whole book about the relationship between mistresses and their maid.” [Il y aurait une volume à écrire sur les relations des maîtresses de maison avec leur bonne (Guex, *Le syndrome d’abandon*, 55).] But according to Guex the *névrose d’abandon* affects women and men alike, in quite similar ways.

[298] Insofar as I can tell, Guex and Odier’s work seems refreshingly free of Lacan’s smug normative assumptions about the inevitability of heterosexuality and a specific content for “femininity” that remains tied to woman’s maternal function (and I use the word “function” advisedly). See Judith Butler, “Lacan, Rivière, and the Strategies of Masquerade” (“Lacanian theory must be understood as a kind of slave morality,” 76), and Eribon, *Réflexions sur la question gay*. But there is no indication that Fanon cared about any of that.

[299] Lacan phrased his substantive objection as follows: “It is dangerous to foreground the real distinction—this critique of object relations implies the notion of a missing object for a being who lives in the symbolic and the real.” [À mettre au premier plan la distinction réelle—cette critique de la relation à l’objet implique la notion de manque d’objet chez un être qui vit dans le symbolique et le réel—cela est dangereux.] Anglo-American practitioners like D. W. Winnicott and Melanie Klein would also do that, but their work led toward, rather than away from, the policing of maternal affect and behavior still visible today in the school of “attachment parenting.” It’s hard not to think this has something to do with the continuing visibility of their names when Guex has faded into oblivion.

[300] “Il faut en convenir: sur le plan de la psychanalyse comme sur celui de la philosophie, la constitution n’est mythe que pour celui qui la dépasse. Si d’un point de vue heuristique on

> We referred earlier to Jacques Lacan; it was not at random. In his thesis, presented in 1932, he made a violent critique of the idea of organic constitution. Obviously, we are departing from his conclusions, but our dissent will be understood when one recalls that for the idea of the constitutional as it was understood by the French school we are substituting that of structure, "embracing unconscious psychic life, as we are able to know it in part, especially in the form of repression and inhibition, insofar as these elements take an active part in the organization peculiar to each psychic individuality." [He's quoting Guex's definition here.] … The neurotic structure of an individual is simply the elaboration, the formation, the eruption within the ego, of conflictual clusters arising in part out of the environment and in part out of the purely personal way in which that individual reacts to these influences.[301]

I must admit it is not entirely clear to me why a political psychoanalysis would want to hang on to the idea of a pre-given (individual) "constitution," and I am not entirely sure whether Markmann is right to interpret the term "constitution" as referring to an underlying *organic* substrate. But either way, the idea of "structure" here seems to be doing similar work to Beauvoir's idea of "situation," which includes both the body and the individual's social history. Fanon concludes that Veneuse/Maran's problems are not *reducible* to questions of race, whatever Veneuse himself may think. And thus his "fate" (as he sees it) is not in fact fateful or inevitable.

> Where does this analysis lead us? To nothing short of proving to Jean Veneuse that in fact he is not like the rest. Making people ashamed of their existence, said Jean-Paul Sartre. Yes: teaching them to become aware of

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doit dénier toute existence à la constitution, il demeure, nous n'y pouvons rien, que des individus s'efforcent d'entrer dans des cadres préétablis. Ou du moins, si: nous y pouvons quelque chose" (*PNMB*, 64–5; *BSWM* 58, translation altered).

[301] "Nous parlions tout à l'heure de Jacques Lacan: ce n'était pas un hasard. En 1932, il a, dans sa thèse, fait une critique violente de la notion de constitution. Apparemment, nous nous écartons de ses conclusions, mais l'on comprendra notre dissidence quand on se rappellera qu'à la notion de constitution au sens où l'entendait l'école française, nous substituons celle de structure, 'englobant la vie psychique inconsciente telle que nous pouvons partiellement la connaître, en particulier sous la forme de refoulé et de refoulant, en tant que ces éléments participent activement à l'organisation propre de chaque individualité psychique.' … La structure névrotique d'un individu sera justement l'élaboration, la formation, l'éclosion dans le moi de nœuds conflictuels provenant d'une part du milieu, d'autre part de la façon toute personnelle dont cet individu réagit à ces influences" (*PNMB* 65; *BSWM* 58–9, translation altered).

> the potentials they have forbidden themselves, of the passivity they have displayed in just those situations where what is needed is to act like a splinter aimed at the heart of the world, to interrupt, when necessary, the heartbeat of the world, to shift the ruling system when it must be shifted, but in any case, and most assuredly, *to stand up to the world.*[302]
>
> Another solution is possible, as we shall see. It implies a restructuring of the world.[303]

How to bring this about, Fanon does not (yet) say. But in the meantime, "those who recognize themselves will have taken a step forward."[304]

There is one important limit to the parallel I have been drawing between Beauvoir and Fanon: the solution Fanon later advocated, of violent collective struggle for liberation, is not available to women as a group acting on our own behalf. We may be glad about this, or we may be sorry, but this is, as Beauvoir saw and said in *The Second Sex,* the place where analogies between the oppression of women and all the other oppressions she puts it in parallel with break down.[305] So we are left with the problem of how to structure a healthy self in an unhealthy world. I can't answer this question, either, but Gordon reads Fanon as saying that "the basic problem … is to restore the humanity of each degraded person."[306]

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[302] "À quoi tend cette analyse? À rien de moins qu'à démontrer à Jean Veneuse qu'effectivement il n'est pas pareil aux autres. Faire honte aux gens de leur existence, disait Jean-Paul Sartre. Oui: les amener à prendre conscience des possibilités qu'ils se sont interdites, de la passivité dont ils ont fait montre dans des situations où justement il fallait, telle une écharde, s'agripper au cœur du monde, forcer s'il le fallait le rythme du cœur du monde, déplacer s'il le fallait le système de commande, mais en tout cas, mais certainement, *faire face au monde*" (*PNMB* 63; *BSWM* 57, translation altered, emphasis in original).

[303] "Nous verrons qu'une autre solution est possible. Elle implique une restructuration du monde" (*PNMB* 66; *BSWM* 60, translation altered).

[304] *PNMB*, 10; *BSWM* 5. "Ceux qui s'y reconnaîtront auront, je crois, avancé d'un pas."

[305] Some of the reasons she gives for this might (at least in theory) be overcome by subsequent historical developments. That the "apprenticeship" girls receive conditions them to regard their bodies as passive rather than active instruments, that they are educated to be the victims rather than the agents of violence, perhaps might be addressed by providing different sorts of training; women's participation in athletics may already have made some difference here (see Vera-Gray, *Men's Intrusion, Women's Embodiment*). The necessity of heterosexual intercourse to perpetuate the race is no longer as fully a feature of "the real" as it was in 1949. But the argument I've been calling "intersectional"—that women's interests (real and perceived) often lie in greater solidarity with the men of their group, rather than with women as a transnational, transracial, transeconomic class for itself—seems likely to stand. This is a structural feature of the human world, not a mystification that can be overcome by thinking about it differently.

[306] Gordon, *What Fanon Said*, 45.

12 Unflattering Portraits, New Ways to Live

But wait a minute, you say: wasn't Frantz Fanon a terrible misogynist?

As with Wright, views (vehemently) differ. Amey Victoria Adkins is among those who think so. She connects Fanon's failure to acknowledge Beauvoir's intellectual contribution to what she calls "the categorically negative assessment of women in *Black Skin, White Masks*": his "acerbic rendering" of Mayotte Capécia's novel and her life in his chapter 2, "La femme de couleur et le Blanc" (The Woman of Color and the White Man), and in general the way he treats the bodies of women, white and Black, in describing the development of Black male subjectivity under conditions of racism.[307]

Many, many scholars have taken up this question, and a full consideration is impossible here.[308] But putting Fanon into parallel with Beauvoir, as Adkins suggests we do, can help us see that these two chapters in *Peau noire masques blancs*—"La femme de couleur et le Blanc" and "L'homme de couleur et la Blanche"—are meant to be *phenomenological* accounts, and accounts of neurosis, of the way relations between men and women and between Blacks and whites are deformed and twisted by racism, and by the tendency for the colonized to accept the values of the colonizer. Considering that the book is an attack on racism, a surprisingly large number of pages are consumed in unflattering portraits of people of color, both female *and* male; many readers also had trouble seeing *The Second Sex* as a feminist book because so many of the women portrayed there are frankly so horrible. But that is precisely the point: for Beauvoir, as I wrote above, the harmed person could not be good; for Fanon—perhaps for both of them?—the harmed person could not be *well*.

Fanon denounces Mayotte Capécia for her complicity with whites in a way that strikingly recalls Wright's unhappiness with Zora Neale Hurston. And T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting makes a point similar to what Hazel Carby said about Hurston: we should ask *why* Capécia's (otherwise unacclaimed) novel *Je suis martiniquaise* was awarded the Grand Prix littéraire des Antilles in 1949 by a jury composed of thirteen white Frenchmen, and why Euro-American "lit crit feminists" (as she describes them) have leapt to her defense.[309]

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[307] Adkins, "Black/Feminist Futures," 701, 699.

[308] See Gwen Bergner, *Taboo Subjects: Race, Sex, and Psychoanalysis*, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Frantz Fanon: Conflicts and Feminisms*, and Françoise Vergès, "Chains of Madness, Chains of Colonialism: Fanon and Freedom."

[309] Sharpley-Whiting, *Frantz Fanon*, 36.

> To reconstruct Capécia's story as an example of Black feminism in practice because she is a Black woman and was taken to task by Fanon is, to say the least, a dangerous feminist politics. One has to ask equally what is invigorating about Capécia's representations and for whom are they invigorating?[310]

Sharpley-Whiting suggests that "many Euro-American lit crit feminists have not read Capécia's novels, but only one another's writing on Fanon and Capécia."[311] I am not sure whether this is fair, but it is certainly the case that Fanon's "attack" on Capécia, like Wright's "attack" on Hurston, have passed into, and been passed around in, the secondary literature almost as a decontextualized "topos" with little or no connection to what *either* writer actually said. (Perhaps this is a parallel to what I called above the "Spelman moment" in feminist reception of Beauvoir.)

Mayotte's story is only one of the strands in "La femme de couleur et le Blanc." Fanon is equally scathing about Nini, the heroine of a novel by Aboulaye Sadji, a male Senegalese writer. He also weaves in real-world examples from everyday life in Martinique, and in Paris, such as a young woman student of color (she will one day be a teacher in the Antilles), who finds Césaire's activism distasteful and could not imagine marrying a "nègre."[312] The issue for Fanon is not so much that Capécia's and Sadji's heroines, and their real-life counterparts, are women, but that they are *sell-outs*, that the social sickness of colonialism has had its way with them. This is visible in Mayotte's desire to be white, in her desire to marry a white man in order to "magically whiten" herself. Mayotte's story—or at least, the story she tells in her books—enables Fanon to explain lucidly how "métissage" in Martinique is not one phenomenon but two, depending on whether it is the father or the mother who is white.[313]

Gordon remarks, "it is unclear to me how Fanon is expected to have written on the two main accounts of women of color, Capécia's and A. Sadji's, without the criticisms he has offered as part of his ongoing argument."[314]And he continues:

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[310] Ibid., 49. Fanon: "the enthusiastic reception that greeted this book in certain circles forces us to analyze it." [L'accueil enthousiaste qui a été réservé à cet ouvrage dans certains milieux nous fait un devoir de l'analyser (*PNMB* 34, *BSWM* 29).]

[311] Sharpley-Whiting, *Frantz Fanon*, 19.

[312] *PNMB* 38, *BSWM* 33.

[313] *PNMB* 37, *BSWM* 32.

[314] Gordon, *What Fanon Said*, 29.

> Fanon announced that he was examining pathological cases, those of the phobic and the failure.... I do not see Black (especially Martinican) men faring especially well who return to the Antilles to be "deified," deluded foragers of civilization in a pair of "white breasts," pathetic slaves in search of whiteness through, if not white women, at least mulattas who condescendingly offer a bit of whiteness, and so on.[315]

Gordon's defense of Fanon on Capécia is plausible to me—Fanon is describing a case of bad faith, of pathological narcissism. This is not the only possible reading of *Je suis martiniquaise*, but it is a credible one.

"One day a woman named Mayotte Capécia, obeying a motivation whose elements are difficult to detect, sat down to write two hundred and two pages—her life—in which the most ridiculous ideas proliferated at random."[316] Fanon's is certainly a negative review (though perhaps not unusually nasty, by French standards). However, having read the book, I do not find Fanon's description unfair: *Je suis martiniquaise* is a simple, straightforward narrative of what the main character (who is given the same name as the author) experienced, and how she felt about it at the time, with no reflection of any sort, and it is indeed "difficult to detect" why it was written or what its author may have been, as the students put it, "trying to say." What Capécia does say, in an entirely straightforward manner, is that Black men and women are ugly, that white men and women are superior objects of desire, that she wants to be whiter and marry a white man, and that she can't. Reading it made Fanon angry. It might make us sad instead, as Sharpley-Whiting suggests.[317] But he doesn't misrepresent it. Similarly, in Capécia's *La négresse blanche*, it is clear that the heroine fears and is disgusted by Blackness, in herself and others. One can think of some twentieth-century texts by Black women that riff on the received trope of the "tragic mulatto" in fascinating and productive ways—Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*, for example. But Capécia simply recites that old story, without comment or complexity.

Fanon's reading of Capécia is certainly no further off the mark than his reading of René Maran, whose novel is mined in "L'homme de couleur et la Blanche" for the portrait of a perfectly neurotic *man*, unable to love.[318] Moreover, literary criticism as such was not Fanon's aim. He also wasn't interested in proving that writers of color were good writers; in fact, the project of showing whites the excellence of Black achievements seemed to him a flawed project in itself. If the criticism is that *Peau noire masques blancs* is largely an investigation of colonized *masculinity*, well, yes it is.[319] But the story it tells is not a happy one. The late section called "The Negro and Recognition" (Le Nègre et la reconnaissance) shows us men who are constantly comparing themselves to others, preoccupied with "autovalorisation," putting others down. The point of the section is to disprove Alfred Adler's "inferiority complex" theory by showing that this behavior is not related to an individual ego "goal," but is socially conditioned. Still, it's an unflattering portrait, and it's easy to see why Fanon says several times that many of his compatriots would not recognize themselves. But he also says that those who *did* recognize themselves would have taken a step forward.[320] I find myself thinking of Alice Schwarzer's comment that Beauvoir "gave women an explanation, but never an excuse."[321]

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[315] Ibid., 30.

[316] "Un jour, une femme du nom de Mayotte Capécia, obéissant à un motif dont nous apercevons mal les tenants, a écrit deux cent deux pages—sa vie—où se multipliaient à loisir les propositions les plus absurdes" (*PNMB* 34, *BSWM* 29).

[317] Sharpley-Whiting, *Frantz Fanon*, 41.

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[318] See Sharpley-Whiting: "Fanon spreads his critical analysis of blackphobia rather evenly among male and female colonized subjects" (ibid., 11). "What 'sympathetic' tenor rings out in Fanon's observation that 'Jean Veneuse … is a beggar. He looks for appeasement, for permission, in the white man's eyes'; or '*Un homme pareil aux autres* is a sham, an attempt to make the relations between two races dependent on an organic unhealthiness'; and better still, in embarking upon uncovering Veneuse's complex neurosis, Fanon offers: 'Veneuse is the lamb to be slaughtered. Let us make the effort'?" (ibid., 48, quoting *PNMB* 76, 80, 66).

I might add that one feature of Veneuse's illness Fanon denounces is that he asks permission of a white male friend before approaching a white woman, who has shown considerable agency already in expressing her interest in him. Does this not at least sketch a proto-feminist critique of the exchange of women between men?

[319] See Traci West, "Extending Black Feminist Sisterhood in the Face of Violence: Fanon, White Women, and Veiled Muslim Women." I agree with those who have written that the passages about the breasts of the white woman as source of the Black man's ego-salvation, which may owe something to Beauvoir's description of what men seek when they see woman as the Absolute Other, are hard to take, as is his depiction of the white woman who half incites the rape she fears. But whether they are hard (for me) to take is beside the point: making me (or anybody) comfortable is not Fanon's aim. As for the white woman who "cries rape," this is a topos common to a great deal of anti-racist writing, from Chester Himes's *If He Hollers Let Him Go* to Gwendolyn Brooks's "The Ballad of Pearl Mae Lee," and the primal scene of a rape accusation is clearly central to the psychology of Black masculinity in the twentieth century, at least as it is expressed in literature. (I am thinking of the scene in Ellison's *Invisible Man* [141–42] where the protagonist, newly arrived in the North, finds himself standing in the subway, and holds desperately on to his lapels to avoid inadvertently touching any of the white women he sees around him.) Two early Alice Walker essay/stories, "Coming Apart" and "Advancing Luna—and Ida B Wells," explore this dynamic beautifully: the narrator of "Advancing Luna" may partly be responding to Fanon and Wright when she says to herself, enraged, "Who know what the Black woman thinks of rape? Who has asked her? Who *cares*?" (93). Sharpley-Whiting: "We are here speaking of white women whose psychosexualities have been corroded, abnormalized, which in turn incite the cultural mythology of the Black male rapist, the sexually voracious Black brute" (*Frantz Fanon*, 13).

Fanon's phenomenological account of inter-racial relationships is *not* meant to imply that the behavior he describes is universal or inevitable, still less that he endorses the "male" version he describes in "L'homme de couleur et la Blanche."

> Just as there was a touch of fraud in trying to deduce from the behavior of Nini and Mayotte Capécia a general law of the behavior of the Black woman with the white man, there would be, we maintain, a breach of objectivity in expanding the attitude of Veneuse to the man of color as such.[322]

This feels very similar to what Beauvoir was doing in her discussion of "myths," and it has been misunderstood in parallel ways. The ultimate goal is demystification, to stop believing lies, lying to oneself, lying to others. But to get there, Fanon, like Beauvoir, passes through an exploration of how powerful these myths are and *how* they are powerful. It's not an argument that they are inevitable, much less that they are desirable. To say that a desire is not desirable is not to stop desiring it. But it's a step.[323]

I wrote above about readers of Beauvoir experiencing a shock of recognition, and sometimes a shock of non-recognition. But suppose sometimes those shocks are simultaneous, or nearly? "I am not that … I do not want to be that … I am that … I do not want to be that *any more*." In early 1970s consciousness-raising groups, this last stage was called, "starting to stop."[324]

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[320] *PNMB* 10, *BSWM* 5.

[321] "Notre propos étant la désaliénation des noirs" (*PNMB* 30, *BSWM* 25).

[322] "De même qu'il y avait une tentative de mystification à vouloir inférer du comportement de Nini et de Mayotte Capécia une loi générale du comportement de la Noire vis-à-vis du Blanc, il y aurait, affirmons-nous, manquement à l'objectivité dans l'extension de l'attitude de Veneuse à l'homme de couleur en tant que tel" (*PNMB* 65; *BSWM* 59, translation altered).

[323] Sandra Bartky's early essays (reprinted in *Femininity and Domination*) work this through in ways I find illuminating.

[324] Where Fanon says, "notre propos est la désaliénation des Noirs," could one describe Beauvoir's "propos" as "la désalienation des femmes"? She does not say so. In fact, she never says what her political project is, I think because she was discovering it along the way. The parallel I am describing here is between his *intention* and her *effect*.

But there is another possibility: I am not that; thank God I am not like those women; yes, she really has their number; thank God there are other ways than that to be a woman. And in that respect both books are written from (and for) the subject position of the *évolué*, the colonized subject who has a greater understanding of the colonial situation than most of his brothers and sisters (so to speak); his or her first impulse will be to *escape*, and Fanon devotes a great deal of derisive energy to showing that this is impossible. (His mockery of the Martiniquais who returns from France with his nose in the air has its counterpart in Suzanne Césaire's contempt for the "vanilla" poets who stand in need of surrealist cure: in "Malaise d'une civilisation" she compared the *évolué* who is bent on assimilating to a "hysteric who does not know he is merely imitating a sickness, but the doctor does know.")[325] The *évolué's* first task as a political being must be to awaken his compatriots to a consciousness of the degradation in which they live but which they themselves do not "speak," even in their hearts. He or she begins by distinguishing him/herself from the character to which most of those who share his oppression have been reduced by their situation, including their intellectual and moral condition, and there is an inevitable moment of alienation for him or her, partly because his or her "evolution" has been enabled by his or her own colonization, through education directed from and by the metropole. Then too, he must resist racist assumptions that Blacks who are more "similar" to whites (either because they are educated, because they are more light-skinned, or both) are somehow more "evolved" in the sense of *biologically* superior: it is for this reason that Fanon sometimes puts "évolué" in quotation marks. (But sometimes he does not.)

> White civilization and European culture have imposed on the Black an existential deviation. We shall demonstrate elsewhere that what people call the Black Soul is a white construction.
>
> The *évolué* Black, slave of the spontaneous and cosmic Negro myth, feels at a given stage that his race no longer understands him.
>
> Or that he no longer understands it.[326]

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[325] Suzanne Césaire, "Malaise d'une civilisation," 122.

[326] "La civilisation blanche, la culture européenne ont imposé au Noir une déviation existentielle. Nous montrerons ailleurs que souvent ce qu'on appelle l'âme noire est une construction du Blanc.

Le Noir évolué, esclave du mythe nègre, spontané, cosmique, sent à un moment donné que sa race ne le comprend plus.

Ou qu'il ne la comprend plus" (*PNMB* 11; *BSWM* 7, translation altered).

And yet, if escape is impossible, nostalgia is worse. One cannot go backwards. The passage continues:

> Then he congratulates himself on this, and enlarging the difference, the incomprehension, the disharmony, he finds in them the meaning of his real humanity. Or more rarely he wants to belong to his people. And it is with rage on his lips and vertigo in his heart that he buries himself in the vast Black abyss. We shall see that this attitude, so absolute and beautiful, renounces the present and the future in the name of a mystical past.[327]

Throughout *Peau noire masques blancs*, Fanon carries on a debate with other Black intellectuals (the most prominent being the poet Léopold Senghor), who were advocating a sort of Afrocentric celebration of Blackness, a re-valorization of what white culture had devalued, leaning on cultural difference as a springboard to liberation, under the banner of "négritude." I think Max Silverman is right to say that "Fanon's position oscillates between intellectual critique and emotional empathy," but ultimately, he is just not with them.[328] For one thing, he is very aware of cultural differences between groups that would all be considered "Black," and of racist tensions between, for example, the Antillais and the Sénégalais—tensions for which the white colonizers are ultimately responsible, and which they exploit shamelessly, but which are nonetheless real.[329] While his desire for *solidarity* across national boundaries comes through in the text (and would become clearer in his later writing, and the commitments of his life), it is not a solidarity based on a clear, real, unambiguous *identity*.

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[327] "Alors il s'en félicite et, développant cette différence, cette incompréhension, cette désharmonie, il y trouve le sens de sa véritable humanité. Ou plus rarement il veut être à son peuple. Et c'est la rage aux lèvres, le vertige au cœur, qu'il s'enfonce dans le grand trou noir. Nous verrons que cette attitude si absolument belle rejette l'actualité et le futur au nom d'un passé mystique" (*PNMB* 11; *BSWM* 7, translation altered).

[328] Silverman, *New Interdisciplinary Essays*, 3.

[329] "One has had friends—and unfortunately one still does—who were born in Dahomey or the Congo but pretend to be natives of the Antilles; one has known, and one still knows, Antilleans who become annoyed when they are suspected of being Senegalese. This is because the Antillean is more 'civilized' than the Black African, in other words he is closer to the White; and this difference prevails not only in the street and on the boulevards but also in public service, in the army. Any Antillean who performed his military service in a regiment of sharpshooters is familiar with this disturbing situation: on one side he has the European, whether born in his own country or in France, and on the other he has the Senegalese marksmen. A day comes back to me when, in the midst of combat, it was a question of wiping out a nest of machine-guns. Three times the Senegalese were launched on attack, three times they were forced back. Then one of them asked, why don't the *toubab*s go? At such times, one ends up unsure which one is, toubab or *indigène*."

(Markmann has a translator's note about *toubab*: "Literally, this dialect word means *European*; by extension it was applied to any officer.")

This strikes me as yet another parallel to Beauvoir. Fanon is struggling here with Sartre's view that what Sartre calls an "anti-racist racism" will be a necessary stage of self-affirmation in moving toward an ultimately post-racialist future. Toril Moi describes him as brilliantly "manag[ing] at once to signal his distance from and endorsement of Sartre's positions," which perhaps entails an acceptance of the need for what would later be called "strategic essentialism."[330] Moi sees it as a "the deepest political flaw in *The Second Sex*" that Beauvoir did not make the corresponding move of affirming an "anti-sexist sexism,"[331] but I can't quite agree: for one thing, Beauvoir's refusal to do so is what enables what I've been calling her intersectionality.

Fanon saw the négritude movement as invoking a concept of Blackness that was not just inaccurately monolithic, but too static, too closed, too unwilling to admit the dimensions of time and change: in short, insufficiently existentialist. He is scathing about what he later labels "folklore,"[332] and about what he sees as pathetic attempts to convince Europeans that Africans, too, have a significant though "different" culture. In the case of Mannoni, he is clear that the idea of a Malagasy "culture" is a dangerous mystification:

> After having locked up the Malagasy in his customs, after having carried out a unilateral analysis of his way of seeing the world, after having described the Malagasy within a closed circle, after having noted that the Malagasy maintains relationships of dependency with his ancestors—eminently tribal characteristics—M. Mannoni, in defiance of all objectivity, then

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[Nous avons connu, et malheureusement nous connaissons encore, des camarades originaires du Dahomey ou du Congo qui se disent Antillais; nous avons connu et nous connaissons encore des Antillais qui se vexent quand on les soupçonne d'être Sénégalais. C'est que l'Antillais est plus "évolué" que le Noir d'Afrique; entendez qu'il est plus près du Blanc; et cette différence existe non seulement dans la rue et sur les boulevards, mais aussi dans les administrations, dans l'armée. Tout Antillais ayant fait son service militaire dans un régiment de tirailleurs connaît cette bouleversante situation: d'un côté les Européens, vieilles colonies ou originaires, de l'autre les tirailleurs. Il nous souvient de certain jour où, en pleine action, la question se trouva posée d'anéantir un nid de mitrailleuses. Par trois fois les Sénégalais furent lancés, par trois fois ils furent rejetés. Alors, l'un des leurs demanda pourquoi les *toubabs* n'y allaient pas. Dans ces moments-là, on arrive à ne plus savoir qui l'on est, toubab ou indigène (*PNMB* 20; *BSWM* 15, translation altered).]

[330] Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman*, 206.

[331] Ibid., 211.

[332] See "Sur la culture nationale" in *Les damnés de la terre* (195–224).

> applies his conclusions to the understanding between two groups—deliberately ignoring the fact that, since Galliéni, the Malagasy has ceased to exist.[333]

(This is more or less Leiris's critique of colonialist anthropology, most fully laid out in the 1950 lecture I discussed earlier, but already sketched in the essays Fanon cites in *Peau noire masques blancs*.) Fanon is equally critical, though, of Black writers like Alioune Diop who were advancing the idea of an alternative African metaphysics:

> What use are reflections on Bantu ontology when one reads elsewhere: "When 75,000 Black miners went on strike in 1946, the state police forced them back to work by firing on them with rifles and charging with fixed bayonets. Twenty-five were killed and thousands were wounded."[334]
>
> We know that Bantu society no longer exists. And there is nothing ontological about segregation. Enough of this rubbish.[335]

In a 1956 talk, he would describe the "zombification of culture": an effort to "freeze time" that was equally misguided whether undertaken as a strategy of colonization or a strategy of resistance. And his analysis that a woman wearing a veil can mean many different things, not just *either* "feudal" dependency *or* resistance to colonialism, his (unfortunately prescient) awareness of the limitations of Algerian nationalism, is rooted in this same dynamism of the *évolué*, who understands culture itself as dynamic.[336]

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[333] "Après avoir enfermé le Malgache dans ses coutumes, après avoir réalisé une analyse unilatérale de sa vision du monde, après avoir décrit le Malgache en cercle fermé, après avoir dit que le Malgache entretient des relations de dépendance avec les ancêtres, caractéristiques hautement tribales, l'auteur, au mépris de toute objectivité, applique ses conclusions à une compréhension bilatérale—ignorant volontairement que depuis Galliéni le Malgache n'existe plus" (*PNMB* 76; *BSWM* 69–70, translation altered). A note by Markmann explains that Galliéni, "the hero of the Marne," was appointed resident-general of Madagascar when it became a French colony in 1896, and later became governor-general. Markmann quotes the *Encyclopedia Britannica*: Galliéni "completed the subjugation of the island."

[334] "Que signifient les méditations sur l'ontologie bantoue, quand on lit par ailleurs: 'Lorsque soixante-quinze mille mineurs noirs se sont mis en grève en 1946, la police d'État les a contraints à coups de fusil et à coups de baïonnette à reprendre le travail. Il y a eu vingt-cinq morts, des milliers de blessés'" (*PNMB* 148–49, *BSWM* 142).

[335] "[N]ous savons que la société bantoue n'existe plus. Et la ségrégation n'a rien d'ontologique. Assez de ce scandale" (*PNMB* 150, *BSWM* 143).

[336] Fanon, "Racisme et culture"; "Mésaventures de la conscience nationale"; "L'Algérie se dévoile."

In a situation where structural inequalities manifest themselves as social and cultural hegemonies, attempts to free oneself by understanding one's oppression often, maybe always? take place against the background of others who share the oppression but do not seem to have the same drive to understand and fight it. This is an important component of Richard Wright's *Black Boy*, of the Aimé Césaire poem from which *Peau noire masques blancs* draws so much of its energy and imagery, of the essays by Suzanne Césaire and others in *Tropiques* and *Légitime défense*. Wright finds Hurston's approach misguided; later, Baldwin will feel the same about Wright…

I see the same dynamic in *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* and *The Second Sex*—the issue is not explicitly *posed* in *The Second Sex*, where Beauvoir is, as I have said, really not concerned with "identity" as such at all: but there is the same struggle to free the idea of "women" from what women and girls are told, often by women, they must or should be like, and from the reality of what many women around one *are* like. It is interesting that when Beauvoir did come to speak as a feminist, she was asked about this question of "we," and she described a kind of split subject—"when I say we I mean we feminists, not we women."[337]

The legacy of this structure for feminism has been something of a poisoned chalice, really. One consequence has been generational warfare; another has been a struggle around the term "feminist," both struggles to possess it (as in the sex wars, or the *des femmes* debacle), and struggles to disavow or/and relabel it ("power feminism," "womanism," etc.). None of these struggles have "succeeded," exactly, in the sense that no new label has "won" and feminism is owned by no one. But it does not seem entirely right, either, to describe these as unfortunate, divisive "splits in the movement." From the point of view of dialectics, the splits in the movement *are* the movement.

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[337] "A. S.—Avant l'existence du Mouvement, vous disiez 'elles' en parlant des femmes. Maintenant vous dites 'nous.' S. B.—Pour moi, cela ne signifie pas 'nous les femmes,' mais nous les féministes" (Schwarzer, *Simone de Beauvoir aujourd'hui*, 124).

CHAPTER 5

The East Is Real: Orientalism and Its Enemies

Without failure, there can be no ethics.
Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté.[1]

Without investigation there is no right to speak.
Chairman Mao[2]

The wise man changes his mind; the fool never does.
Greek Proverb

1 Algeria without Apology

When Fanon and Beauvoir met in 1961, they didn't, as far we know, discuss whether there should have been footnotes to *The Second Sex* in the book he'd published nine years earlier. Did they talk at all about the "position of women" in France's colonies, or in the Algerian revolution, or more generally? Beauvoir does not record any such conversation, either, in the vivid and moving pages of *La force des choses* she devoted to Fanon's meeting with Sartre, Claude Lanzmann, and herself.[3] Nor, apparently, did they pursue, as Sabine Broeck would have wished, "a philosophical questioning of the white premises of the Enlightenment": Broeck is correct that "a concerted epistemically programmatic critique did not emerge."[4]

There were other things to talk about in 1961. Colonialism in Algeria and throughout Africa was taking a long and bloody time to die, and the prospects for what would follow it were not encouraging. Lanzmann (who met Fanon first) reported him as devastated by the assassination of Patrice Lumumba, and also by the mounting evidence of fractures and fault lines to African unity,

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[1] "[S]ans échec, pas de morale" (*Pour une morale de l'Ambiguïté* [hereinafter PMA], 14, *Ethics of Ambiguity* [hereinafter *EA*], 10).

[2] Mao Zedong, "Reform Our Study," 23.

[3] *La Force des Choses* (hereinafter *FCh*), 2:420–27, 439–41; *Force of Circumstance* (hereinafter *FCirc*), 605–611, 620–21.

[4] Sabine Broeck, "Re-reading de Beauvoir After Race," 170. See chapter 3 above.

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his most urgent commitment.[5] When the four came together in Rome, Fanon was worried that France was about to invade Tunisia, and watching his own back vigilantly: assassins had already made at least one attempt to take his life. The metropole too seemed on the brink of civil war. Sartre's apartment had just been bombed, for the second time, in reprisal for his support of the Algerian revolution and his denunciation of torture by French forces there. Fanon himself was dying of leukemia. It can hardly have seemed like the moment for querying the episteme.

Interestingly, the conflict over Algeria brought together intellectuals whose epistemological commitments were quite diverse. The 1960 Manifesto of the 121 against the Algerian war ("Déclaration sur le droit à l'insoumission dans la guerre d'Algérie"), signed by Beauvoir and Sartre and many others (but not by Camus), was originally drafted by Maurice Blanchot, who might reasonably be considered the grandfather of deconstruction. As Gisèle Sapiro showed for the question of collaboration with Vichy, epistemological commitments are poor predictors of political ones.[6]

What Beauvoir and Fanon did talk about included Fanon's formation as a revolutionary leader. She gives a very compelling and nuanced account of how his experiences of racism in France and in Algeria moved him from assimilationist optimism to militant advocacy of direct action. Everything he wrote against intellectuals he wrote against himself, she says, explaining how his lived experience of racism as a student had called into question the humanist abstractions with which he, like Sartre and herself, had been raised as a French subject.[7] And they talked about the future, about the difficulties facing pan-Africanism given the cultural differences and divisions between and among peoples of color, which were confirming the complex account of Black identity Fanon gave in *Peau noire masques blancs*.

But in the end, what Beauvoir and Fanon most had in common was a war. Both were passionately engaged in a real-world struggle for third-world liberation, each on the basis, not of a theoretical critique or a fantasized identification, but of a lucid understanding of their actual, and very different, social locations in a concrete world: a world that, to steal Yeats's phrase, was changing minute by minute.

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[5] *FCh* 2:408, *FCirc* 597. Patrice Lumumba, the first democratically elected prime minister of the Congo, was assassinated on January 17, 1961, apparently with the complicity of the CIA: Cold War machinations were deeply entangled with post-independence infighting between Congolese factions. In May, *Les Temps Modernes* had published a long section from what became *Les damnés de la terre*, for which Sartre would write the famous preface; extracts from *L'an V de la révolution algérienne* (usually translated as *A Dying Colonialism*) had appeared there in May-June 1959.

[6] Sapiro, *La guerre des écrivains*.

[7] *FCh* 2:424, *FCirc* 609. Unlike some later commentators, Beauvoir does not seem to see a sharp break between *Peau noire masques blancs* and *Les damnés de la terre*, between the philosopher-psychologist and the professional revolutionary responsible for training troops.

Or perhaps there was an epistemic critique, in a way, in the basic sense of an acknowledgement that what you see and know is conditioned by where you are placed to see it. Throughout *La force des choses* Beauvoir very much situates herself as French, and as French at that moment of danger, rather than assuming the "view from nowhere" of ahistorical universalist humanism; she speaks of the shame of being French in terms very similar to those of *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947*, when her color "burned her." And as in the earlier book, she gives a detailed and devastating account of her reasons.

> The sky was so blue that as I sat facing my open window I wanted to write just for the sake of writing, as I would have sung just to sing, if I'd had any voice. "I've got some things to show you," Lanzmann said one evening. He took me to dinner outside Paris, in a sleepy fragrant country village, and suddenly, hell was back on earth. Marie-Claude Radziewski had given him a file which contained accounts of the treatment inflicted by the *harkis*, in the cellars of the Goutte d'Or, on Moslems handed over to them by the DST: electrodes, burning, impaling on bottles, hangings, stranglings. The tortures were psychological as well as physical. Lanzmann wrote an article on the subject for *Les Temps Modernes* and published the dossier of charges. A student told me that she had been in the street near the Goutte d'Or and seen bleeding men dragged house to house by the *harkis*. Every night the neighbors heard their screams. "Why? Why? Why?" The unendingly repeated cry of a fifteen-year-old Algerian boy who had watched his whole family being tortured ripped at my eardrums and my throat. Oh, how mild they had been in comparison, those abstract storms of revolt I had once felt against the human condition and the idea of death! … [A]t least then my horror had been directed at something outside myself. Now I had become an object of horror in my own eyes.[8]

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[8] The Goutte d'Or quarter of Paris was and is home to African migrants and their working-class descendants; DST stands for "Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire," an arm of the police force responsible for domestic surveillance and counter-espionage. Analogous to the CIA in the United States, it behaved comparably during this period, including arming a group responsible for "false flag" attacks and other delightful behavior. See Jim House, "Colonial and Post-Colonial Dimensions of Algerian Migration to France."

"Le ciel était si bleu que, face à la fenêtre ouverte, j'avais envie d'écrire, pour ne rien dire, comme j'aurais chanté si j'avais eu de la voix. 'J'ai des choses à te montrer,' me dit Lanzmann

At an early stage, she notes, "It seemed to us that the [French] Left had nothing to teach the Algerians, and that *El Moudjahid* was quite right to put them in their place"[9]—an echo of Leiris's point: Africa does not need me. But the tortures described above took place in Paris. And "France" itself was becoming unrecognizable.[10] By the time of the meeting with Fanon, to be "French" meant to be inescapably responsible for violence undertaken "in one's name," violence one is helpless to prevent, but in which one is nonetheless implicated.

In a fine article, Annabelle Golay has done a very thorough job of putting Fanon's later writing (*L'an V de la révolution algérienne* and *Les damnés de la terre*) in dialogue with Beauvoir's activism as described, over hundreds of pages, in the second volume of *La force des choses,* which Golay shows as very much part of the same project.[11] Golay doesn't use the word "activism," which seems to have no exact French equivalent. What do I mean by it? nothing especially glamorous: meetings, mostly. Now and again a demonstration. Writing editorials and pieces for *Les Temps Modernes*, soliciting and editing articles from others. Taking public stands in the hope of changing minds; when she can't, continuing the work of testimony and documentation.

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un soir. Il m'emmena dîner aux environs de Paris, dans un village endormi qui sentait la campagne; et soudain, l'enfer remonta sur la terre. Marie-Claude Radziewski lui avait communiqué un dossier sur les traitements infligés par les harkis, dans les caves de la Goutte-d'Or, à des Musulmans que leur livrait la DST: gégène, brûlures, empalements sur des bouteilles, pendaisons, étranglements. Les tortures étaient entrecoupées d'actions psychologiques. Lanzmann écrivit là-dessus un article pour *Les Temps Modernes* et publia le dossier des plaintes. Une étudiante me raconta qu'elle avait vu de ses yeux, rue de la Goutte-d'Or, des hommes en sang que des harkis traînaient d'une maison à une autre. Les gens du quartier entendaient toutes les nuits des hurlements. 'Pourquoi? Pourquoi? Pourquoi?': ce cri indéfiniment répété d'un petit Algérien de quinze ans qui avait vu torturer toute sa famille me déchirait les tympans et la gorge. Qu'elles étaient bénignes les révoltes où me jetaient jadis la condition humaine et l'idée abstraite de la mort! … Et du moins le scandale demeurait hors de moi. Aujourd'hui j'étais devenue scandale à mes propres yeux" (*FCh* 2:409–10, *FCirc* 598).

[9] "Nous trouvions que la gauche n'avait pas de leçon à donner aux Algériens et qu'*El Moudjahid* avait bien fait de le remettre à sa place" (*FCh* 2:127, *FCirc* 381). The articles in *El Moudjahid* to which she refers were probably largely authored by Fanon himself.

[10] "[P]ointing to the flowering apple orchards, Lanzmann said in a desolate voice: 'Even the grass won't be the same color any more.' What devastated us was to suddenly discover the face of France as it had become, little by little, depoliticized, inert, ready to give itself over to the men who wanted to continue the war to the point of atrocity." [Me montrant les clos fleuris de pommiers, il me dit d'une voix désolée: "Même l'herbe n'aura plus la même couleur." Ce qui nous accablait c'était de découvrir soudain le visage qu'avait pris peu à peu la France: dépolitisée, inerte, prête à s'abandonner aux hommes qui voulaient poursuivre à outrance la guerre (*FCh* 2:152; *FCirc* 404, translation altered).]

[11] Annabelle Golay, "Feminisme et postcolonialisme: Beauvoir, Fanon, et la guerre d'Algérie."

Should I be calling this activism? Beauvoir herself does not. In *La force des choses* and elsewhere, she contrasts herself to her friend Francis Jeanson, who put his life on the line by helping to deliver weapons to the FLN, and her former student Jacqueline Guerroudj, who participated in the Battle of Algiers and was condemned to the guillotine for her militant activities. Beauvoir told Madeleine Gobeil: "I felt and thought about things in a political way, but I never engaged in political action."[12] *La force des choses*:

> Since the Left had completely failed in its attempt to carry on the struggle within the limits of legality, if one wanted to remain faithful to one's anti-colonialist convictions and free oneself of all complicity with this war, then underground action remained the only course. I admired those who took part in such action. But to do so demanded total commitment, and it would have been cheating to pretend I am capable of such a thing. I am not a woman of action; my reason for living is writing; to sacrifice that I would have to believe myself indispensable in some other field. Such was not by any means the case. I contented myself with giving what help I could when I was asked for it; certain of my friends did more.[13]

Whatever we want to call it, Beauvoir's testimony on behalf of Jacqueline Guerroudj is often credited as decisive in winning her reprieve. Beauvoir and

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[12] "The Art of Fiction No. 35," interview with Madeleine Gobeil, 35. Sonia Kruks comments on this point: "As a well-known public figure, who by this time could not sit in a café without being recognized, [Beauvoir] was not practically speaking a good bet for underground activity. She was far too visible easily to shelter FLN militants, to transport money or materials for them, as the 'Jeanson network' and others were doing.… In fact, Beauvoir did at times offer practical support to the network: she lent members her car and allowed her apartment to be used. On at least one occasion, she helped to find a secure hiding place for a fugitive" (Kruks, "Politics of Privilege," 202). Kruks cites Hervé Hamon and Patrick Rotman, *Les porteurs de valises*, 158 and 283. She also notes that "under the emergency powers of the time," actions such as signing manifestos and attending banned demonstrations were "acts of illegality," and that after the publication of *Djamila Boupacha* (which Beauvoir co-signed with Gisèle Halimi) a death threat was telephoned to Beauvoir's apartment.

[13] "La gauche ayant échoué à mener dans la légalité un combat efficace, si on voulait rester fidèle à ses convictions anticolonialistes et briser toute complicité avec cette guerre, il ne restait d'autre issue que l'action clandestine. J'admirais ceux qui la menaient. Seulement elle exigeait un engagement total et ç'aurait été tricher que de m'en prétendre capable: je ne suis pas une femme d'action; ma raison de vivre, c'est d'écrire; pour la sacrifier, il aurait fallu me croire ailleurs indispensable. Ce n'était pas du tout le cas. Je me contentai de rendre, quand on me le demanda, des services; certains de mes amis firent d'avantage" (*FCh* 2:245–56, *FCirc* 472).

Sartre had signed the Manifesto of the 121, the "Déclaration sur le droit à l'insoumission dans la guerre d'Algérie." *Les Temps Modernes* had vigorously sponsored Henri Alleg's book, *La question*, which described his torture by French troops (and was banned by the French government); a letter of defiant support from Sartre had been read out at the trial of Jeanson's underground network. As a result, it had been unsafe, for a time, for Sartre and Beauvoir to be in France. Even after they returned, Paris felt to Beauvoir like an occupied city. Her own government's support of torture and massacre, police brutality and censorship, the casual racism of the people in the streets, the deceitful lies of the government and the mainstream press poisoned everyday life and saturated her with shame. "I had been called an enemy of France: I became one."

> This hypocrisy, this indifference, this country, my own self, were no longer bearable to me. All those people in the streets, in open agreement or battered into a stupid submission—they were all murderers, all guilty. Myself as well. "I'm French." The words scalded my throat like an admission of hideous deformity. For millions of men and women, old men and children, I was one of the people who were torturing them, burning them, machine-gunning them, slashing their throats, starving them; I deserved their hatred because I could still sleep, write, enjoy a walk or a book.... I felt that I was suffering from one of those diseases whose most serious symptom was the absence of pain.[14]

Other commentators on Beauvoir's work at this period have highlighted her work on behalf of Djamila Boupacha, whose shameful treatment—falsely accused of setting a bomb, she was raped and tortured by French forces, with the complicity of higher-ups—Beauvoir denounced in *Le Monde*; Beauvoir headed up the committee of support, and accompanied Gisèle Halimi in interviewing French officials, whose disgraceful statements and behavior they detailed in a book.[15] Dramatic as this was, I see it not as an isolated incident, but rather as embedded in the day in day out of resistance, resistance as a way of life.

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[14] "Je ne supportais plus cette hypocrisie, cette indifférence, ce pays, ma propre peau. Ces gens dans les rues, consentants ou étourdis, c'étaient des bourreaux d'Arabes: tous coupables. Et moi aussi. 'Je suis française.' Ces mots m'écorchaient la gorge comme l'aveu d'une tare. Pour des millions d'hommes et de femmes, de vieillards et d'enfants, j'étais la sœur des tortionnaires, des incendiaires, des ratisseurs, des égorgeurs, des affameurs; je méritais leur haine puisque je pouvais dormir, écrire, profiter d'une promenade ou d'un livre: les seuls moments où je n'avais pas honte, c'étaient ceux où je ne le pouvais pas.... Il me semblait traîner une de ces maladies où le symptôme le plus grave, c'est l'absence de douleur" (*FCh* 2:145, *FCirc* 396–97).

As usual, I feel that summary can't do justice to the texture of Beauvoir's narration, which catches us up in the alternations of hope and despair. Perhaps her most important activism was this work of testimony, as the period documented in *La force des choses* catches up to its own moment of writing.[16] She documents it all, in detail, move by move: massacres, tortures and disappearances, Muslims rounded up in the Vel' d'Hiv where the Jews had been held, systematic rapes in detention camps. Listening to the radio with Michel and Zette Leiris, just as she and Sartre had done during the Second World War.[17] At one point she turns to reproducing pages from her diary, as she'd done in the part of *La force de l'âge* that covers the worst days of the Occupation; what horrible thing did we just learn about, how did other people react.... As the rules of human rights are suspended not just in Algeria but in France itself (censorship, bans, firings, deportations), she draws parallels with the Nazis, with the massacre at Oradour and the rounding-up of French Jews.[18] She describes also a progression of her awareness and shame about being French, how she walks around gritting her teeth as French people say stupider and stupider things and show unconcern in the face of casual brutality against Algerians and then against demonstrators.[19] *La force des choses* also records travel—Cuba, Brazil,

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[15] *FCh* 2:298–306, 402, 436, 449; *FCirc* 513–18, 591–92, 618, 628. While most of *Djamila Boupacha* was written by Halimi, Beauvoir's name was given as author so that she could take responsibility if a prosecution resulted, which seemed quite likely. See also Kruks, "Politics of Privilege," Mary Caputi, "Simone de Beauvoir and the Case of Djamila Boupacha," Karen Shelby, "Beauvoir and Ethical Responsibility," and Julien Murphy, "Beauvoir and the Algerian War: Toward a Postcolonial Ethics." See now also Lori Marso, "Politics with Beauvoir," 94–120.

[16] See also Ursula Tidd, *Gender and Testimony*, especially chapter 6.

[17] *FCh* 2:256, *FCirc* 404.

[18] "Ten thousand Algerians have been herded into the Vel' d'Hiv, like the Jews at Drancy once before. Again I loathed it all—this country, myself, the whole world." [Dix mille Algériens étaient parqués au Vel' d'Hiv, comme autrefois les Juifs à Drancy (*FCh* 2:431, *FCirc* 614).]

[19] For instance: "Yes, the poor Germans—one realizes now it wasn't their fault." [Oui, pauvres Allemands: on se rend compte maintenant que ce n'était pas de leur faute (*FCh* 2:455, *FCirc* 633).] Beauvoir says that "[f]rom then on, having a coffee at the bar or going to the boulangerie was a trial. You heard people say that 'the whole thing was the Americans wanting our oil,' or, 'why are we waiting? One good blow will finish it.' ... I had liked crowds. Now even the streets were hostile, and I felt as dispossessed as in the first days of the occupation." [Désormais, boire un café à un zinc, entrer dans une boulangerie, ce fut une épreuve. On entendait: "Tout ça, c'est les Américains qui veulent notre pétrole." Ou bien: "Qu'est-ce qu'on attend pour en mettre un bon coup et en finir?" ... J'avais aimé les foules: maintenant même les rues m'étaient hostiles, je me sentais aussi dépossédée qu'aux premiers temps de l'occupation (*FCh* 2:125, *FCirc* 381).]

China (more on this below), Africa, the Soviet Union—which took place within the context of support for revolutionary movements, respites of optimism against a backdrop of dread. Going to a demonstration, being moved by a sense of solidarity, and yet coming home to futility and rage: if only there had been more of us, if only the unions had come out earlier, if only the Communists hadn't bailed on us (again).... And she talks about a "tetanus of the imagination" resulting from wave after wave of bad news, atrocities, massacres, torture and rapes, suspensions of the rule of law. The worst thing, she says, "is that you get used to it."[20]

Working through this in the first year of Donald Trump's administration, what resonated most for me was her description of walking that difficult line. How to avoid defeatism ("demonstrations never change anything") without grandstanding, without exaggerating the importance of what one says or does; how to mark one's own visceral responses without narcissism or self-complacency.[21] I remember Anne in *Les mandarins*, finding it hard to answer Scriassine's questions about life in Paris under the Occupation: "the truly awful things, it wasn't me they happened to; and yet they haunted my life."[22] Later Beauvoir would say to Madeleine Gobeil, "everyone has forgotten about Algeria";[23] she'd go on to dramatize this French amnesia in *Les belles images* (1966). At our own moment in particular, it seems important not to reproduce that amnesia in scholarship on Beauvoir, not to act as if "nothing happened" between *The Second Sex* and the 1970s.

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[20] "Today, in this grim December of 1961, like most of my fellow-creatures I suppose, I am suffering from a sort of *tetanus of the imagination.* [Here she quotes details of torture from trial testimony.] I read this and move on to another article. That, perhaps, is the final stage of demoralization for a nation: one get used to it." [Aujourd'hui, en ce sinistre mois de décembre 1961, comme beaucoup de mes semblables, je suppose, je souffre d'une sorte de *tétanos de l'imagination*.... C'est peut-être ça le fond de la démoralisation pour une nation: on s'habitue (*FCh* 2:122, *FCirc* 379).] Very similar language occurs in "Pour Djamila Boupacha," which appeared in *Le Monde*, and in the introduction to *Djamila Boupacha*.

[21] One is entitled to one's very own despair and self-loathing; one is not entitled to infect others with it under the guise of political analysis, much less "theory." And one must live through these things in one's own skin, without mistaking one's inner theatre of war for the actual ongoing struggle. "When one lives in an unjust world there is no use hoping by some means to purify oneself of that injustice; the only solution would be to change the world, and I don't have that power. To suffer from these contradictions serves no good purpose; to blind oneself to them is mere self-deception. [Quand on habite un monde injuste, inutile d'espérer, par aucun procédé, se purifier de l'injustice; ce qu'il faudrait, c'est changer le monde et je n'en ai pas le pouvoir. Souffrir de ces contradictions, ça ne sert à rien; les oublier, c'est se mentir (*FCh* 2:501, *FCirc* 668–69).]

But see also Ursula Tidd, *Gender and Testimony* (1999): "Although presence is sometimes all that is possible in our relationship with the Other, Beauvoir represents her project of testimonial autobiography as a means of reaching these others whose testimonies are silenced in order to break down our common existential isolation. Living with others in 'the real,' resisting the Disneyland hyperreality parodied by Beauvoir in the mid-sixties in *Les belles images*, may seem an increasingly remote option at the end of the second millennium. Before we learn to live with the 'loss of the real' [the reference is to Baudrillard, *Simulacres et simulations*], Beauvoir's testimonial autobiographical project alerts us to the continuing importance of being there and bearing witness" (154).

Golay also points out that the solidarity between Beauvoir and Fanon at the time of their meeting did not come out of nowhere.

> The story of their meeting, as told in *La force des choses* (1963), makes it possible to think about the common stakes for oppressed nations and oppressed individuals, women and colonized peoples, and to establish the unifying link between French feminism and the call for decolonialization. Woman's *alterity* with respect to man is comparable to that of the colonized with respect to the colonizer. Beauvoir highlights this parallel from the first pages of *The Second Sex.* The essay should be reread,

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[22] "[L]es vrais malheurs ce n'est pas à moi qu'ils étaient arrivés, et pourtant ils avaient hanté ma vie" (*Les mandarins*, 1:111).

[23] "De Beauvoir: I felt and thought about things in a political way, but I never engaged in political action. The entire last part of *Force of Circumstance* deals with the war. And it seems anachronistic in a France which is no longer concerned with that war.

Interviewer: Did you realize that people were bound to forget about it?

De Beauvoir: I deleted lots of pages from that section. I therefore realized that it would be anachronistic. On the other hand, I absolutely wanted to talk about it, and I'm amazed that people have forgotten it to such a degree. Have you seen the film *La Belle Vie,* by the young director Robert Enrico? People are stupefied because the film shows the Algerian war. Claude Mauriac wrote in *Le Figaro littéraire*: 'Why is it that we're shown parachute troopers on public squares. It's not true to life.' But it is true to life. I used to see them every day from Sartre's window at Saint-Germain-des-Prés. People have forgotten. They wanted to forget. They wanted to forget their memories. That's the reason why, contrary to what I expected, I wasn't attacked for what I said about the Algerian war but for what I said about old age and death. As regards the Algerian war, all Frenchmen are now convinced that it never took place, that nobody was tortured, that insofar as there was torture they were always against torture" ("The Art of Fiction No. 35," interview with Madeleine Gobeil, 35–6).

In the 1986 interview with Hélène Wenzel for *Yale French Studies*, Beauvoir indicated at the outset that she had written about "other things," not just feminism: "As a result, I'd prefer that a focus on my writing and my work not be absolutely limited … to the woman question" (Wenzel, "Interview with Simone de Beauvoir," 6). But she was unsuccessful in getting Wenzel to discuss those "other things," and the articles in the issue (an important breakthrough for Beauvoir scholarship in the United States) focused entirely on feminist questions.

> in this respect, starting from the situation of its writing and the colonial context.[24]

That last sentence describes what I've been trying to do right along. I'd add that, while *La force des choses* describes her relationship to France and Frenchness as *changing* during the Algerian conflict, her disgust, and her awareness of linkage between social conservatism and the war machine, had been well-prepared by her previous intellectual commitments: remember the refusal of knee-jerk nationalism at the heart of her conception of the One and the Other, and her uptake of the surrealist response to Claudel's smug patriotism.[25] As is true for Fanon, there is more ethical and political continuity throughout the development of her work than may at first appear.

I agree with Golay, too, in not seeing any contradiction between drawing a parallel between two sorts of oppressions, and being deeply committed to ending both of them, whether together or separately. (As I write that, I am asking myself, why would anybody think that would be a contradiction? Was I fighting a straw person, for all those pages?) Golay goes so far as to say that for Beauvoir, the struggle against racist colonialism took precedence over the *lutte des femmes* during the years chronicled in *La force des choses*, and I think she's right.

It's not that Beauvoir forgets about women during the second volume of *La force des choses*. She notes casual points of interest, for instance, that Castro's guerilla army included some women, "a fact which caused a good many sniggers among the French bourgeoisie";[26] that "six women prisoners in the La Roquette prison escaped; a pretty feat, well-organized, and one that should have been a help to all women in getting rid of their inferiority complexes."[27] She also makes brief mentions here and there of what would later be labelled "sexism." For instance, when describing her disappointment with the increasing conservatism of Dos Passos and with Faulkner's failure to disavow his racist Southern heritage, she also rethinks her admiration for Hemingway, noting the anti-Semitic tinge of *The Sun Also Rises*: "Aryan, male, endowed with wealth and leisure—[Hemingway] speaks as one seigneur to the other."[28] She expresses admiration for younger women she meets: the mixed-race Chinese writer Han Suyin;[29] the Algerian lawyer Gisèle Halimi, who enlisted her support for Djamila Boupacha;[30] the young working-class novelist Christiane Rochefort.[31] She is gratified by the reception of *The Second Sex* in America, its "success unspoiled by any salacious comment,"[32] and also gratified by those who write to thank her for it, and to provide more evidence that "[i]t's terrible to be a woman"; their letters, she says, would make a moving document. "I wasn't wrong when I wrote *The Second Sex*, in fact I was even more right than I knew at the time."[33] As she reads page proofs for *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*, she says she hopes it will help younger women;[34] and she even gives several feminist talks.

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[24] "Le récit de leur rencontre dans *La force des choses* (1963), permet de penser les enjeux communs aux nations et aux individus opprimés, femmes et colonisés, et d'établir le lien qui unit le féminisme français et les revendications de la décolonisation. *L'altérité* de la femme par rapport à l'homme est comparable à celle du colonisé par rapport au colon. Beauvoir met en lumière ce parallèle dès les premières pages du *Deuxième sexe* (1949). L'essai doit être relu, à cet égard, à partir de sa situation d'écriture et du contexte colonial" (Golay, "Féminisme et postcolonialisme," 408).

[25] In the course of one demonstration, in 1957, we run into our old friend Adamov: "There were cries of 'Down with de Gaulle,' shouted out syllable by syllable as though we were at a sporting event, and Adamov said angrily, 'It's all too gay, this isn't how we should be behaving.'" [On a crié "À bas de Gaulle" au rythme des monômes d'étudiants et Adamov a dit avec irritation: "C'est trop gai, ça ne convient pas" (*FCh* 2:217, *FCirc* 451).] He's still criticizing style, but (throughout *La force des choses*) he's still by their side, along with Leiris and a number of other veterans of surrealism (Tzara, Masson…).

[26] "Dans la petite armée qui tenait le maquis avec lui, il y avait des femmes, ce qui suscitait chez les bourgeois français des rires égrillards" (*FCh* 2:137–38, *FCirc* 391).

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[27] "Six détenues de la Roquette s'évadèrent; un joli exploit, bien machiné et qui aurait dû aider les femmes à se nettoyer de leurs complexes d'infériorité" (*FCh* 2:409, *FCirc* 597–98).

[28] "D'ailleurs, les complicités que nous propose Hemingway à tous les tournants de ses récits impliquent que nous avons conscience d'être, comme lui, aryens, mâles, dotés de fortune et de loisirs, n'ayant jamais éprouvé notre corps que sous la figure du sexe et de la mort. Un seigneur s'adresse à des seigneurs. La bonhomie du style peut tromper, mais ce n'est pas un hasard si la droite lui a tressé de luxuriantes couronnes: il a peint et exalté le monde des privilégiés" (*FCh* 2:132, *FCirc* 386–87).

See also "The Art of Fiction No. 35," interview with Madeleine Gobeil, 34, where they discuss Hemingway as a paradigmatic uncommitted writer.

[29] *FCh* 2:231, *FCirc* 461–62.

[30] *FCh* 2:225, *FCirc* 457.

[31] "[Rochefort's *Les petits enfants du siècle*] had caused less of a scandal than her first [book], but she'd had another cartload of self-righteous filth emptied on top of her all the same. 'It's happened to me too,' I told her. 'It must have been worse for you, though,' she said sympathetically, 'because I'm a tramp anyway, you know.' And indeed, I was always conscious of my middle-class origins when I was with her; she was a real working-class girl, and there wasn't much she hadn't seen: I envied her daring, her fire, her inner freedom. For the time being, she wasn't writing. 'I can't get interested in my piddling little stories, not at the moment!'

I understood how she felt. The assassination of Lumumba, the last pictures of him, the photographs of his wife leading his mourners, head shaved, breast bare—what novel could compete with that?"

[Ce livre avait moins scandalisé que le premier, mais tout de même on l'avait à nouveau aspergé de vertueuse merde. "J'ai connu ça, lui dis-je. —Ça a dû être plus gênant pour vous, m'a-t-elle dit avec sympathie, parce que moi, je suis une truande." Près d'elle en effet, j'avais conscience de mes origines bourgeoises; c'était une fille du peuple et elle en avait vu de toutes les couleurs; elle avait des audaces, une verve, une liberté que je lui enviais. Pour l'instant, elle n'écrivait pas: "Je ne peux pas m'intéresser à mes petites histoires, en ce moment!"

Je la comprenais. L'assassinat de Lumumba, les dernières images qu'on vit de lui, les photographies de sa femme menant le deuil tête rasée, seins nu, à côté de ça quel roman pouvait tenir le coup? (*FCh* 2:407, *FCirc* 596).]

But her heart does not seem to be in it. "At the university [of Rio de Janeiro] I spoke—not because I wanted to, but because I had been asked—on the position of women."[35] Describing another such talk in São Paolo she says,

> Once more I found myself talking about women in a large flower-decked and scented hall, addressing a lot of bedizened ladies who were thinking exactly the opposite of what I was saying; but a young woman lawyer thanked me on behalf of women who work.[36]

Most of these women seem to have all too much in common with the French "society women who listen in ecstasy" to the sickeningly patriotic and self-aggrandizing speeches of de Gaulle.[37] Even the success of the first two volumes of her memoirs creates mixed emotions.

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[32] "*Le deuxième sexe* parut en Amérique avec un succès que ne salit aucune chiennerie. J'y tenais à ce livre et j'ai été contente de vérifier—chaque fois qu'on l'a publié à l'étranger—qu'il avait fait scandale en France par la faute de mes lecteurs, non par la mienne" (*FCh* 2:19, *FCirc* 298).

[33] "Que de correspondantes me répètent: 'C'est terrible d'être une femme!' Non, je ne me trompais pas en écrivant *Le deuxième sexe*, j'avais même encore plus raison que je ne le pensais. Avec des extraits de lettres reçues depuis ce livre, on aurait un document navrant" (*FCh* 2:188, *FCirc* 429).

[34] "[F]or once, one of my books is giving me pleasure to reread. Unless I am mistaken, it should be a success with young girls who are having problems with their family and religion and who do not yet dare to dare." [Hier après-midi, j'ai corrigé un énorme paquet d'épreuves envoyées par Festy: pour une fois un livre que j'ai écrit me fait plaisir à relire. Si je ne me trompe, il devrait avoir du succès auprès des jeunes filles, en mal de famille et de religion et qui n'osent pas encore oser. D'autre part, j'ai pris mon élan, je crois, pour mon nouveau livre (*FCh* 2:189, *FCirc* 429–30, translation altered).]

[35] "À l'Université je parlai—non par goût, mais parce qu'on me l'avait demandé—de la condition de la femme" (*FCh* 2:349, *FCirc* 552). In their public appearances, both she and Sartre were mainly concerned to gather support for the Cuban revolution, advancing the ideas he'd just articulated in "Ouragan sur le sucre" (Hurricane Over the Sugar).

[36] "De nouveau, je parlai des femmes dans une grande salle fleurie et parfumée, devant des dames harnachées qui pensaient le contraire de ce que je disais; mais une jeune avocate me remercia au nom des femmes qui travaillent" (*FCh* 353, *FCirc* 555, translation altered).

> People would come up to me with beaming smiles and say, "I don't agree with you politically; but I liked your book so much." "Let's hope you don't like the next one," I said to one of them. It is true that in *La force de l'âge* I had taken a very objective attitude toward my past beliefs; all the same, I did make it perfectly clear how distasteful I find bourgeois institutions and ideologies; I shouldn't have been receiving the approval of people who were attached to them.[38]

I'm reminded of Richard Wright's determination that his second book, *Native Son*, would make less room than his earlier writings for what is now called "white tears," and of Beauvoir's later "dialogue of the deaf" with Betty Friedan. At one point she describes her support for a Doctor Weill-Hallé's crusade for birth control, noting the shockingly conservative attitude of the French communist party; she is asked to, and does, write prefaces for two short books, *Le planning familial* and *La grande peur d'aimer*. But she describes the press conference for the second book as depressing.

> There were about a hundred people there: psychoanalysts, doctors, various more or less qualified specialists in the human heart. Mme. Weill-Hallé in a white dress, blonde, virginal-looking, expounded in her musical voice on the advantages of the pessary; some fifty-year-olds asked uneasily if the use of such things was not harmful to the romantic side of love. The vocabulary employed was edifying in the extreme. They talked, not about birth control but about the joys of maternity, not about contraception but about orthogenesis. At the word abortion, faces were turned away; as for sex, that wasn't allowed in the room at all.[39]

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[37] "Tout en réclamant pour son investiture une procédure exceptionnelle, de Gaulle avait fait savoir qu'il voulait être légalement appelé par le pays. Des dames du monde écoutaient, en extase; Mauriac se pâmait" (*FCh* 2:151, *FCirc* 401).

[38] "Les gens me disaient avec d'éclatants sourires: 'Je ne suis pas d'accord avec vous, politiquement; mais votre livre m'a tellement plu!—J'espère que le prochain déplaira,' dis-je à l'un d'eux. Il est vrai que dans *La force de l'âge* je prenais certaines distances par rapport à mes attitudes passées; tout de même j'y disais clairement mon dégoût des institutions et des idéologies bourgeoises; je n'aurais pas dû obtenir les suffrages de ceux qui leur étaient attachés" (*FCh* 2:404, *FCirc* 593). See also *FCh* 2:497, *FCirc* 665.

[39] "Il y avait une centaine de personnes: des psychanalystes, des médecins, des spécialistes plus ou moins autorisés du cœur humain. Mme. Weill-Hallé en robe blanche, blonde, fraîche, virginale, exposa d'une voix musicale les avantages du pessaire; des quinquagénaires

It would not be until 1970 that she would be contacted by the younger generation of militants from the MLF (Mouvement de libération des femmes), with whom she'd have more in common. For now, she quickly turns back to the urgency of defending Jeanson and Alleg. As she observes (in a different context): "The war in Algeria was mobilizing all my emotions. I had none left over for anything else."[40]

I think Golay is also right when she defends that priority, using Beauvoir's own language from *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*:

> Because oppression has more than one face, if in the historical context of the late '50s and early '60s Beauvoir's feminist engagement seems to have been subordinated to the struggle for decolonization, it's on the one hand because the urgency of the situation demanded it, and on the other because the liberation of colonized nations would serve the struggle for women's liberation (as Fanon argues in "L'Algérie se dévoile"): "First things first," one might say, taking Kirsten Holst Petersen's formulation.[41]

By 1972, Beauvoir would acknowledge that the second part of that reasoning had been over-optimistic, writing in *Tout compte fait*: "Fanon was profoundly mistaken when he foretold that the Algerian women would escape from male oppression because of the part they had played in the war."[42] But as Beauvoir also says in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, one makes choices about this kind of thing without being able to know in advance whether one will be right: we're

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demandèrent avec inquiétude si l'usage n'en était pas nuisible au romantisme amoureux. Le vocabulaire employé était des plus édifiants. On parlait non de 'birth-control' mais de maternité heureuse, non de contraception, mais d'orthogenèse. Au mot avortement, on se voilait la face; quant au sexe, il n'était nulle part" (*FCh* 2:297–98, *FCirc* 512–13).

[40] She has met an old friend who is devastated by a different injustice, the execution of Caryl Chessman in the US: "La guerre d'Algérie mobilisait mes émotions, je n'en avais plus de reste, mais je la comprenais" (*FCh* 2:306–7, *FCirc* 519).

[41] "L'oppression ayant plus d'un visage, si dans le contexte historique de la fin des années 50 et du début des années 60, l'engagement féministe de Beauvoir semble subordonné à la lutte pour la décolonisation, c'est d'une part que l'urgence de la situation l'exigeait, et d'autre part, que la libération des nations colonisées servait la lutte de libération des femmes (ce que défend Fanon dans 'L'Algérie se dévoile'): '*First things first*,' pourrait-on dire en reprenant la formule-titre de Kirsten Holst Petersen" (Golay, "Féminisme et postcolonialisme," 423). Golay is referencing *PMA* 14, *EA* 10; see chapter 3 above. See also Petersen, "First Things First."

[42] "Fanon s'est bien trompé quand il prédisait que grâce au rôle qu'elles ont joué pendant la guerre les femmes algériennes échapperaient à l'oppression masculine (*Tout compte fait* [hereinafter *TCF*], 562; *All Said and Done* [hereinafter *ASD*], 443). I'll return below to the wider context for this passage.

not in the world of trolley problems now. And perhaps, looking back later, one would still feel one's choice had been the right one, much as she'd said no one had the right to judge Richard Wright's view that, for American Blacks in the 1940s, the war effort was less urgent than their own liberation.

But where Golay, honoring an important strand of postcolonial critique, says "first things first," Beauvoir's own formulation, both in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* and here, seems a little different: I expressed it (with reference to Anna Julia Cooper) as *one thing at a time*. If we wait for the perfectly intersectional action, we will wait forever; plus, in the real world, certain desiderata are genuinely incompatible, and nothing is gained by pretending otherwise. (This is also, I think, one important takeaway from Kimberlé Crenshaw's original article.)[43] Perhaps here is as good a place as any to remind my reader (and myself) that what is an issue is not whether Beauvoir was "a good person."[44] Of course, after all these pages (and all these decades) I can't help but hope so; but she herself would have regarded that issue as pretty much irrelevant, and as a bit of a trap.[45] The question I began with was a different one: how can her thinking-in-situation (including the thinking she did in her autobiographical writing), from her situation, be of use to us in ours.[46]

In retrospect, only one of the two justifications Golay saw Beauvoir as offering for prioritizing the anti-colonial struggle (and de-centering more obviously "feminist" concerns) would hold water. But the most we can ask is that people make a good faith judgement based on what was available to them at the time. With respect to Algeria, as always, Beauvoir documents her response, both intimate and collective,[47] to facts on the ground as they appear to her; and does not hesitate to say, later, when she turns out to have been wrong.

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[43] See Qrescent Mali Mason, "Intersectional Ambiguity and the Phenomenology of #BlackGirlJoy."

[44] Whatever we mean by that. And what *do* we mean by that? For women especially, there's a depressing amount of overlap between "a good person" and "a *nice* person." Perhaps this is another situation where policing a boundary is not an especially good use of one's energy, even (especially?) when one is thinking about oneself.

[45] See for example her discussion of "dévouement" and of the "dame de charité" in *The Second Sex*, but also in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, where it is formulated in a more gender-neutral way.

[46] I follow Ursula Tidd (*Gender and Testimony*) and Karen Vintges (*Philosophy as Passion*) in taking Beauvoir's autobiographical works as a key aspect *of her theory*, and of her theory's impact on women and the women's movement internationally.

[47] "Writing the self and writing history are woven into one and the same gesture of writing." [L'écriture de soi et l'écriture de l'histoire se tissent ici en un seul et même geste d'écriture (Golay, "Féminisme et postcolonialisme," 415).]

It may be worth underlining this. Beauvoir is a remarkably consistent thinker and writer, when compared to, say, Gide or Malraux, or even Sartre; it is striking, for instance, that the same views and even the same examples recur in writing of very different periods and genres. But in their search for "Beauvoir," commentators often miss the way she undertakes to document the uncertainties and evolutions in her thinking,[48] and the way many of her texts, as Golay says of this one, look forward to their own "dépassement."[49] One should not ignore the warning at the beginning of *La force des choses*:

> Like its predecessor, this book asks the reader for his collaboration. I present, in order, each moment of my development, and the reader must have the patience not to close the accounts before the end. He is not entitled, for instance, to conclude, as one critic has done, that Sartre likes Guido Reni because he liked him when he was nineteen. Indeed, only malice dictates such blunders, and against malice I do not intend to be on my guard. On the contrary, this book contains everything likely to provoke it, and I should be disappointed if it failed to displease someone. I should also be disappointed if it pleased no one, and that is why I suggest that its truth is not expressed in any one of its pages but only in their totality.[50]

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[48] As I discussed above, Mary McCarthy could only see the different views in *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947* as an incoherent mess; others have followed her lead in picking out and attacking isolated points, identifying those as "Beauvoir." What is often missing (whether through bad faith or "déformation professionnelle") is the habit of reading dialectically.

[49] "The text of *La force des choses*, which looks forward to its own *dépassement*, this tense and straining text, has an even more forceful effect on the reader because Beauvoir gives us the whole story of the road she took, with a constant concern for the truth, making no attempt to disguise her own contradictions, but rather forcing herself to take hold of them in the very gesture of writing." [Le texte de *La force des choses*, qui vise son propre dépassement, ce texte tendu, peut être reçu par le lecteur avec d'autant plus de force que Beauvoir y livre son cheminement dans son ensemble avec un souci constant de vérité, ne cherchant en rien à masquer ses propres contradictions, mais s'efforçant au contraire de les saisir dans le geste même de l'écriture (Golay, "Féminisme et postcolonialisme," 419).]

[50] "Comme le précédent, ce livre demande au lecteur sa collaboration: je présente, en ordre, chaque moment de mon évolution et il faut avoir la patience de ne pas arrêter les comptes avant la fin. On n'a pas le droit par exemple, comme l'a fait un critique, de conclure que Sartre aime Guido Reni parce qu'il l'aima à dix-neuf ans. En fait, seule la malveillance dicte ces étourderies et contre elle je n'entends pas me prémunir: au contraire, ce livre a tout ce qu'il faut pour la susciter et je serais déçue s'il ne déplaisait pas. Je serais déçue aussi s'il ne plaisait à personne et c'est pourquoi j'avertis que sa vérité ne s'exprime pas dans aucune de ses pages mais seulement dans leur totalité" (*FCh* 1:10, *FCirc* 7).

La force des choses ends with a kind of balance sheet, where she responds in firm feminist tones to those who have criticized her relationship with Sartre, or insinuated that he writes her books for her,[51] or painted a wounding picture of her personality, describing her as a madwoman, an eccentric, dissolute, a schoolmistress, a conformist: any number of incompatible slurs.[52] But she then moves into an assessment of her objective situation:

> I know that I am a profiteer, and that I am one primarily because of the education I received and the possibilities it opened up for me .... [T]he people who buy my books are all beneficiaries of an economy founded upon exploitation. I am an accomplice of the privileged classes and compromised by this connection; that is the reason why living through the Algerian war was like experiencing a personal tragedy.[53]

The primary commitment is to decolonization, to anti-racism, to the Third World. "For now I know the truth of the human condition: two-thirds of mankind are hungry."[54] France is where she is, she is in it and of it, and she does not pretend or fantasize otherwise: like Pierre in *L'invitée*, she cannot imagine writing from a position of exile. But France is not the world, or the center of the world.

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[51] See *FCh* 2:490, *FCirc* 660.

[52] "In France, if you are a writer, to be a woman is simply to provide a stick to be beaten with ... I am of the Left, I had things I was trying to say; among others, that women are not just a tribe of moral cripples from birth." [En France, si vous écrivez, être femme c'est donner des verges pour vous battre .... Je suis de gauche, j'ai essayé de dire des choses, entre autres, que les femmes ne sont pas des éclopées de naissance [*FCh* 2:492, *FCirc* 661).]

[53] "Je sais que je suis une profiteuse, et d'abord par la culture que j'ai reçue et les possibilités qu'elle m'a fournies .... [L]es gens qui achètent mes livres sont tous les bénéficiaires d'une économie fondée sur l'exploitation. Je suis complice des privilégiés et compromise par eux: c'est pourquoi j'ai vécu la guerre d'Algérie comme un drame personnel" (*FCh* 2:501, *FCirc* 668–69).

She returns also to the contradiction about her readership I mentioned above: "My relationship to the public has become ambiguous because the horror my class inspires in me has been brought to white heat by the Algerian war.... I feel ill at ease if the middle class as a whole gives me a good reception. There were too many women who read *The Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* because they enjoyed the accuracy with which I had depicted a milieu they recognized, but without being at all interested in the effort I had made to escape from it. As for *The Prime of Life*, many's the time I've stood gritting my teeth as people congratulated me: 'It's bracing, it's dynamic, it's optimistic,' when I was so sickened by everything that I would rather have been dead than alive." [Mon rapport au public est devenu très ambigu parce que la guerre d'Algérie a porté au rouge l'horreur que m'inspire ma classe.... [J]'éprouve un malaise si la bourgeoisie dans son ensemble m'accueille bien. Trop de lectrices ont apprécié dans les *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* la peinture d'un milieu qu'elles reconnaissaient, sans s'intéresser à l'effort que j'avais fait pour m'en évader. Quant à *La force de l'âge*, j'ai souvent grincé des dents quand on me félicitait: "C'est tonique, c'est dynamique, c'est optimiste," à un moment où tel était mon dégoût que j'aurais mieux aimé être morte que vive (*FCh* 2:497, *FCirc* 665).]

2 A Response to "Occidental Dreams"

But wait a minute, you say. Didn't I read somewhere that Beauvoir was a terrible orientalist?

Sigh. Yes, you did.

As I mentioned above, Sally Markowitz's article, "Occidental Dreams: Orientalism and History in *The Second Sex*," takes Beauvoir to task for being embedded in some problematic discourses about "the oriental," and scolds Beauvoir scholars for having ignored this. In Markowitz's view, *The Second Sex* is rendered less than useful for present-day feminists by traces of an outdated rhetoric of ethnic difference in Beauvoir's account of the "progress" East and West have made toward gender equality. Markowitz sees Beauvoir as closer to Havelock Ellis "whom Beauvoir cites respectfully in *The Second Sex*," and to the integral racism of Hegel's theory of historical progress, than to "us today"; it would be a caricature to say that Beauvoir gets raked over the coals for not having read Edward Said, but that is the general drift. Markowitz assimilates Beauvoir to a whole history of white women's imposition of exclusionary theory on peoples of color, and on that basis claims that her work is outdated and irrelevant.[55]

Markowitz's article is a polemic, rather than a work of textual scholarship: her claim that *The Second Sex* associates gender and oriental "race" in an embarrassingly retrograde way rests on two short quotations—four sentences in all—from that eight-hundred-page book. One occurs in a footnote, at the end of part 2 of the five-part "Histoire" section. Beauvoir has been pointing forward to a discussion of the ambiguity of modern man's "Othering" of women: no longer satisfied with nakedly dominating her as a pure object, his "problem" will become how to make her his "companion" while still maintaining her subservient status.[56] Then the footnote explains that she'll be describing this modern development in the West, since that is where it has occurred: "the history of women in the East, in India, in China, has been in effect the history of a long and unchanging slavery."[57] The second passage Markowitz cites, which occurs in Beauvoir's chapter on "myths," is indeed a stereotyped generalization, something that (to borrow Nancy Bauer's phrase) "hurts my ears,"[58] as I'll discuss fully below: Beauvoir contrasts an "Oriental" man who views women as objects of pleasure to a modern Western man who dreams of embracing "another free being."[59] But Markowitz pulls these two passages out of context, and she doesn't engage with any of the other, more substantive things Beauvoir says in *The Second Sex* about China, India, and the Arab world. The "oriental other," Markowitz says, "haunts the margins" of *The Second Sex*;[60] but she seems unable or unwilling to cite further examples of his actual presence in Beauvoir's actual text. Nonetheless, her description of Beauvoir as an "orientalist" has become a routine, dismissive gesture in the general feminist literature, taking its place alongside older accusations that Beauvoir is a "liberal feminist" in the model of Betty Friedan, and that she writes only from the viewpoint of her own race and class and has "nothing to say" about, or to, anyone else.

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[54] "Car je connais à présent la vérité de la condition humaine: les deux tiers de l'humanité ont faim" (*FCh* 2:503, *FCirc* 670).

[55] "*The Second Sex*, for all its brilliance, reflects a time increasingly remote from our own and thus inevitably marked by ways of thinking we would rather forget. Indeed, there is reason to regard Beauvoir as a figure in some respects as close in spirit to, say, the early twentieth-century sexologist Havelock Ellis (whom Beauvoir cites respectfully in *The Second Sex*) as to the feminists she would provoke and inspire in the 1970s and beyond" (Markowitz, "Occidental Dreams," 271).

Why do I find it so hard to be charitable to this article? It does not add anything to our understanding of Simone de Beauvoir—but then, that was not the writer's intention. We are expected to simply accept on faith Markowitz's claim that her two brief quotations "cast a long shadow" over Beauvoir's work and her career, without supporting argumentation.[61] Markowitz barely talks about any more of *The Second Sex* than Lucy did.[62] Instead, most of her article expands on what is wrong with the "discourse" in which Beauvoir allegedly participates: Markowitz rehearses a grand narrative about the racialization of the sex/gender difference in the grand narrative of the West, using as her examples *other* writers, including some who may have been unknown to Beauvoir. (For example, she adduces the shortcomings of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, without showing any relationship between Gilman and Beauvoir—and I don't believe there was one: Gilman's work was pretty well forgotten in the United States by the time Beauvoir traveled there, and remained little-known until feminists rediscovered her work in the 1970s.) Markowitz explains what she is criticizing as follows:

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[56] *DS* 1:135–36.

[57] "Nous examinerons cette évolution en Occident. L'histoire de la femme en Orient, aux Indes, en Chine a été en effet celle d'un long et immuable esclavage. Du Moyen Âge à nos jours nous centrerons cette étude sur la France dont le cas est typique" (*DS* 1:136).

[58] Nancy Bauer, "On the Limits of Philosophizing," 2.

[59] *DS* 1:237.

[60] Sally Markowitz, "Occidental Dreams: Orientalism and History in *The Second Sex*," 286.

[61] Why did a major, well-respected academic feminist journal fail to pick up on this elementary methodological point? Perhaps the view is taken that racism in feminism is such an emergency that other matters must take a back seat. Or perhaps it is Spelman who casts a long shadow here, even though, as Markowitz rightly says, her own arguments are different ones.

[62] She's also not quite right when she announces herself triumphantly as the first to have taken notice of the passages she discusses: Margaret Simons noted that Beauvoir "consigns the majority of the world's women to a footnote" in an article, "Sexism and the Philosophical Canon: On Reading Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*," first published in 1990 and

> By the racialization of sex/gender difference, I mean that constellation of views, prevalent in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, that correlated greater "racial advancement" with greater sex/gender difference between the men and women of a particular race: the more "advanced" the race—so the story went—the greater the differences between men and women of that race.[63]

But in fact, even the most painful passages Markowitz pulls out from *The Second Sex* do not talk about differences between men and women, or between masculinity and femininity: they are talking about how different groups of men relate sexually to women, which is not the same thing at all.[64] Tina Chanter says something in another connection that I find apposite here:

> Of course, anything anyone says about anyone anywhere is fair game, once it is out there in the world.... But I do have a question about the ethics and politics of readings which focus on strategic alignments and produce a homogenizing string of feminist authors, all of whom are represented as

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reprinted in her 1999 collection, which Markowitz lists in her references. But she may well be the first to have made such a meal of it.

[63] Markowitz, "Occidental Dreams," 274.

[64] In what follows below, I will analyze all the other passages that relate to Arabs, Islam, harems, the "Orient" and or the "East." While there are indeed strange things to see, I cannot find a discussion of progress toward greater gender differentiation *anywhere*. By extrapolating, in fact, one might deduce the opposite: it is the average modern Occidental man who sees his wife (at least some of the time) as his "semblable." Beauvoir does find this preferable—Markowitz is right that, pace Bergoffen, Beauvoir favors what Thomas Laqueur named the "one-sex model"—or, as she might have called it, humanism. I myself know some women who would agree with her. (This is not the place to explore how fully Laqueur's own historical scheme has been cast into doubt by other scholars.)

> saying more or less the same thing, despite the fact that their political and ethical sensibilities might be entirely divergent.[65]

However, in another way, Markowitz's two passages are very well chosen, in that they are guaranteed to make "the woman of today"—that is to say, the academic feminist of today—wince, blush, and desperately wish herself elsewhere.

> One may interpret this passage [the footnote] generously, overlooking Beauvoir's easy generalizations about non-Western cultures, but later in the book one encounters this troubling explanation of what makes gender relations in the modern West so special: "The more the male becomes individualized and lays claim to his individuality, the more certainly he will recognize also in his companion an individual and a free being. The Oriental, careless of his own fate, is content with a female [*femelle*] who is for him [an object of pleasure]; but the dream of the Occidental, once he rises to consciousness of his own uniqueness, is to be taken cognizance of by another free being, at once strange and docile."[66]

This seems quite obtuse, by the standards of any age. So what is it doing here? What might Beauvoir have intended?

One thing to notice is that the passage occurs in the section on "Mythes." This section follows the "Histoire" section; Beauvoir explains that she intends to supplement her earlier discussion of women's concrete economic and judicial subjugation to men with a discussion of the latter's "ontological and moral pretentions."[67] Here Beauvoir reports on quite a few crazy ideas, the overwhelming majority of which are Western and Christian. In a sense, the entire chapter needs to be put within scare quotes: it is a compilation of things that are not true, but that have nonetheless been powerful. Remember that the overall title of volume 1 is "Les mythes et les faits," myths and facts, and that it is shaped by a dialectic relationship between what women "are seen as," and what they are, or could be. "If woman did not exist, men would have invented her. They did invent her. But she also exists."[68] So to take any isolated sentence from the myth section as "Beauvoir" would be, at best, naïve: Beauvoir investigates myth in order to demystify. As Fanon said, "Nous faisons ici le procès des mystifiés et des mystificateurs."[69] Both those who make myths, and those who fall for them, are on trial.

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[65] Tina Chanter, "The Trouble We (Feminists) Have Reasoning With Our Mothers," 492. Chanter was responding to Penelope Deutscher's use of Chanter's own work in *Yielding Gender*.

Having argued that Beauvoir received Hegel, not directly, but via Marx, Markowitz also spends several pages exploring whether or not Marx was an "orientalist," in a way which is significantly more respectful of the nuances of that question: but if Marx is an important enough thinker that one or two quotations from his work should not condemn him out of hand, why not extend that same contextualizing courtesy to Beauvoir?

[66] The French, which Markowitz does not give, reads as follows: "L'Oriental insouciant de son propre destin se contente d'une femelle qui est pour lui un objet de jouissance; mais le rêve de l'Occidental, quand il s'est élevé à la conscience de la singularité de son être, c'est d'être reconnu par une liberté étrangère et docile" (*DS* 1:281).

[67] "[P]rétentions ontologiques et morales" (*DS* 1:237).

Like the rest of *The Second Sex*, the myth chapters are a patchwork quilt of strange and contradictory things which nonetheless add up to an argument, if one has the patience to wait for it. Markowitz sees her chosen passage as "a troubling explanation of what makes gender relations in the modern West so special"; to my mind, it forms part of a lengthy *indictment* of how modern Western men behave, even as they pat themselves on the back for their greater enlightenment. We might remember what short work Beauvoir made, in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, of *le colon*'s supposed arguments for his own superiority.

Beauvoir has a fair amount to say, in *The Second Sex*, about India, China, the Arab world, and various ethnographically-documented "peoples"; her study of the "non-Western" was far from a cursory afterthought. For instance, quite early in the Introduction, and central to her development of the primordial category of Otherness (prior to its sexual differentiation), we find a reference to Granet's works on "Chinese Thought" and Dumézil's scholarship on India and Rome.[70] What led Markowitz to single out the particular tidbit she cites? Even if she'd wanted to stick to the realm of desire, she could have chosen the following one, from the chapter on "Initiation sexuelle":

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[68] *DS* 1:303. I discuss this passage above in connection with Richard Wright.

[69] *Peau noire masques blancs* [hereinafter *PNMB*], 25; *Black Skin White Masks* [hereinafter *BSWM*] 17, translation altered.

[70] "The category of the *Other* is as primeval as consciousness itself. In the most primitive societies, the most ancient mythologies, there is always a duality of Same and Other; this division at first was not placed under the sign of the division of the sexes, it was not based on any empirical given: this emerges from the research of Granet on Chinese thought, from Dumézil's work on Rome and India, among others." [La catégorie de l'*Autre* est aussi originelle que la conscience elle-même. Dans les sociétés les plus primitives, dans les mythologies les plus antiques on trouve toujours une dualité qui est celle du Même et de l'Autre; cette division n'a pas d'abord été placée sous le signe de la division des sexes, elle ne dépend d'aucune donnée empirique: c'est ce qui ressort entre autres des travaux de Granet sur la pensée chinoise, de ceux de Dumézil sur les Indes et Rome (*DS* 1:16).]

> It appears that in India the husband, while fulfilling his conjugal duty, happily smokes a pipe to distract himself from his own pleasure, so that his wife's pleasure can last longer; in the West, in contrast, a Casanova will brag about the number of his "coups," and his greatest pride is to make his partner beg for mercy; according to the tradition of erotica, that is a rare exploit…[71]

"Gender relations in the West" are hardly being shown here as "special": surely one would rather be in bed with this considerate Indian fellow than with any of the sadistic Parisian and Viennese husbands, casual rapists, and self-centered premature ejaculators catalogued in that chapter?[72] Except that "the Indian husband" is undoubtedly imaginary, a hasty over-generalization from (maybe) the *Kama Sutra*, just as Markowitz's insouciant oriental was a hasty over-generalization from the *Thousand and One Nights,* or some such. Really both are deployed as illustrations, or foils, rather than argument or evidence. The tactic is similar to Foucault's contrast, in the first volume of his *History of Sexuality*, between an Eastern "ars amatoria" and a Western "scientia sexualis," and it is deployed for a quite similar purpose: to problematize (and, subliminally, to criticize) the habitual practices and discourses of sexuality in the *West*, by showing that another approach is possible. And yes, the use of non-Western examples purely for contrast is a familiar orientalist habit; and the failure to locate non-Westerners as distinct agents in real historical time is another. But I see no argumentation that would lead me to believe that the careless oriental of Markowitz's passage "casts a long[er] shadow" than the thoughtful Indian husband, or indeed that either has any importance beyond the page on which he appears.

In some ways this is the same question of method I discussed above: when a reader balks at something in a text, how is she to decide whether that "something" is, to put it crudely, a dealbreaker, or merely a regrettable lapse in an otherwise valuable work?[73] Are Markowitz's two passages about "the Orient" on the level of Beauvoir's usage of "he," where we might wish she'd said "he or she"—a surface irritant, which one can describe as "of its time"—or do they betray a deeper obtuseness against which readers must be warned? Perhaps the latter case can be made, but no one has taken the trouble to actually *make* it. What's frustrating to me is that, while Markowitz does a fine job of explaining the ideology she is taking issue with (the subject of her own earlier book), she does not do the textual work of connecting what she is against to *Beauvoir*'s work, and she fails to see *The Second Sex* as a whole.

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[71] "Il paraît qu'aux Indes l'époux, tout en remplissant ses devoirs conjugaux, fume volontiers la pipe afin de se distraire de son propre plaisir et de faire durer celui de son épouse; en Occident, c'est plutôt du nombre de ses 'coups' que se vante un Casanova; et sa suprême fierté, c'est d'obtenir que sa partenaire crie merci" (*DS* 2:180). This illustration follows up on statistical information, drawn from Kinsey, about the difference in time men and women require to reach orgasm.

[72] Perhaps my reader will remember (from chapter 1) Dr. Grémillon, the war hero Beauvoir quoted (*DS* 2:237) in her discussion of orgasm: "The modern woman wants to be made to vibrate. We reply: Madam, we haven't got the time, and hygiene forbids it!" Actually, in this context, Markowitz's own quotation might look somewhat less critical of the "Oriental" than she thinks—the "insouciant Oriental" seems more interested in sexual pleasure*, period,* than in the use of sexual pleasure as a tool of domination.

Instead, she makes Beauvoir responsible for all the faults of everyone she cites. But "cites respectfully" is not the right way to understand how Beauvoir uses Havelock Ellis, or sources generally, as I hope I've explained fully in chapter 1. For instance, one place Beauvoir cites Ellis is a long footnote in the "Initiation sexuelle" chapter listing a variety of objects that doctors have removed from women's vaginas. Beauvoir's point here is that, despite what Kinsey says about the lack of nerve endings in the vagina, women do, apparently, find enough sensation present there that some among them find it worthwhile to masturbate, using, um, a range of items.[74] Maybe you didn't want to know this; but I can't find anything wrong with Beauvoir's logic, her conclusion appears reasonable, and her "methodology" appears to value plain old empirical evidence. If that is "outdated," I don't know what to say.

Actually, since the Kindle makes this so easy now, why not finish the job? The list of dildoids is one of nine references to Havelock Ellis in *The Second Sex*. All are very brief. In four, all she is interested in is the first person narrative he has collected;[75] in three others, she uses his statistics;[76] the last one refers very briefly to a concept he called "undinism," a term that, indeed, one rarely hears nowadays (it never caught on), but all it means is "urinary eroticism," which still exists, from what I read on the internet.[77] Furthermore, Ellis's legacy to sexology and gay liberation is a mixed one, as Markowitz herself notes: he had some dumb ideas, and also some better ones (and his ideas about "inversion" look different, and better, in the age of "trans" than they did twenty years ago). But it hardly seems worth dwelling on that here, since Beauvoir's "use" of Ellis is actually quite cursory. As with Stekel, she seems to have mined him for information rather than taken him as a mentor or guide. The only thing she quotes from him that might rise to the status of an actual idea is the statement that there is more rape inside marriage than outside of it:[78] this has nothing to do with an evolutionary view of race, or with race at all.

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[73] This question cuts both ways: as I discussed above regarding Debra Bergoffen's work, is it fair to pull out a few passages one likes and agrees with, and develop them into an interpretation one then labels as "Beauvoir"?

[74] *DS* 2:149.

[75] She quotes a patient he calls Zenia to the effect that the noise of a jet of water was sexually exciting (*DS* 2:22); one of the cases Stekel analyses (Florrie) was originally Ellis's case (2:23); at 2:198, there is a reference to "the homosexuals' confessions collected by Ellis and Stekel" [les confessions d'inverties … qu'ont recueillies Havelock Ellis et Stekel]—from both, she uses only the first-person quotation; at 2:206, one of the stories Havelock Ellis recounts concerns "a subject … who detested her mother throughout her childhood" [Un des sujets dont Havelock Ellis raconte l'histoire et qui avait détesté sa mère pendant toute son enfance] and how this influenced the girl's first lesbian experience.

[76] At *DS* 2:50, his results show that more girls want to be boys than boys want to be girls, and this is followed up with a corroborating result from a more qualitative study done by someone else. At 2:68 she discusses a survey he cites that "out of 125 American high school students thirty-six at the time of their first period knew absolutely nothing of the question, and thirty-nine had vague ideas.… Ellis cites the case of a young girl who threw

And what does "cites respectfully" mean, exactly? If all of us were to blame for all the faults of everyone whose work we cited, who among us would 'scape whipping? Following out Penelope Deutscher's nice metaphor of Beauvoir's eclectic assemblage of theorists as a dinner party where the guests don't get along:[79] suppose I invite Heidegger to my party (or, suppose my boyfriend asks if he can bring him along and I say, oh well, ok). Am I then personally responsible

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herself into the Seine in Saint-Ouen because she thought she had an 'unknown disease'" [D'après une enquête rapportée en 1896 par Havelock Ellis, sur 125 élèves d'une "high-school" américaine, 36 au moment de leurs premières règles ne savent absolument rien sur la question, 39 avaient de vagues connaissances.... H. Ellis cite le cas d'une jeune fille qui s'est jetée dans la Seine à Saint-Ouen parce qu'elle se croyait atteinte d'une "maladie inconnue."] (Others cited on this point include Helene Deutsch, Melanie Klein, and a memoir by Beauvoir's friend Colette Audry). At 2:248, he is quoted as saying that there are more rapes inside than outside of marriage ["Il y a certainement plus de viols commis dans le mariage que hors du mariage," dit Havelock Ellis], and lower down the page he is cited as objective support for the misery of women's sexual initiation: "In England, Ellis reports, a woman asked six intelligent, married, middle-class women about their reactions on their wedding night: for all of them, intercourse was a shock." [En Angleterre, rapporte Havelock Ellis, une dame demanda à six femmes mariées de la classe moyenne, intelligentes, leur réaction pendant la nuit de noces: pour toutes le coït était survenu comme un choc; deux d'entre elles ignoraient tout; les autres croyaient savoir mais n'en furent pas moins psychiquement blessées.]

[77] This occurs in the chapter on narcissism: another footnote says a case of Dalbiez "confirms Havelock Ellis's ideas of the relation between narcissism and what he calls 'undinism,' that is, a certain urinary eroticism" [ce qui confirme les idées d'Havelock Ellis sur le rapport entre le narcissisme et ce qu'il nomme "ondinisme," c'est-à-dire un certain érotisme urinaire (*DS* 2:526)]. "As we now know," Ellis was drawing on the authority of personal experience here. See Phyllis Grosskurth, *Havelock Ellis: A Biography*, 365–66.

[78] *DS* 2:248.

[79] Deutscher, *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Ambiguity, Conversion, Resistance*, 11–13.

for everything he says at the table? Everything he says *at* my table, maybe that's fair, unless I say something back to him about it at the time.[80] But everything else he ever said *ever*?[81] And *his* friends? And with respect to her use of Hegel: is there any twentieth-century critical theorist who wasn't, on some level, friends with Hegel?[82] Do we have to throw out all of standpoint theory, too?[83]

So Beauvoir should not have used Ellis and Hegel; Second Wave feminists should not have used Beauvoir; I should not use those Second Wave feminists; students now, presumably, should not use me. What a relief: the reading list is now much, much shorter! No, this can't be right. This can't be what Markowitz means.

But what is to be feared if these things are not pointed out? That the younger generation will be corrupted by tainted discourses? It still does not seem possible to treat Simone de Beauvoir as a thinker, rather than as a mother who is required to be either perfect or terrible. What accounts for this lack of generosity, I think, is the belief that policing the purity of others will guarantee our own. *But that is magical thinking*. Markowitz announces rather smugly that Beauvoir seems "all but unaware of her own orientalism."[84] Like Freud or Stekel: "I brought her to admit…" Aha! A racist moment! Is the project simply to catch people out? Wasn't there a different project? Is it comprehensible to speak of collaborating with writers of the past? Of working in coalition with them?

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[80] Beauvoir is very clear that many of Hegel's ideas were repugnant to her, in *The Second Sex*, in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, in her memoirs…. Markowitz does not engage with this, or with the considerable secondary scholarship on the question.

[81] I'm channeling the flap occasioned in continental philosophy circles by the publication of Heidegger's *Black Notebooks*. A prominent Heideggerian resigns, and people go, why resign only now? We *knew* that. The issue is how *thoroughgoing* was Heidegger's anti-Semitism. Some people privilege the private texts in deciding that; others feel just the opposite; some even feel that what Heidegger did personally during the war actually matters, too. See Sarah Bakewell, *At The Existentialist Café: Freedom, Being, and Apricot Cocktails with Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Albert Camus, Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Others*.

[82] See for instance Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, 15: "[W]e need to consider not only Hegel's Haiti, but Haiti's Hegel, that is, the Afro-Caribbean reception of Hegel that claims him as their own. [Nick] Nesbitt has traced this legacy through the work of Aimé Césaire, whose influential conception of *négritude*, referring to the African diaspora's self-understanding based on 'a common experience of subjugation and enslavement,' considers the slave's self-liberation in the Haitian revolution as 'emblematic.' Césaire recalled to Nesbitt personally his youthful excitement in discovering Hippolyte's new translation of Hegel's *Phenomenology* (1941). 'When the French translation of the *Phenomenology* came out, I showed it to Senghor, and said to him "Listen to what Hegel says, Léopold: to arrive at the Universal, one must immerse oneself in the particular!"' Césaire understood that the truly productive, 'universal' experience of reading Hegel is not through a summary of the total and totalizing system, but through the liberation that one's own imagination can achieve by encountering dialectical thinking in its most concrete exemplification." Buck-Morss's citation is to Nesbitt, *Voicing Memory: History and Subjectivity in French Caribbean Literature*, 120.

[83] Actually, much as I like it, the dinner party analogy is a bit misleading: it wasn't people Beauvoir invited to dinner, it was ideas. And most powerful ideas (good and bad) have more than one parent: Markowitz and many others derive the racism in philosophy from Hegel, a recent *Aeon* article derives it just as convincingly from Kant (Bryan Van Norden, "Why the Western Philosophical Canon is Xenophobic and Racist").

But there I go again using the dated language of the shared "project." Markowitz seems really to be against the whole idea of "progress," the underlying optimism of *The Second Sex* that things for women are getting better, that we're almost there. She's quite snide about this, as though we all agree it was a stupid idea. I really don't know what to say about this. Would a feminism that didn't think things for women were once worse, had gotten better, were getting better, would get better, could get better, really be feminism? I must be missing something.

Anyhow, I almost want to ask Markowitz the question I asked Spelman: who do *you* think "we" are? The fact is, there is no reason to regard a view of "the East" or "the Orient" as somehow behind or belated or defective or lesser as "dated." There are plenty of people who believe it now. (Many of them have guns.) So what is actually happening is that Markowitz is asserting the existence of a feminist vanguard, or rather, asserting that she is a member of it, that Beauvoir is not, and that *I* am not. Presumably that's what's bugging me, sorry, that's really dopey. Isn't there also something kind of silly, though, about criticizing Beauvoir for being embedded in a Hegelian teleology of human progress which we have "gotten beyond," since that statement is itself couched in a rather Hegelian and teleological way….[85] And now I'm being meta-silly, since that kind of "you're doing what you accuse X of" is easy and boring. Of course what Markowitz means to do is to condemn the *specifics* of that part of Hegel's account which are racist, and the triumphalist progress narrative which those specifics are mobilized to justify. I condemn those too. *But so did Beauvoir*.

Now, I am very far from the first to notice about the term "orientalism" that the more different kinds of work it is mobilized to do, the less it can actually accomplish. As Said himself pointed out in an earlier essay, "Traveling Theory,"

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[84] Markowitz, "Occidental Dreams," 278.

[85] The locus classicus for this kind of thing is Julia Kristeva's "Women's Time," which … now looks terribly … dated … OK, I can't help it, either.

"a breakthrough can become a trap."[86] When Markowitz says that a "postcolonial" reading of Beauvoir is in tension with a more "philosophical" reading, I think she means (and this is a fair criticism) that philosophical readings have attended insufficiently to the political history of concepts. But her own reading also fails to do so. The power of Edward Said's analysis was that he linked a system of ideas, beliefs, ways of seeing and thinking—"orientalism"—to an economic and political system, colonialism/imperialism, which involved the violent extraction of resources from whole sets of people, the institution of regimes of terror, etc., for which a set of ideas about "civilization," "barbarism," "progress," and so on served as an *excuse*. (This is Fanon's point, too: colonialism is not a thinking-machine.)[87] Of course the two are connected: otherwise there would be no point in intervening on the level of ideas at all. But an approach like Markowitz's here abandons the material for the discursive, and then polices the discursive at the level of language. Beauvoir's explicit and principled analysis of and opposition to the practices of colonialism become irrelevant, compared to her failure to cleanse herself from certain unpleasant Hegelian turns of phrase, employed in the course of speaking *about something else*. This is not, I don't think, what Said had in mind.[88]

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[86] Said, "Traveling Theory," 56. It was something of a surprise to me to realize that this essay, whose title phrase has had such resonance in post-colonial studies, actually (if you look) deals with French and British responses to the work of Georg Lukács … and the follow-up piece, "Traveling Theory Reconsidered," explores Lukács's possible *and salutary* impact on the thinking of Frantz Fanon. A similarly nuanced uptake of Foucault's underlying point is visible in Said's work on Conrad.

[87] Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre*, 66. One might say that the distinction I'm making between orientalism as a set of enabling tropes and colonialism as an economic and political system is parallel to the distinction between individual racism and institutional racism, which according to Alison Jaggar was first made by Stokely Carmichael and Michael Hamilton in *Black Power* in 1967. (Jaggar, "Philosophical Challenges of Gender Justice," 5.)

[88] To criticize a writer for "participating in a discourse" that one finds problematic is also a fundamental misapplication of what Foucault meant by "discourse." Ursula Tidd (*Gender and Testimony*, 154) gives, at greater length, the quotation from the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* I've referenced several times already: "[W]e must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies.… Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are. We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it" (Foucault, *History of Sexuality: Volume One, an Introduction*, 100–101). [Il ne faut pas imaginer un monde de discours partagé entre le discours reçu et le

In my discussion of "the Spelman moment," above, I argued that it was unfair then to set Simone de Beauvoir up as a scapegoat for second wave occlusions of race. I think it's just as unfair now to set her up as a scapegoat for occlusions of colonialism.

OK, but what about the harem? What about the harem? *What about the harem?*

3 Harem Trouble

While Markowitz's two isolated quotations were clearly chosen for their shock value, a better starting point for this discussion is probably Beauvoir's use of the figure of the "harem woman" as a counterpoint to "the Western woman of today." I've already said, in my discussion of *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, that Beauvoir's emphasis there was more on "enfermée" (locked up) than on "harem." But as I promised, I want to return and trace the development of this figure through Beauvoir's work.[89] Markowitz's article takes us back to a familiar story from *La force de l'âge*, which happened during the Second World War, while Sartre was on leave from the army:

> Gallimard had just brought out [Sartre's] *The Imaginary*. There Sartre indicated the theory of *néantisation* which he was working to deepen. In the moleskin notebooks where he took notes on his day to day life along with a heap of reflections upon himself and his past, he was sketching a philosophy; he expounded the main points to me one evening as we were walking around near the Gare du Nord; the streets were bare and humid and I had a sense of irremediable desolation; I had too greatly desired the

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discours exclu ou entre le discours dominant et celui qui est dominé; mais comme une multiplicité d'éléments discursifs qui peuvent jouer dans des stratégies diverses .... Les discours, pas plus que les silences, ne sont une fois pour toutes soumis au pouvoir ou dressés contre lui. Il faut admettre un jeu complexe et instable où le discours peut être à la fois instrument et effet de pouvoir, mais aussi obstacle, butée, point de résistance et départ pour une stratégie opposée. Le discours véhicule et produit du pouvoir; il le renforce mais aussi le mine, l'expose, le rend fragile et permet de le barrer (*La volonté de savoir: histoire de la sexualité volume 1*, 133).]

[89] Again, I must apologize for long quotations, which are necessary since I'm arguing that points were taken out of context; and I also apologize for going over ground that has been very well addressed by Patricia Moynagh ("Beauvoir on Lived Reality, Exemplary Validity, and a Method for Political Thought," 16–17), by Sonia Kruks (*Retrieving Experience: Subjectivity and Recogition in Feminist Politics*, 35), and by others. Markowitz quotes only the last five sentences of this passage, in Kruks' translation, which differs slightly from mine.

> absolute and suffered from its absence not to recognize in myself that useless project toward Being which *Being and Nothingness* describes. But what a sad deception, this endlessly vain seeking, begun over and over without end, where existence consumes itself! In the days that followed we discussed some particular problems, especially the relation between situation and freedom. I maintained that, from the point of view of freedom as Sartre defined it—not a stoical resignation but an active *dépassement* of the given—situations are not equivalent. What *dépassement* is possible for the woman shut up in a harem? Even this imprisonment, there are different ways of living it, Sartre said to me. I dug in my heels for quite a while and only gave in half-heartedly. At bottom, I was right; but to defend my position, I would have needed to abandon the terrain of individualist, idealist morality.[90]

This paragraph is justly famous among Beauvoir scholars, partly because it seems to be one of the earliest sketches of feminist argument Beauvoir attributes to her younger self, partly because many commentators have seen it as a sign of how much better of a social and political thinker she was than Sartre, and how her idea of *situation*, which would be central to *The Second Sex*, in some ways preceded his interest in political engagement after the war. Beauvoir's use of "the woman in a harem" is a way of arguing that all situations are not alike and that not all subjects are practically free, even though theoretical freedom may be the heart of what it means to be human. Without the understanding that situations are different, and that situations matter, no understanding of oppression, indeed no politics at all, is possible; without this shift, none of Beauvoir's social and political analysis (or Sartre's) could have happened.

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[90] "*L'imaginaire* venait enfin de paraître chez Gallimard. Sartre y indiquait la théorie de la 'néantisation' qu'il était en train d'approfondir. Sur les carnets de moleskine où il notait sa vie au jour le jour, ainsi qu'un tas de réflexions sur lui-même et sur son passé, il ébauchait une philosophie; il m'en exposa les grandes lignes, un soir où nous rodions du côté de la Gare du Nord; les rues étaient noires et humides et j'eus une impression d'irrémédiable désolation; j'avais trop souhaité l'absolu et souffert de son absence pour ne pas reconnaître en moi cet inutile projet vers l'être que décrit *L'être et le néant*; mais quelle triste duperie, cette recherche indéfiniment vaine, indéfiniment recommencée où se consume l'existence! Les jours suivants, nous discutâmes certains problèmes particuliers et surtout le rapport de la situation et de la liberté. Je soutenais que, du point de vue de la liberté, telle que Sartre la définissait—non pas résignation stoïcienne mais dépassement actif du donné—les situations ne sont pas équivalentes: quel dépassement est possible à la femme enfermée dans un harem? Même cette claustration, il y a différentes manières de la vivre, me disait Sartre. Je m'obstinai longtemps et je ne cédai que du bout des lèvres. Au fond, j'avais raison. Mais pour défendre ma position, il m'aurait fallu abandonner le terrain de la morale individualiste, donc idéaliste, sur lequel nous nous placions" (*La force de l'âge*, hereinafter *FA*, 498–99).

But why did she need to situate the oppression of women *elsewhere*, bringing up the figure of the Other woman, in order for it to become visible? Here's what Markowitz says about the appearance of this figure in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*:

> So the child, the slave, the "Mohammedan woman enclosed in a harem" can be said to be free in only the most attenuated of senses, while the Western woman of today, whose changed situation is accompanied by a new awareness and new possibilities, consents to her unfreedom in a way the others do not. Although *The Second Sex*, written soon after, may equivocate somewhat on the matter, it suggests that the "Western women of today" and "the Mohammedan woman enclosed in a harem" have something important in common after all: both have female bodies, and so both are viewed as the other by the men of their group. But Beauvoir also insists on a crucial difference between them. Even as she comes to embody the ideal of feminine difference, the bourgeois Western woman has a correspondingly more developed idea of what it means to be a free, autonomous subject.[91]

Now, I may be being obtuse here, but it is very hard for me to see what Markowitz wishes Beauvoir had done. To Spelman's complaint that Beauvoir only discusses women of her own race, nationality and class and generalizes from that about "Woman," Markowitz adds the complaint that when she does discuss women of color, she describes their situation as different from her own. *But it was*.

She could hardly have turned to Sartre and said, "you're wrong because you are more free than I am." It would not have been true, and she knew it. She was, at that young point in their individual histories, at least as free, and probably more so—as she later explains, he was more tied than she to expectations of bourgeois masculine adulthood that he experienced as constraining.[92] Plus, he was actually in the army, in time of war.[93] What freedom was available to a Catholic girl from an haut-bourgeois family, who had fought her way out, and was earning her own living and enjoying her sexuality just as she liked? Actually, quite a bit. When Beauvoir implied that women in other parts of the world were less free than she was, that was an accurate statement, and also, in so far as it showed awareness of her own privilege, it was a politically progressive thing to say. The issue is not race or nationality, but the fact that some people (including some people who happen to be women) have more agency than others, and thus (since ought implies can) more ethical responsibility.[94] The passage from *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* draws attention to differences among women, rather than papering them over.[95] (As I discussed when I analysed this passage at the end of chapter 3, those differences are not reducible to simple identity categories: some modern European women are not free, some Muslim women may be free, although *which* Muslim women these are, and how we can tell, remains unclear.)

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[91] There's a slippage in Markowitz's paraphrase from what Beauvoir actually said—"what freedom is possible"—a difference in the actual, material situation—to how the two women *thought* about their different situations. Markowitz continues: "*The Second Sex*, moreover, suggests that this idea and the material conditions that make it possible have developed through the evolution of man—that is, of Western man, who increasingly requires his companion to be not merely an object of pleasure, but another free being, a version of himself if not quite his equal." She references the same passage she quoted above, without further support or analysis.

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[92] "On this point, there was a big difference between Sartre and myself. It seemed to me miraculous to have pulled away from my past, to be self-sufficient, making my own decisions; I had won my autonomy once and for all; nothing could take that away. As for Sartre, he was simply reaching the stage of a man's existence that he had long foreseen with disgust; he had lost the irresponsibility of early youth and was entering the detestable universe of the adults. His independence was in danger. First, he would be constrained for eighteen months to a soldier's life; then the professoriate lay in wait." [Sur ce point, il y avait une grande différence entre Sartre et moi. Il me semblait miraculeux de m'être arrachée à mon passé, de me suffire, de décider de moi; j'avais conquis une fois pour toutes mon autonomie: rien ne me l'ôterait. Sartre, lui, ne faisait qu'accéder à un stade de son existence d'homme qu'il avait depuis longtemps prévu, avec dégoût; il venait de perdre l'irresponsabilité de la première jeunesse; il entrait dans l'univers, détestable, des adultes. Son indépendance était menacée. D'abord, il allait être astreint à dix-huit mois de vie militaire; ensuite le professorat le guettait (*FA* 29–30).] Beauvoir would also explain his later episode of hallucinatory depression along the same lines (*FA* 243–45).

[93] As we know from *Three Guineas*, there are ways full citizenship can be constraining, especially in wartime, ways from which women (because they are *not* full citizens) are ironically free.

[94] So, at the founding moment of "situation," we find, not "Woman," but an intersectional account. What has been taken as an "orientalist" perception of "differences" results from not wanting to generalize her own position.

[95] One could understand Beauvoir's initial hesitation to write a book about women in the same light: with respect to her *own* situation, being a woman did not seem all that interesting—it hadn't made much of a difference to her own life chances; but the situation of *women in the world*, yes, she could write about that. See *FCh* 1:135–36 and Kruks, "Living on Rails."

Without some way of distinguishing between the different situations of different women, Beauvoir would have been trapped within an early Sartrean position of voluntarism, which could only have led to blanket victim-blaming and/or the rather, I want to say American, individual solution: I did it, what's the matter with you? (Why don't you lean in?) By deploying the figure of the "harem woman," Beauvoir is able to avoid blaming all women for not having practically emancipated themselves in the way she herself has done. Far from being a carefree and unconscious expression of European bourgeois superiority, it is an admission of privilege, and a refusal to let her own situation stand for the situation of all women, let alone all people. It is as if she were saying to Sartre, "sure, you and I can do it—but that doesn't mean everyone can, and a purely theoretical abstract freedom is actually not much use to people who are actually suffering."[96]

Markowitz says, "Although *The Second Sex*, written soon after, may equivocate somewhat on the matter," and then proceeds to take the *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* passage as "Beauvoir." But as we saw, Beauvoir professed herself very dissatisfied with *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, by reason of its abstraction: "It was absurd to pretend one could define an ethics independent of social context."[97] And it does seem fair to grant theorists the right to evolve in their thinking. Let's see if she did any better in *The Second Sex*.

The most familiar reference to the "harem" in *The Second Sex* occurs in the introduction, in a phrase that recalls the conversation she had with Sartre during his leave; it comes in the discussion about the difference between happiness and freedom.

> But we do not confuse the idea of private interest with that of happiness. That is another point of view one often comes up against: aren't women of the harem happier than a woman voter? Isn't the housewife happier than the woman worker? It is not easy to know what the word "happy" really means, still less what authentic values might be behind it. There is no way to measure the happiness of others, and it is always easy to call "happy" the situation one wishes to impose on them....[98]

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[96] See Moynagh, "Beauvoir on Lived Reality," 16–17; Kruks, "Living on Rails."

[97] "Il était aberrant de prétendre définir une morale en dehors d'un contexte social" (*FCh* 1:99, *FCirc* 76, translation altered).

[98] "Mais nous ne confondons pas non plus l'idée de l'intérêt privé avec celle de bonheur: c'est là un autre point de vue qu'on rencontre fréquemment; les femmes de harem ne sont-elles pas plus heureuses qu'une électrice? La ménagère n'est-elle pas plus heureuse que l'ouvrière? On ne sait trop ce que le mot bonheur signifie et encore moins quelles valeurs

If you diagram this in your head, the harem woman is being set up as a parallel to the housewife (two examples of immanence), the woman voter to the working woman (two examples of transcendence). This has remarkably little to do with the oriental way of life as different from or opposite to "our" way. The contrast, rather, is between two mystifications about women as happy in their subjection, and two examples of women as subjects, as who they are in and for themselves, or at least, could be. And please note that, unlike in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, the comment about women in harems is attributed speech, and it is speech attributed to an interlocutor *with whom she does not agree.*

Notice also another change. In the misty conversation with Sartre, the question was whether the harem woman is as free as the abstract human individual. By the introduction to *The Second Sex*, the abstract human individual has been abandoned—as she said in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, he exists *nulle part*, nowhere.[99] So the question is whether the harem woman or the housewife is happier than *une électrice*—a brand-new coinage, by the way[100]—and the answer is, *that's so abstract I won't answer it. In fact, sir, your bad faith in posing this question is so palpable that I will not lower myself to discuss it further.*

It is interesting that Markowitz quotes the rather muddy distinction drawn in an early work with which Beauvoir professed herself dissatisfied, rather than this one which (at least to my eyes) is clearer, from a work Beauvoir was willing to stand by until the end of her life. Who exactly is "equivocating" here?

But this is not the end of Arab women in *The Second Sex*.

Probably only the most obsessive readers will recall a related passage from chapter three of the history section, where the condition of "the Muslim woman, veiled and shut in," is contrasted to the freer life of the "bédouine." This occurs in the course of Beauvoir's unfolding argument about the relationship between the history of women and the history of property. In between the Greeks and the Jews, we find the following:

> When family and private patrimonial property remain the uncontested bases of society, women also remain totally alienated. This is what

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authentiques il recouvre; il n'y a aucune possibilité de mesurer le bonheur d'autrui et il est toujours facile de déclarer heureuse la situation qu'on veut lui imposer" (*DS* 1:30–1).

[99] "[U]niversal, absolute Man exists nowhere" [l'Homme universel, absolu, n'existe nulle part (*PMA* 162, *EA* 112)]. One reason why the *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* passage, as Nancy Bauer and I agree, is really a bit of a mess, is that she could not fully follow through on this insight: she was still wrestling with Hegel's ghost.

[100] French women voted for the first time in 1945. Recall the controversy over votes for women, and for "les indigènes," in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*.

occurred in the Muslim world. Its structure is feudal, which is to say that there has never emerged a state strong enough to subdue and unite the different tribes; no power holds in check that of the patriarchal chieftain. The religion that emerged when the Arab people were warriors and conquerors displayed the most extreme scorn for woman. "Men rule over women by virtue of the qualities through which God has endowed them with pre-eminence, and because they give women dowries," says the Koran; she has never enjoyed either actual power or mystical prestige. The Bedouin woman does hard labor, she handles the plow and bears heavy loads: in this way she establishes a bond of reciprocal dependence with her husband; she circulates freely with uncovered face. The veiled and confined Muslim woman is still today, at most levels of society, a kind of slave. I recall in a village of cavedwellers in Tunisia an underground hollow where four women were squatting on their haunches: the old wife, one-eyed and toothless, her face horribly ravaged, was cooking some cakes on a small brazier, surrounded by acrid smoke; two other wives, slightly younger but almost as disfigured, were rocking babies in their arms, one of them breastfeeding; a young idol, magnificently decked out with silk, gold and silver, was seated at the loom, knotting strands of wool. As I was leaving this melancholy cavern—the realm of immanence, both womb and tomb—I crossed paths, in the tunnel that led back up to the light, with the Male, dressed in shining white, smiling and sunny. Returning from the market, where he had discussed the business of the world with the other men, he would spend a few hours in this retreat, which was his at the heart of a vast universe to which he belonged, from which it did not separate him. For the old withered women, for the young bride doomed to the same decline, there was no universe apart from the smoky cave from which they only emerge only at night, silent and veiled.[101]

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[101] "Quand la famille et le patrimoine privé demeurent sans contestation les bases de la société, la femme demeure aussi totalement aliénée. C'est ce qui s'est produit dans le monde musulman. La structure en est féodale, c'est-à-dire qu'il n'est pas apparu d'État assez fort pour unifier et soumettre les différentes tribus: aucun pouvoir ne tient en échec celui du chef patriarcal. La religion qui s'est créée au moment où le peuple arabe était guerrier et conquérant a affiché pour la femme le plus total mépris. 'Les hommes sont supérieurs aux femmes à cause des qualités par lesquelles Dieu leur a donné la prééminence et aussi parce qu'ils dotent les femmes,' dit le Koran; elle n'a jamais détenu ni pouvoir réel ni prestige mystique. La Bédouine travaille durement, elle manie la charrue et porte des fardeaux: par là elle établit avec son époux un lien de dépendance réciproque; elle sort librement, à visage découvert. La Musulmane voilée et enfermée est encore aujourd'hui dans la plupart des couches de la société une sorte d'esclave. Je me rappelle dans un village troglodyte de Tunisie une caverne souterraine où quatre femmes étaient accroupies: la vieille

Now, some may wish to debate Beauvoir's reading of the Koran, just as some would balk at her readings of the Old and New Testament, which are just as negative if not more so.[102] The description of strong tribes and weak states probably makes more sense for some places and times than for others. And for the twentieth century, there is now available a wide variety of emic accounts of Muslim women's seclusion, which present a variety of opinions: many of them don't mesh with this one, though some do, in whole or part.[103] But given that

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épouse borgne, édentée, au visage horriblement ravagé, faisait cuire des pâtes sur un petit brasier au milieu d'une âcre fumée; deux épouses un peu plus jeunes mais presque aussi défigurées berçaient des enfants dans leurs bras: l'une d'elles allaitait; assise devant un métier à tisser une jeune idole merveilleusement parée de soie, d'or et d'argent nouait des brins de laine. En quittant cet antre sombre—royaume de l'immanence, matrice et tombeau—j'ai croisé dans le corridor qui montait vers la lumière le mâle vêtu de blanc, éclatant de propreté, souriant, solaire. Il revenait du marché où il avait causé avec d'autres hommes des affaires du monde; il passerait quelques heures dans cette retraite qui était sienne au cœur du vaste univers auquel il appartenait, dont il n'était pas séparé. Pour les vieillardes flétries, pour la jeune mariée vouée à la même rapide déchéance, il n'y avait pas d'autre univers que la cave enfumée d'où elles ne sortaient qu'à la nuit, silencieuses et voilées" (*DS* 1:139–40).

[102] The Koran is briefly mentioned three times; the New and Old Testament are discussed voluminously, in many sections. The same proportion holds for Islam generally. For instance, when making a general argument that the transcendence offered to women by religion is a mystification, she notes that "[a]mong others, for Jews, Muslims, and Christians, man is the master by divine right" [Entre autres chez les Juifs, les mahométans, les chrétiens, l'homme est le maître par le droit divin (*DS* 2:514)]. But in the page of condemnation that follows to illustrate the point, her examples are all drawn from Catholicism. Should we complain about the negative attitude toward Islam, since there are versions of Islam that would not support this view? but there are also more woman-friendly forms of Judaism and Christianity than Beauvoir ever acknowledges. Or, should we object that the treatment of the three traditions is uneven, and demand "equal time" for other traditions? That might make sense, if one disregarded how unrelentingly negative the discussions of the Western traditions are. Christianity is described as promising women greater freedom in theory, but then instantly taking it away and making things worse for women (and everyone) by its antagonism to sexuality and to the body. As I said above about the attention paid to bourgeois women: It is, I agree, important what people talk about more and what they talk about less, or don't talk about, but not to the point where we should ignore what they *say.*

[103] See Andrea Duranti, "Becoming 'Woman' in the Muslim World: Echoes of Simone de Beauvoir's Thinking." Duranti references the work of Assia Djebar, Fatima Mernissi, Leila Marouane, Malika Mokeddem, Azar Nafisi, and Shirin Ebadi; his strongest example, to my mind, is Nawal El-Saadawi, whose *Woman at Point Zero* is a paradigmatic existentialist novel, and whose account of the transition to Islam in the book that was translated as *The Hidden Face of Eve* parallels Beauvoir's account. I would add Marnia Lazreg to his list (see discussion below).

Beauvoir's account was written in the 1940s, and that her sources appear to have been limited, I want to draw attention to several points.

First, the Arab world is not handled differently from other traditions or parts of the world. It is offered as an example, among others, of her general point that women's status tracks with questions of private property. What follows this passage also tracks a similarity rather than a difference: "The Jews of Biblical times had more or less the same customs as the Arabs. The patriarchs were polygamous."[104] A bit later, speaking of fourth-century Athens—the cradle of Western philosophy—she says that "there was no great difference between the gynaeceum and a harem," and details the iniquities of the Athenian system of inheritance—"the *epikleros* was not a female heir but only a machine to procreate a male heir."[105]

> The customs of the Greeks are very similar to Oriental ones; however, they do not practice polygamy. No one knows exactly why.… [T]he reality was that the Greek citizen still enjoyed all the comforts of polygamy, since he could find ways to satisfy his appetites with the prostitutes of the city or the women servants of the gynaeceum itself. "We have *hetairas* for spiritual pleasures," says Demosthenes, "*pallakes* for sensual pleasure, and wives to give us sons."[106]

Second, she speaks to *differences between* Arab women, based on different relations to labor and property—the distinction between the "bédouine" and the shut-in woman is strikingly similar to the distinction between the French peasant and the French bourgeoise as I discussed it earlier. The "hole" in which the Muslim women live is the "realm of immanence," a term that in the second volume will be mainly associated with the bourgeois apartment inhabited by the miserable "femme d'intérieur."[107] Moreover, Beauvoir's is a realist, materialist account and not eroticized, glamourized, or sensationalized. I mention this because the eighteenth-century orientalist discourses to which Markowitz (drawing on the work of Alain Grosrichard) wants to assimilate *The Second Sex* were primarily erotic texts, written by and for Western men. The materialist account may, for all I know, be quite inaccurate (it's hard to know what Beauvoir's source would have been). But Arab treatment of women is explained, not by some intrinsic "oriental" difference, but by the persistence of a feudal structure of society. This is not about racializing gender difference. It isn't about race at all.

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[104] "Les juifs de l'époque biblique ont à peu près les mêmes mœurs que les Arabes. Les patriarches sont polygames" (*DS* 1:140).

[105] "[L]'épiclère n'était pas héritière mais seulement une machine à procréer un héritier" (*DS* 1:145).

[106] "Les mœurs des Grecs demeurent très proches des mœurs orientales; cependant ils ne pratiquent pas la polygamie. On ne sait pas exactement pourquoi.… [E]n vérité, le citoyen grec demeurait agréablement polygame puisqu'il pouvait trouver chez les prostituées de la ville et chez les servantes du gynécée l'assouvissement de ses désirs. 'Nous avons des hétaïres pour les plaisirs de l'esprit, dit Démosthène, des *pallages* pour le plaisir des sens, et des épouses pour nous donner des fils'" (*DS* 1:143–44).

[107] Beauvoir's use of the word "troglodyte" at first gave me pause (I've heard it used as an insult for an uneducated or overly conservative person). But the French word turns out to mean simply, "dwelling in caves": "Troglodyte: n.m. (du gr. *trôglê*, trou, et *duein*, entrer).

And there's another way it's not an abstraction: she connects her view to something she saw—not in "the Orient," but in Tunisia—and she is upfront about this. Like the discussion in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* of the serious man's chillingly callous joking about bad-smelling Arab midwives, the appearance in that text of the "Musulmane enfermée au fond d'un harem" was related to something that happened while she was writing it, in the course of a solo trip she took to the Mahgreb. One advance of *The Second Sex* over *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* might seem to be that in the later work she comes out and says so, and just tells the story, abandoning the "empty maxims"[108] of historical or philosophical summary which were responsible for the muddled contortions around the figure of the harem woman in the earlier essay.

She gives an even clearer account of the incident in *La force des choses*. She'd been traveling in Tunisia, to do some lecturing sponsored by the Alliance Française, but mostly because she wanted to explore, as a tourist, a region she'd only glimpsed on previous trips, particularly the Sahara Desert and its oases.

> At Médenine, the promised truck was waiting for me. I was the only passenger. The driver must have known the Matmata road before it was damaged in the war. In two or three places bridges had been blown up, but he managed to ford the wadis and brought me to that strange village where ten thousand people live under the ground. The market-place was a seething mass; nothing but men, draped in snowy burnouses, cheerfully chatting and gossiping; the dark, blue-eyed women, some young and beautiful, but dull-looking, were scattered at the bottom of the shafts which led to the caves; I visited one of these dens. Down the dark, smoky caverns I saw a horde of half-naked children, a toothless old woman, two

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Habitant des cavernes. // Nom que donnaient les géographes de l'Antiquité à un peuple qui se plaçaient au sud-est de l'Eygpte. //Oiseau passereau insectivore, nichant dans les trous des murs et des arbres, dans les buissons. (Long. 10 cm)." *Petit Larousse*, 1080.

[108] "[J]'ai pris beaucoup de peine pour poser de travers une question à laquelle j'ai donné une réponse aussi creuse que les maximes kantiennes" (*FCh* 1:99, *FCirc* 76).

> neglected-looking women neither old nor young, and a pretty girl covered with jewelry who was weaving a carpet. As I came back up into the light, I passed the master of the house returning from the market, dazzling in his white burnous and gleaming with health. I pitied my sex.[109]

Now, in the memoir this clearly marks what we could call a moment of solidarity—"J'ai plaint mon sexe": *plaindre* can mean to pity, or it can mean, to sympathize. It's not that she thinks she is the same as they are—she's clearly not—but that there's a point of connection. (There are many differences, but nonetheless some similarities.) The moment of solidarity does not explicitly appear, however, in either *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* passage or the passage in *The Second Sex*, though some readers seem to see it there.

Myself, I don't see this quick moment of imaginative sympathy as sufficient to demonstrate *either* that Beauvoir saw with "Western eyes," *or* that she didn't. But it's interesting that in the wider context of *La force des choses*, the encounter is surrounded by a distaste (as yet only mild) for the behavior of the French in the Maghreb.[110] She met some quite odious "colons," and also some who were more critical of the French presence, including her Alliance Française hosts, "M. and Mme. E."; she also met some "modernized" Tunisian women.

> The E.s regarded French policy in Tunisia as clumsy; they were in favor of a *rapprochement* between the French and Moslem middle classes. At their house I met Tunisian women dressed, made up, groomed and scented just like Parisiennes; they no longer wore veils except in the morning, to go to market; they were thirsty for freedom. Among the men, the young ones were in agreement with them; they resented having their fathers impose wives on them who were ignorant and unenlightened. No one

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[109] "A Médenine, le camion promis m'attendait. J'étais l'unique passagère. Le chauffeur devait reconnaître la route des Matmata endommagée par la guerre. En deux ou trois endroits des ponts avaient sauté, mais il réussit à franchir les oueds et m'amena jusqu'au singulier village où dix mille personnes habitent sous terre. La place du marché grouillait; rien que des hommes, drapés dans des burnous neigeux, bavards et joyeux; les femmes, brunes, aux yeux bleus, parfois jeunes et belles, mais l'air morne, étaient disséminées au fond des puits sur lesquels donnaient des grottes; j'ai visité un de ces antres: dans de sombres cavernes enfumées, j'ai vu une marmaille demi-nue, une vieille édentée, deux femmes entre deux âges, mal soignées, et une jolie fille couverte de bijoux qui tissait un tapis. En remontant vers la lumière, j'ai croisé le maître du logis qui revenait du marché, resplendissant de blancheur et de santé. J'ai plaint mon sexe" (*FCh* 1:86, *FCirc* 66, translation altered).

[110] For the whole account of that trip, see *FCh* 1:81–9, *FCirc* 62–8.

> had anything to tell me about the Franco-Tunisian situation in general, and I did not question them too closely.[111]

Perhaps the encounter with these "évoluées" accounts for the phrase "at most levels of society" in the sentence I quoted above: "The veiled and confined Muslim woman is still today, *at most levels of society*, a kind of slave." The women confined to the cave do not necessarily stand in her mind for "the Arab world," or at least, they do not stand alone in that. But as she describes that particular trip in the passage from *La force des choses*, any nascent social critique is still subordinated to the adventure of discovering a foreign land. It is not until the next trip that she will declare the old sort of tourism no longer possible.[112]

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[111] "Les E. trouvaient maladroite la politique de la France en Tunisie; ils souhaitaient un rapprochement entre les bourgeoisies française et musulmane. Je rencontrai chez eux des Tunisiennes habillées, maquillées, coiffées et parfumées à la parisienne; elles ne portaient plus le voile que le matin, pour aller au marché; elles avaient soif de la liberté. Parmi les hommes, les jeunes étaient d'accord avec elles; ils souffraient de se voir imposer par leur père des épouses ignorantes et mal éveillées. Sur l'ensemble de la question franco-tunisienne, personne ne me renseigna et je n'insistai guère." (*FCh* 1:83–4, *FCirc* 64).

Writing after her *prise de conscience* of the Algerian crisis, Beauvoir undoubtedly saw the problem of French rule more clearly in hindsight, but that is precisely her point: *how could I not have noticed this*? The overall arc of *La force des choses* documents the path toward greater awareness.

[112] "At last I set out with Sartre for Algeria; we wanted sun, we loved the Mediterranean; it was a vacation, a pleasure trip; we would go touring, write, talk. One day Camus had said: 'happiness exists, and it's important; why refuse it? You don't make other people's unhappiness any worse by accepting it; it even helps you to fight for them. Yes,' he had concluded, 'I find it sad the way everyone seems to feel ashamed of feeling happy nowadays.' I agreed with him completely and the first morning I looked out of my room in the Hôtel Saint-Georges at the blue sea with a light heart. But that afternoon we walked around the Casbah, and I realized that tourism, as we had practiced it in the old days, was dead and buried; what had been picturesque before no longer seemed so: what we encountered now in these streets was misery and bitterness….

But Camus, now that I thought it over, had put the question badly; we weren't refusing to feel happy, we just couldn't." [Enfin, je m'embarquai avec Sartre pour l'Algérie; nous souhaitions du soleil, nous aimions la Méditerranée; c'était des vacances, un voyage d'agrément: nous nous promènerions, nous écririons, nous causerions. Un jour, Camus nous avait dit: "Le bonheur, ça existe, ça compte; pourquoi le refuser? En l'acceptant, on n'aggrave pas le malheur des autres; et même, ça aide à lutter pour eux. Oui, avait-il conclu, je trouve regrettable cette honte qu'on éprouve aujourd'hui à se sentir heureux." J'étais bien d'accord, et de ma chambre de l'hôtel Saint-Georges, le premier matin, je regardai gaiement le bleu de la mer. Mais l'après-midi nous nous promenâmes dans la Casbah et je compris que le tourisme, tel qu'autrefois nous l'avions pratiqué, était enterré; le pittoresque s'était décomposé: ce que nous rencontrions dans ces ruelles, c'était la misère

4 Theories and Histories

But in *The Second Sex*, the concreteness and presentness of the cave example also raises a problem: what is it doing in the history chapter? What century are we in? Are we talking about time or about place?

In fact this is part of a larger problem, which is partly (though only partly) due to Beauvoir's (inconsistent) use of the "historical present" tense to narrate events which are clearly long past, such as Persian and Babylonian laws of inheritance and the behavior of Old Testament patriarchs and fourth-century Athenians.[113] The problem begins in the sections on "prehistory," and continues as she struggles to account for the transition to patriarchy, not from "matriarchy" (she knows quite well and says that, *pace* Engels and the "élucubrations" of Bachofen, there was never any such thing), but from … well, from whatever human life was like before a settled relationship to property cemented men's power over women and children, as part of consolidating their power over other sorts of objects and dominating the natural world.

What gets tricky is that some of this "before" is documented by reference to the life of "tribes" who persisted in that "earlier" way of life long enough for anthropologists to study them in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and for Lévi-Strauss to synthesize those findings into a general structuralist account of How Culture Works. An excellent piece by Françoise Héritier, teasing out the strands in these early "Histoire" chapters, establishes the difficulties Beauvoir had in fitting together what she had learned from Lévi-Strauss with a prior strain of thought Héritier describes as "évolutionniste," a term which describes most of what Beauvoir would have found in the Bibliothèque nationale and in the library of the Musée de l'homme.[114] Or rather, the piece establishes

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et la rancœur.… Mais Camus, réflexion faite, avait mal posé la question; nous ne refusions pas de nous sentir heureux, nous ne le pouvions pas (*FCh* 1:228, *FCirc* 173).]

[113] Beauvoir's use of tenses is inconsistent, to the point where I've given up the attempt to analyze it fully. What I can say is that some of what is most troubling in the history chapters in terms of orientalism or evolutionism does involves tense shifts which makes it unclear—Beauvoir makes it unclear (let me be clear)—whether the ethnic descriptions do or don't continue to apply.

The same tension can be found in Hegel's *Phenomenology*: see Robert Pippin, "You Can't Get There From Here: Transition Problems in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*." Indeed, that dislocating alternation between historical narrative and cultural description is traceable back as far as Herodotus, the inventor of the "ethnographic present," on whom both Hegel and Beauvoir herself were drawing. But to explore that will require a separate paper.

[114] Françoise Héritier, "Les communautés agricoles primitives," in Galster, Le deuxième sexe: *Le livre fondateur du féminisme moderne en situation*. Another helpful feature of Héritier's

the difficulties Beauvoir *should* have had, because as Héritier says, this major contradiction, so clear to us, Beauvoir simply seems not to see.[115] It may be helpful to realize that Beauvoir was writing at the very moment of a paradigm shift (reading *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* right before it was published). Also, as I noted above in my discussion of Leiris, the absence of questions of historical development from the structuralist account is both the greatest strength of that approach, and its blind spot.[116]

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chapter is that, while noting that one cannot blame Beauvoir for not knowing what was not known ("Il va de soi qu'on ne saurait reprocher à Simone de Beauvoir de ne pas connaître ce qui était inconnu" [104]), it provides a short account of what *is* now known, which could be useful in teaching. One must tell the students what is wrong, so it is helpful to tell them also what is right: for instance, that most scholars now acknowledge the role of women in the discovery of agriculture; that Malinowski was wrong to assert that "primitive" societies were unaware of the male role in procreation.

The preceding chapter, by Nicole-Claude Mathieu, on "les hordes primitives," is also excellent. And overall, Galster's collection is a major contribution, both substantively and methodologically, and I regret that it has not been translated. As she explains in her "Présentation," "*The Second Sex* is undoubtedly the most quoted book in modern feminism. Still, have the 958 tightly-packed pages that make up the two volumes in the Collection Blanche edition always been carefully read? Fifty years after its first publication, it has seemed useful to set in motion a radical return to the text. To create the conditions for a precise and searching reading, we have submitted each chapter of this wide-ranging work—interdisciplinary before there was such a thing—to a researcher particularly well-trained to investigate it." [*Le deuxième sexe* est sans doute le livre le plus cité du féminisme moderne, mais a-t-on pour autant toujours bien lu les 958 pages serrées qui constituent les deux tomes dans la collection blanche? Cinquante ans après sa première publication, il a paru utile d'opérer un retour radical sur le texte. Pour créer les conditions d'une lecture précise et pénétrante, on a soumis chaque chapitre de cette œuvre abondante et pluridisciplinaire avant la lettre à une chercheuse ou un chercheur particulièrement bien armé pour s'en occuper (11).]

[115] Héritier, "Les communautés agricoles primitives," 107.

[116] Héritier concludes her discussion of the chapter Galster assigned her: "Certainly, Simone de Beauvoir's argumentation is full of errors. Certainly she writes in this chapter a 'grand narrative' which is not true. Certainly, she loses the trail, blinded as she was (as we all are) by images [*représentations*], in philosophy as much as everyday life, which were (and still are) current and function as though they were certainties. And nonetheless, at the end of the day, there stands a stubborn and illuminating truth. And this is the paradox for *us*, to say both that the roads she took in this chapter are undoubtedly not the most appropriate ones, but that the picture she paints is nonetheless, in itself, appropriate and fair." [Certes, l'argumentation de Simone de Beauvoir est erronée. Certes elle écrit dans ce chapitre un "grand récit" qui n'est pas véridique. Certes, elle omet des pistes, aveuglée qu'elle fut, comme nous le sommes tous, par des représentations tant philosophiques qu'usuelles qui avaient (ou ont toujours) cours et qui fonctionnent comme des certitudes. Et pourtant, au bout du compte, une vérité est là, éclairante, obstinément posée. Et c'est notre paradoxe à nous, de dire à la fois que les chemins qu'elle a suivis dans ce chapitre n'étaient pas sans

But to return to the narrower question about how Beauvoir's "Histoire" section approaches people and parts of the world that might be considered "non-Western": almost all of what she includes (and there's a fair amount) is seamlessly intermingled with what might be considered "Western," in a syncretic, not to say agglutinative, way. For instance, when she tries to clarify the development of agriculture and private property, we find New World Indian, Australian, and Polynesian tribes side by side with Babylonians, Indians from India, Arabs, ancient Celts, and ancient Greeks. Or see her discussion of the so-called Great Mother.[117]

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doute les plus appropriés, mais que le tableau qu'elle dresse est cependant, lui, approprié et juste (ibid., 117).]

On the other hand, the criticism of later history sections made by Claudia Opitz ("Moyen Âge et Ancien Régime," 144) that Beauvoir wrongly concluded history had been made exclusively by men, because she uncritically accepted that view from her (male) historical sources—from Michelet to the early work of the Annales school—must simply be marked, *objection sustained*. See also Karin Hausen, "De la révolution française aux années 1940," 160–61: "Beauvoir mostly builds up ... an image of the *longue durée* that is almost outside time. She thus, I think, reinforces representations of the patriarchal order's inertia, its sedimentary force, in ways that work against her political intentions." [Beauvoir ébauche plutôt ... une image de la longue durée presque intemporelle. Elle renforce ainsi, je pense, contre son intention politique, les représentations de la force d'inertie sédimentaire de l'ordre patriarcal.]

[117] Beauvoir knows that Bachofen (and therefore Engels) are wrong about the "great historical defeat of the feminine sex": "In truth, this Golden Age of Woman is no more than a myth ... 'Public, or even social, authority always belongs to men,' Lévi-Strauss affirms in the conclusion of his study of primitive societies" [en vérité cet âge d'or de la Femme n'est qu'un mythe ... "L'autorité publique ou simplement sociale appartient toujours aux hommes," affirme Lévi-Strauss au terme de son étude sur les sociétés primitives (*DS* 1:122)]. She also knows that goddess-worship, or the fact that women in matrilineal (or other) groups hold apparently high positions, as priestesses or queens, tells us nothing about the actual condition of most women: "It can happen that in a matrilineal society [woman] occupies a high situation, but one must still be aware that the presence of a woman chief, or a queen, at the head of a tribe absolutely does not mean that women there hold power: Catherine the Great's accession to the throne did not in the least alter the lot of Russian peasant women." [Il arrive qu'en régime matrilinéaire elle occupe une situation très haute: encore faut-il prendre garde que la présence d'une femme chef, d'une reine, à la tête d'un tribu ne signifie absolument pas que les femmes y sont souveraines: l'avènement d'une Catherine de Russie n'a en rien modifié le sort des paysannes russes; et il n'est pas moins fréquent qu'elle vive dans l'abjection (*DS* 1:123).]

Perhaps here she was also informed by Virginia Woolf's insight (in 1929) that the high status granted women by prized cultural forms such as literature provides no information about women's actual status or life: "[Women] have burnt like beacons in all the works of the poets from the beginning of time.... Indeed, if woman had no existence save in the fiction written by men, one would imagine her a person of the utmost importance; very various; heroic and mean; splendid and sordid; infinitely beautiful and hideous in the

> Capricious, lustful, as cruel as Nature, benevolent but terrifying, [the Great Mother] reigns over the whole Aegean region, over Phrygia, Anatolia, and all Western Asia. She is called Ishtar in Babylon, Astarte by Semitic peoples, and by the Greeks Gaea, Rhea, or Cybele; we find her in the features of Isis in Egypt; the male gods are below her. A lofty idol in the distant realms of heaven or hell, woman on earth is surrounded by taboos, like all sacred beings—she is herself taboo; because of the powers she holds, she is seen as a sorceress or a witch; prayers are offered to her, she sometimes becomes a priestess like the ancient Celtic druidesses; sometimes she takes part in governing the tribe or even governs alone. These remote ages have left us no literature. But the great patriarchal eras preserve in their mythology, monuments, and traditions the memory of a time when women's position was a very high one. From the point of view of women, the Brahman period is a regression from that of the Rig-Veda, and the latter is a regression from the primitive stage that preceded it. Pre-Islamic Bedouin women had much higher status than the Koran accorded them. The great figures of Niobe and Medea evoke a time when mothers took pride in children as in their own property. And in the Homeric poems, Andromache and Hecuba have an importance that classical Greece no longer granted to women hidden in the shadows of the gynaeceum.[118]

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extreme; as great as a man, some think even greater. But this is woman in fiction. In fact, as Professor Trevelyan points out, she was locked up, beaten, and flung about the room" (*A Room of One's Own*, 50–1).

[118] "Capricieuse, luxurieuse, cruelle comme la Nature, à la fois propice et redoutable, elle règne sur toute l'Égéide, sur la Phrygie, la Syrie, l'Anatolie, sur toute l'Asie occidentale. Elle s'appelle Ishtar à Babylone, Astarté chez les peuples sémitiques et chez les Grecs Géa, Rhéa où Cybèle; on la retrouve en Égypte sous les traits d'Isis; les divinités mâles lui sont subordonnées. Suprême idole dans les régions lointaines du ciel et des enfers, la femme est sur terre entourée de tabous comme tous les êtres sacrés, elle est elle-même tabou; à cause des pouvoirs qu'elle détient on la regarde comme magicienne, sorcière; on l'associe aux prières, elle devient parfois prêtresse telles les druidesses chez les anciens Celtes; en certains cas elle participe au gouvernement de la tribu, il arrive même qu'elle l'exerce seule. Ces âges reculés ne nous ont légué aucune littérature. Mais les grandes époques patriarcales conservent dans leur mythologie, leurs monuments, leurs traditions, le souvenir d'un temps où les femmes occupaient une situation très haute. Du point de vue féminin, l'époque brahmanique est une régression sur celle du Rig-Véda, et celle-ci sur le stade primitif qui l'a précédée. Les Bédouines de l'époque pré-islamique avaient un statut bien supérieur à celui que leur assigne le Koran. Les grandes figures de Niobé, de Médée, évoquent une ère où les mères considérant leurs enfants comme leur bien propre s'enorgueillissaient. Et dans les poèmes homériques, Andromaque, Hécube ont une

Soon thereafter, in a similar passage that precedes the infamous footnote by several paragraphs, she speaks in one (long) breath of Aristotle, of Adam and Eve, of Pythagoras, the "laws of Manu" (Wikipedia informs me that this is "a sacred Hindu verse text, a legal code based on the Veda, dating from the second century CE"), Leviticus, the code of Solon, Christian Canon Law, and then the Koran:

> Lawgivers, when they organize the oppression of woman, are afraid of her. Of the polyvalent attributes she once enjoyed, what mostly remains is the dangerous side: at one time sacred, she now becomes unclean. Eve, given to Adam as his companion, brought down the whole human race; the pagan gods when they wished to punish mankind invented woman and the first female creature, Pandora, unleashed all the evils that plague humanity. The Other is passivity against activity, diversity destroying unity, matter opposing form, disorder resisting order. Woman is thus doomed to Evil. "There is a good principle which created order, light, and man, and an evil principle that created chaos, darkness, and woman," says Pythagoras. The Laws of Manu define her as a vile being who should be held in slavery. Leviticus puts her in the same category with the beasts of burden owned by the patriarch. Solon's laws confer not a single right upon her. The Roman code puts her in guardianship and proclaims her "imbecility." Canon law considers her "the devil's gateway." The Koran treats her with the most absolute contempt.[119]

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importance que la Grèce classique ne reconnaît plus aux femmes cachées dans l'ombre du gynécée" (*DS* 1:121).

[119] "Organisant l'oppression de la femme, les législateurs ont peur d'elle. Des vertus ambivalentes dont elle était revêtue on retient surtout l'aspect néfaste: de sacrée elle devient impure. Ève donnée à Adam pour être sa compagne a perdu le genre humain; quand ils veulent se venger des hommes, les dieux païens inventent la femme et c'est la première-née de ces créatures femelles, Pandore, qui déchaîne tous les maux dont souffre l'humanité. L'Autre, c'est la passivité en face de l'activité, la diversité qui brise l'unité, la matière opposé à la forme, le désordre qui résiste à l'ordre. La femme est ainsi vouée au Mal. 'Il y a un principe bon qui a créé l'ordre, la lumière et l'homme; et un principe mauvais qui a créé le chaos, les ténèbres et la femme,' dit Pythagore. Les lois de Manou la définissent comme un être vil qu'il convient de tenir en esclavage. Le Lévitique l'assimile aux bêtes de somme possédées par le patriarche. Les lois de Solon ne lui confèrent aucun droit. Le code romain la met en tutelle et proclame son 'imbécillité.' Le droit canon la considère comme 'la porte du Diable.' Le Koran la traite avec le plus absolu mépris" (*DS* 1:134–35).

The picture is certainly a sweeping one, but it is hardly the particular grand narrative that underwrites a colonialist triumph of the West. Its very grandness makes the opposite point, holding all cultures in equivalence, rather than making a hierarchy or a sequence. (Perhaps it is more of a grand *landscape* than a grand narrative?) Beauvoir's account differs significantly, not just from Hegel's, but also from what she would have encountered in her own study of Ancient Greece and Rome as an undergraduate, and in preparing for the *agrégation*. For most of the twentieth century, the opposition between the Ancient Greece and its barbarian Others (Persians, etc.) was routinely and nakedly couched in terms of the politics of nineteenth- and twentieth-century empire; the way she was taught about Ancient Greece would have been part of this attempt to distinguish the font of Western wisdom from the "primitive," or barbarous, parts of the world, in preparing the youth of Europe to take up the "white man's burden" of colonial administration.[120] Beauvoir does not do this.

Another excellent essay in Galster's collection, by Pauline Schmitt Pantel and Beate Wagner-Hasel, has uncovered the influence of a book by German feminist Lily Braun on Beauvoir's negative view of the Athenians, whom she had been raised to revere as part of her own cultural birthright.[121] (We've already seen Beauvoir's use of Braun's book in her discussion of prostitution.)[122] According to Pantel and Wagner-Hasel, Braun repudiates the idea of matriarchy, and also says: "We are in the habit of considering the Greeks, when compared with the Orientals, as representatives of a remarkably higher civilization. However if one takes the condition of woman as the criterion, one would judge quite differently, for one would find scant progress and even a rather discouraging movement backwards"[123]—a formulation very similar to Beauvoir's own.

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[120] The literature on this aspect of "classical reception" is voluminous, but I would single out Christopher Stray, *Classics Transformed*, as exemplary.

[121] Pauline Pantel Schmitt and Beate Wagner-Hasel, "L'antiquité"; Lily Braun, *Die Frauenfrage*.

[122] It's worth noting that this wonderful book, which Beauvoir credits, seems lost in the mist (or amnesia) that chronically occludes feminist intellectual history, especially when it does not fall neatly into "waves" or national traditions. Many articles exist about Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir and Heidegger, a growing number on Beauvoir and Arendt (who was not a feminist, and who hated Beauvoir), but few or none on the relationship of her thought to that of Lily Braun, Colette Audry, Françoise d'Eaubonne, Wollstonecraft, Woolf…

[123] "Nous avons l'habitude de considérer les Grecs, par rapport aux Orientaux, comme les représentants d'une civilisation remarquablement plus élevée. Si cependant on prenait la condition de la femme comme critère, on jugerait tout différemment, car on trouverait à

So is Beauvoir writing a progress narrative or isn't she? Well, if by "progress narrative" we mean the Hegelian story of unbroken progress from darkness to light and from East to West, no.[124] For instance, at the same time—the fourth century BCE—Sparta was better for women and Athens was worse, because the laws of property, and the relation between the family and the State, were different. The "Brahmans" are found wanting in comparison with the Vedas, not in comparison to what was happening in "the West" (or the proto-West) in the same era. And, as we saw above, things "in the West" can stagnate, or go backwards, or leave some women better off and other women worse off.[125] But

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peine quelques progrès et même un mouvement de recul assez pénible" (Pantel and Wagner-Hasel, "L'antiquité," 128).

As Pantel and Wagner-Hasel note, one sign of the prominence of Greek and Roman classics in her education was that at the oral examination for the *agrégation* she would have been given an untranslated Greek text to comment on. (This according to Maurice Gandillac, who took the same exam.) They also point to a rare footnote in *The Second Sex*, in Beauvoir's rather Herodotean account of Persia and Egypt: "This account is taken from Clément Huart, *La Perse antique et la civilisation iranienne*." Pantel and Wagner-Hasel note that this book was part of a series called "l'évolution de l'humanité," which they discovered was kept in the general reference section in the reading room of the Bibliothèque nationale.

Further discussion of this topic must wait. But it would be valuable also to attend to the literary side of Beauvoir's education in the "classical tradition," to the remarkably quick progress she made in overcoming the deficiencies of her preparation at the Greekless Cours Desir, and to her use, as another source for *The Second Sex*, of an English book, James Donaldson's *Woman: Her Position and Influence in Ancient Greece and Rome, and Among the Early Christians* (1907). We are indebted to Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier for having identified (on p. 61 of their translation) this book, which Beauvoir alludes to rather cryptically at *DS* 1:95. For a detailed reading of Beauvoir's education and its historical context, see Moi, *Making of an Intellectual Woman*, part 1, chapter 2.

[124] If it is permissible to speak of arguments that "haunt" a text, but are not actually *in* the text, this whole section is haunted by the awareness that if we bring women into the picture, Hegel's view of history cannot be right. But I don't think it's permissible to speak of such things, I think it's slightly mad, actually. And in any case, she had already found and stated many other good reasons not to agree with Hegel's theory of history as the progressive triumph of *Geist*.

[125] In the more modern parts of the history, we could say her point was largely to prove the *nearly* "unbroken subjection" of women in the West also: despite some complexity, and even some dissenters, the codes of chivalry didn't "break" it, neither did the French Revolution, the Enlightenment, or the rise of the bourgeoisie; it was not until the industrial revolution put women to work that they gained a measure of control over their own destinies, and even then, as we have seen, the condition of women workers was lamentable. The "progress" Beauvoir documents does show up in legal reform toward the end of the nineteenth century, and then in her history of suffrage movements. As she reaches the present time of writing, she notes that, with the resolutions passed by the UN Commission

insofar as Beauvoir judges that some cultures, at some eras, are better for women and others are worse, one must say yes, "progress" is very much at issue here,[126] even though her overall thesis is that the progress has often been more illusory than real, that the promise has not been fulfilled. At the end of the history section: "The fact that controls women's condition today is the stubborn survival of the most antiquated traditions in the new civilization that is beginning to take shape."[127]

How then do we interpret that "long, unbroken subjection" footnote, which does not jibe particularly well with anything that is before or after it? Well, here's my imaginative reconstruction: "I've done the best I possibly can to include everything that's in the library: if I don't find a way to leave *something* out, I'm never going to finish this book."

Or maybe I'm just projecting.

5 The Myth Itself, and Not the Thing

So much for Beauvoir's "history." But the second passage on which Markowitz rests her claim occurs in the myth section, and actually, most of what hurts our ears about "the Orient" occurs there. As I've already said, everything in the three chapters of the myth section must be understood as imaginary, powerful but/because imaginary: the point is to investigate what we can tell about people—about men, really—from how they imagine Woman. As I said above, it's important not to be misled by Beauvoir's long ironic paraphrases in *style indirect libre*. Lori Marso puts this very nicely when she speaks of Beauvoir's "mimicking of male voices," which can make it hard to be sure what she is or isn't "endorsing."[128] Beauvoir sometimes talks about Scheherazade as though Scheherazade really existed. But she talks in the same way about Eve, and Pandora, and Stendhal's character Mlle. de la Mole. Like so much else in *The*

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on the Status of Women, "[i]t would seem that the game has been won" [[i]l semble donc que la partie soit gagnée (*DS* 1:220)]. And yet abstract rights do not guarantee real equality ("les droits abstraits, nous venons de le dire, n'ont jamais suffi à assurer à la femme une prise concrète sur le monde: entre les deux sexes, il n'y a pas aujourd'hui encore de véritable égalité," *DS* 1:228).

[126] Hausen ("De la révolution française aux années 1940," 164) points out Beauvoir's belief, following Engels and Marx, in the "march of history" advanced, as if inevitably, by means of the "evolution of techniques" in the industrial revolution—in spite of what she shows about the immiseration of women workers in factories.

[127] "Le fait qui commande la condition actuelle de la femme, c'est la survivance têtue dans la civilisation neuve qui est en train de s'ébaucher des traditions les plus antiques" (*DS* 1:231).

[128] Lori Marso, *Politics With Beauvoir: Freedom in the Encounter*, 27.

Second Sex, the images of the East are for the most part literary rather than "factual," and Beauvoir knows this. When she writes that "only the sultan of the *Thousand and One Nights* has the power to behead mistresses when dawn takes them from his bed,"[129] she is describing a male fantasy of sexual conquest, and a Western one at that.

Where the history section shifted awkwardly between static synchronic comparison and diachronic narrative, the method of the myth chapters is deliberately ahistorical, structured by topic and theme. Josette Pacaly calls it a "light-hearted journey," full of "oscillations" and "meanderings." "Beauvoir invites us on a vast-ranging tour of the world."[130] The discussion travels as easily in time as in space, bringing data from very different cultures and eras into non-hierarchical parallel, mingling information about "primitive societies" from Lévi-Strauss, Malinowksi, etc. with rural and urban western customs, poetry and other "high" literature, and "I heard a man say one day." Speckled amid this profusion of examples are some references to "les Indes" and to Islam, which are in no way labelled as worse and sometimes come off better. Discussion of women in the "Orient" is always embedded in long paragraphs that discuss the oppression of women *not* in the Orient. This intermingling makes precisely the opposite point from what is claimed to be orientalism, a stark opposition between two worlds. (Indeed, in all this welter of detail it is hard to keep track of what "the Orient" could really mean: there are many more parts of Beauvoir's world than just two.)[131]

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[129] "[S]eul le sultan des *Mille et une nuits* a le pouvoir de trancher la tête de ses maîtresses dès que l'aube les retire de son lit" (*DS* 1:271).

[130] "[U]n parcours allègre, plein d'allers et retours; on pense à la dialectique que Pascal définissait comme un perpétuel renversement du pour au contre, où à la méthode progressive-régressive de Sartre; chemin faisant Beauvoir parle d' 'oscillations,' de 'méandres compliqués'.... Beauvoir ... nous invite ... à un immense périple à travers le monde..." (Pacaly, "La femme et les mythes," 172–73). Pacaly quotes *DS* 1:242: "It is always difficult to describe a myth: it won't let itself be grasped or defined, it haunts consciousnesses without ever being posed in front of them like a fixed object. [The myth of Woman] is so changeable, so contradictory, that it takes a while to see it as a unified whole: Dalila and Judith, Aspasia and Lucretia, Pandora and Athena, woman is at the same time Eve and the Virgin Mary." [Il est toujours difficile de décrire un mythe; il ne se laisse pas saisir ni cerner, il hante les consciences sans jamais être posé en face d'elles comme un objet figé. Celui-ci est si ondoyant, si contradictoire qu'on n'en décèle pas d'abord l'unité: Dalila et Judith, Aspasie et Lucrèce, Pandore et Athéné, la femme est à la fois Ève et la Vierge Marie.]

[131] One might ask oneself whether, in the 1940s, the Jews of the Old Testament counted as Orientals or not; right-wing French (and, for that matter, British) writers continued to describe modern Jews as "Asiatic," and they didn't mean this as a compliment. But drawing such distinctions do not seem to interest Beauvoir.

For instance, in talking about how the worship of nature as female survives long after the Great Mother has been "dethroned," Beauvoir refers in one swoop to Goethe's second *Faust*, William Blake ("the matron Clay"), "un prophète indien" who tells his disciples not to plow the Earth because this would harm their "mother"; this last is also true, she says, of "les Baija" who live "en Inde centrale." In the next sentence, we have Aeschylus and Sophocles; "the beloved of an Egyptian song declares, 'I am the Earth!'";[132] "in the Islamic texts woman is called 'a field ... the grape-bearing vine'";[133] then we hear about St. Francis of Assisi ... then Michelet....[134] She shows a similar eclecticism when it comes to taboos and fears about menstruation: in the list of customs that isolate girls at menarche (sometimes she is forbidden to touch her own body, sometimes she is forbidden to touch food, etc.) it is hard to tell exactly when Beauvoir slides from Lévi-Strauss to Leviticus, which, she says, views the "impurity" of menstruation in the same way it views the impurity of gonorrhea.[135] Among those who are cited as thinking the presence of a menstruating woman might spoil food or drink or other products, we find Pliny, "un vieux poète anglais,"[136] the *British Medical Association Journal* in 1878 (meat), the sugar refineries of the North (?) at the beginning of the century,[137] and this: "In Saigon, women are not employed in opium factories: because of their periods, the opium goes bad and becomes bitter. These beliefs survive in many areas of the French countryside."[138] And apparently they also survive in French scientific writing, as a hilarious footnote describes.[139] (Pacaly calls this a "sottisier réjouissant!," a delightful compendium of stupidities.)[140] There follows a long quotation

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[132] "La bien-aimée d'une chanson égyptienne déclare: 'Je suis la terre!'" (*DS* 1:245).

[133] "Dans les textes islamiques la femme est appelée 'champ ... vigne aux raisins'" (*DS* 1:245).

[134] *DS* 1:245.

[135] Menstruation taboos can be ambivalent, and power can heal as well as harm: "still today some Indians" protect their boats with "a wad of fibers soaked in menstrual blood," young girls in ancient Greece dedicated their stained linen to Astarte, and so on (*DS* 1:250).

[136] "An old English poet" (*DS* 1:251). I and several friends spent a pleasurably procrastinatory morning attempting to identify the source of the lines she (mis)quotes as "Oh! menstruating woman, thou'st [sic] a fiend / From whom all nature should be screened." He may have been the seventeenth century Abraham Cowley, who lived through the English Civil War and died shortly after the Restoration, but we couldn't quite verify this. See Lesel Dawson, "Menstruation, Misogyny, and the Cure for Love." It seems very likely that Beauvoir encountered these lines in Ellis, *Studies in The Psychology of Sex, Volume 1: The Evolution of Modesty, The Phenomena of Sexual Periodicity, Autoeroticism* (1926), where they appear on page 331, also without the poet's name. Ellis's volume is itself a dizzyingly syncretic and bizarrely comprehensive compendium of received ideas on the topics in the subtitle, drawn indiscriminately from science, ethnography, literature, and commonplace. Unlike Beauvoir, Ellis seems not to have known that what he was compiling was a book of myths, but his style may have had some influence on hers.

[137] "These beliefs have continued quite forcefully right until today. In 1878, a member of the British Medical Association sent in to the *British Medical Journal* as article in which he declared: 'It is an unquestionable fact that meat becomes rotten when it is touched by menstruating women'; he claimed to be personally acquainted with two instances where hams had been spoiled under those circumstances. At the beginning of this century, in

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the refineries of the North, a regulation forbade women from entering the factory when they were suffering from what the Anglo-Saxons call 'the curse,' because the sugar would turn black." [Ces croyances se sont perpétuées jusqu'à nos jours avec beaucoup de force. En 1878, un membre de l'Association médicale britannique a fait une communication au *British Medical Journal* où il déclarait que: "C'est un fait indubitable que la viande se corrompt quand elle est touchée par des femmes ayant leurs règles"; il dit connaître personnellement deux cas où les jambons ont été gâtés en de telles circonstances. Au début de ce siècle, dans les raffineries du Nord, un règlement défendait aux femmes d'entrer dans la fabrique quand elles étaient atteintes par ce que les Anglo-Saxons appellent le "curse," la "malédiction": car alors le sucre noircissait (*DS* 1:251).]

[138] "Et à Saigon, on n'emploie pas de femmes dans les fabriques d'opium: par l'effet de leurs règles, l'opium tourne et devient amer. Ces croyances survivent dans beaucoup de campagnes françaises." The passage continues:

"Every cook knows it is impossible to make a successful mayonnaise if she or anyone near her is 'indisposed.' Recently in Anjou an old gardener, after storing the year's cider harvest in a cellar, wrote to his master, 'you must ask the young ladies of the household and female guests not to enter the cellar on certain days of the month, they would keep the cider from fermenting.' The cook, when told of this letter, merely shrugged: *that* never kept the cider from fermenting, says she, it's only bad for making lard." [Toute cuisinière sait qu'il lui est impossible de réussir une mayonnaise si elle est indisposée ou simplement en présence d'une femme indisposée. En Anjou, récemment, un vieux jardinier, ayant emmagasiné dans un cellier la récolte de cidre de l'année, écrivait au maître de la maison: "Il faut demander aux jeunes dames du logis et aux invitées de ne pas traverser le cellier à certains jours du mois: elles empêcheraient le cidre de fermenter." Mise au courant de cette lettre, la cuisinière haussa les épaules: "*Ça* n'a jamais empêché le cidre de fermenter, dit-elle, c'est pour le lard seulement que c'est mauvais…" (*DS* 1:251–52).]

[139] "The question of whether these prejudices have any basis in fact is still discussed today. The only fact adduced in its favor by Dr. Binet is an observation by Schink (cited by Vignes). Schink supposedly saw flowers wilt in the hands of a servant who had her period; some yeast cakes prepared by that woman supposedly only rose three centimeters instead of the five centimeters they normally reached. At any rate this data is quite meagre and sketchy when one compares the universal scope of such beliefs, whose origin is clearly mystical." [On discute encore aujourd'hui la question de savoir s'il y a quelque fondement à ces préjugés. Le seul fait que rapporte en leur faveur le docteur Binet est une observation de Schink (citée par Vignes). Schink aurait vu des fleurs se faner entre les mains d'une servante indisposée; les gâteaux à la levure fabriqués par cette femme n'auraient monté que de trois centimètres au lieu des cinq centimètres qu'ils atteignaient normalement. De toute façon ces faits sont bien pauvres et bien vaguement établis si on considère l'importance et l'universalité des croyances dont l'origine est évidemment mystique (*DS* 1:252).]

[140] Josette Pacaly, "La femme et les mythes," 173.

about menstrual taboos among the Chago, cited by Lévi-Strauss, supported by a parallel among "the Aleutians"; again Leviticus; then the French romantic poet Alfred de Vigny, whom Beauvoir, like every French child, would have studied at school. A page later, Leviticus is once more given equal weight with the laws of Manu, and the discussion ends with the Oedipus complex.[141]

Women can help the community maintain a connection with the mysterious powers of the natural world: "still today, among the Bedouins, among the Iroquois, [woman] assures the fertility of the fields," and in Ancient Greece she was Pythia and prophetess.[142] Beauvoir has a great deal to say about myths of Virginity, whose power unites dread and desire: here we find Venus emerging from the water ("sortie toute neuve de l'eau"), Genesis, and the laws of Manu, in the same paragraph as a drawing by André Masson, further illuminated by a footnote to Rabelais.[143] Nor is it purely a case of "Western eyes" looking at "Eastern" matters.

> Marco Polo asserted about the Tibetans that "none of them wanted to take a virgin girl as wife." A rational explanation has sometimes been given for this refusal: the man does not want a wife who has not yet aroused masculine desires. El-Bekri, the Arab geographer, speaking of the Slavic peoples, notes that "if a man gets married and finds that his wife is a virgin, he says, 'If you were worth something, men would have loved you and one of them would have taken your virginity.'"[144]

I have not succeeded in figuring out who El-Bekri (or Al-Bekri) might have been, but his appearance certainly reverses the ethnographic lens. Beauvoir's discussion of virginity myths concludes with mentions of the Valkyries, Joan of Arc, wedding night customs of the "*indigènes* described by Malinowski," the Brahmans of the Malabar coast, the Ancient Romans, and the Samoans. And "there are still villages in France where the bloody sheet is displayed."[145]

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[141] *DS* 1:254.

[142] "Elle assure encore aujourd'hui chez les Bédouins, chez les Iroquois, la fécondité des champs; dans la Grèce antique, elle entend les voix souterraines" (*DS* 1:255).

[143] "'Woman is like the field in which man sows the seed,' say the Laws of Manu. A drawing by André Masson shows a man, hoe in hand, cultivating the garden of the female genitals." ["La femme est comme le champ et l'homme comme la semence," disent les Lois de Manou. Dans un dessin d'André Masson on voit un homme, une pelle à la main, qui bêche le jardin d'un sexe féminin (*DS* 1:256).]

[144] "Selon que l'homme se sent écrasé par les puissances qui le cernent, ou qu'il se croit orgueilleusement capable de les annexer, il refuse ou réclame que son épouse lui soit livrée vierge…. Marco Polo affirmait des Tibétains 'qu'aucun d'eux ne voudrait prendre pour femme une fille qui serait vierge.' On a parfois expliqué ce refus d'une manière rationnelle: l'homme ne veut pas d'une épouse qui n'a pas déjà suscité des désirs masculins. Le géographe arabe El Bekri, parlant des Slaves, rapporte que 'si un homme se marie et trouve que sa femme est vierge, il lui dit: 'Si tu valais quelque chose, des hommes t'auraient aimée et il y en aurait un qui t'aurait pris ta virginité.' Puis il la chasse et la répudie" (*DS* 1:256–57).

Now, this syncretic or synoptic mode of inquiry was not Beauvoir's invention, obviously. References make it clear that she has been reading Jung and Bachelard, whose method in such works as *L'eau et les rêves* may have been influential.[146] She refers frequently also to the sociologist and sinologist Marcel Granet, and to Georges Dumézil (1898–1986), the founding figure of the discipline of "comparative mythology," who was in many ways a precursor of structuralism. Dumézil studied parallels between Greek, Roman, Indian, and ancient Iranian traditions, and derived what he believed to be a common ideological structure dividing both mythological narratives and social institutions into three "functions": that particular homology has been called into question, but the influence of his method continues to be felt in the cross-cultural study of myth. He also apparently supported and influenced both Lévi-Strauss and then Foucault. Beauvoir never mentions the "three functions," but her frequent references to Dumézil's work *Mitra-Varuna*, and indeed to the "laws of Manu," show that he was an important influence on her thought as well.

What we are dealing with here is not the popularizing universalism of a Joseph Campbell, which strips away cultural particularities and turns every story into the same story. Rather, it is a nuanced and (at least in Beauvoir's hands) somewhat torturous inquiry into both similarities and differences across cultures. Dumézil himself can be criticized for the way he "slices up the world"—the phrase is Keith Nightenhelser's[147]—in that he defended the existence of something called "Indo-European culture" and described patterns that (he thought) were found there and not found elsewhere. (And he has been blamed for the rather awful uses to which the idea of "Indo-European culture" was put by the Third Reich, though Didier Eribon and others make strong arguments that this was unfair.)[148] Beauvoir, however, did not "slice up the world" in that way, or indeed in any way at all: just putting the "laws of Manu" in parallel with Leviticus, as she does repeatedly, shows she's not drawing a distinction between Semitic and Indo-European worlds. Her copious use of Dumézil's examples, detached from the over-arching theory he was using them to support, is yet another example of the "unhooking" we saw with Stekel, Ellis, etc.

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[145] "Il y a encore en France des villages où, le matin des noces, on exhibe devant parents et amis le drap ensanglanté" (*DS* 1:259).

[146] Bachelard's comment in prefacing his own work—"People might be surprised to see a rationalist philosopher devoting such attention to illusions and errors"—could apply to Beauvoir as well. Gaston Bachelard, *L'eau et les rêves*, 18: "On a pu s'étonner qu'un philosophe rationaliste donne une si longue attention à des illusions et à des erreurs."

[147] Personal communication.

[148] Didier Eribon, *Faut-il brûler Dumézil?* See also David Frauenfelder's review of García Quintela, *Dumézil: An Introduction*, and Hugo Freund's review of C. Scott Littleton, *The*

Some of what Beauvoir draws from Dumézil, Granet, and other sources for these chapters may be right and some of it is undoubtedly quite wrong. But none of it was even visible to Markowitz *because it does not look like what she was combing for*: that is to say, it was *not* part of that orientalizing discourse we are trained to look for and object to. Beauvoir does not speak of "the Orient" when referring to the work of Granet and Dumézil, but rather of other cultures, understood as systems of thought in their own right. There's no distinction drawn between "myth" (them) and "religion" (us): the myths of the Chago and the Greeks are put in parallel with the myths of Christianity, and indeed with the myths created by supposedly "rationalist" thinkers from Pythagoras to Aquinas to the British Medical Association and the man next door. (Perhaps we have forgotten that calling Christianity a "myth," and examining it on the same level as other stories, was once a very radical thing to do.)

Interestingly, the rather awful lines Markowitz quoted about the "insouciant Oriental" are embedded in just such a characteristically syncretic (and tortuous) discussion of the shift toward companionate understandings of marriage, drawing again on Dumézil, where non-Western (as well as Western) examples weigh on the "after" side as well as the before.

> In the patriarchal family, feminine magic was deeply domesticated. Woman makes it possible for society to integrate into itself the cosmic forces. Dumézil indicates in his study *Mitra-Varuna* that, in India as in Rome, there are two ways for male power to affirm itself: in Varuna and Romulus, in the Gandharvas and the Luperques, it is aggression, abduction, disorder, hubris; then woman appears as a being who must be violently assaulted and raped; the abducted Sabine women were sterile, they were whipped with goatskin thongs, dealing violently with violence. But Mitra, Numa, the Brahmans and the flamines, on the contrary, ensured the order and the reasonable equilibrium of society; then the wife is bonded with the husband by a complicated ritual of marriage and, collaborating with him, she assures for him the domination of all the female forces of nature; in Rome, if the *flamina* dies, the *flamen dialis* resigns his

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> office. It is thus that in Egypt Isis, having lost the supreme power of the Goddess Mother, nonetheless remains generous, smiling, welcoming and kind, the magnificent spouse of Osiris. But when woman appears thus as the associate of man, his complement, his other half, she of necessity possesses a conscience, a soul; he could not depend so intimately on a being who did not participate in the human essence. We have already seen that the laws of Manu promised to the legitimate wife the same paradise as her husband. The more the male becomes individualized and lays claim to his individuality, the more certainly he will recognize also in his companion an individual and a free being. The Oriental careless of his own fate is content with a female [*femelle*] who is for him an object of pleasure [*jouissance*]; but the dream of the Occidental, once he rises to consciousness of his own uniqueness, is to be taken cognizance of by another free being, at once strange and docile.[149]

What follows deals with the difference between Greece and Rome, then gets to the main enemy, Christianity, which paradoxically proclaims women's "equality" and then traps her in the duality of Virgin and Whore.

I am not, by any means, arguing that this account is a correct one, or even that it makes sense: the confusion of tenses alone is dizzying. What is the relationship between what the laws of Manu already "promised" (in the imperfect tense), and the Oriental who is seemingly stuck in the ethnographic present? Once again, the problem Héritier identified with the history chapter rears its head. My point is merely that quoting the last two sentences out of context oversimplifies what Beauvoir was doing. As I said above, there is in these chapters no discussion of "the Orient" that is not *attached* to discussions of the not-Orient; sometimes it is the latter that comes off worse,[150] but usually questions of comparative judgment vanish in a welter of concrete particulars. The overall point is not about a binary difference, and the effect is the opposite of cultural triumphalism.

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[149] "La magie féminine a été profondément domestiquée dans la famille patriarcale. La femme permet à la société d'intégrer en elle les forces cosmiques. Dans son ouvrage, *Mitra-Varuna*, Dumézil signale qu'aux Indes comme à Rome, il y a deux manières pour le pouvoir viril de s'affirmer: en Varouna et Romulus, dans les Gandharvas et les Luperques, il est agression, rapt, désordre, hybris; alors la femme apparaît comme un être qu'il faut ravir, violenter; les Sabines ravies se montrent stériles, on les fouette avec des lanières en peau de bouc, compensant par la violence un excès de violence. Mais Mitra, Numa, les Brahmanes et les Flamines assurent au contraire l'ordre et l'équilibre raisonnable de la cité: alors la femme est liée au mari par un mariage aux rites compliqués et, collaborant avec lui, elle lui assure la domination de toutes les forces femelles de la nature; à Rome, si la flamina meurt, le flamen dialis se démet de ses fonctions. C'est ainsi qu'en Égypte, Isis, ayant perdu sa puissance suprême de déesse mère, demeure cependant généreuse, souriante, bienveillante et sage, la magnifique épouse d'Osiris. Mais quand la femme apparaît ainsi l'associée de l'homme, son complément, sa moitié, elle est nécessairement douée d'une conscience, d'une âme; il ne saurait si intimement dépendre d'un être qui ne participerait pas à l'essence humaine. On a vu déjà que les Lois de Manou promettaient à l'épouse légitime le même paradis qu'à son époux. Plus le mâle s'individualise et revendique son individualité, plus aussi il reconnaîtra en sa compagne un individu et une liberté. L'Oriental insouciant de son propre destin se contente d'une femelle qui est pour lui un objet de jouissance; mais le rêve de l'Occidental, quand il s'est élevé à la conscience de la singularité de son être, c'est d'être reconnu par une liberté étrangère et docile" (*DS* 1:280–81).

Another example: Beauvoir takes a similarly syncretic approach to the question of female *beauty*:

> All the poets of the East and the West [*d'Orient et d'Occident*] have transformed woman's body into flowers, fruits, birds.... Here too, one would have to cite an entire weighty anthology.[151]

Her citations are drawn from the Song of Songs, Breton, Steinbeck, Colette, "Samivel cited by Bachelard," and the poet Léopold Senghor (1906–2001), *négritude*'s greatest champion, who would later serve as the first president of Senegal. Around this time, Senghor's work was appearing in *Présence Africaine* (which *Les Temps Modernes* was strongly supporting); his *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache* came out in 1948, with a preface by Sartre, "Orphée noir" (Black Orpheus). Beauvoir quotes Senghor's lines (beginning "Naked woman, dusky woman! / Ripe and firm-fleshed fruit" [Femme nue, femme obscure! / Fruit mûr à la chair ferme]) in absolute parallel to the others, much as the work of Richard Wright and other theorists of Black experience was appearing alongside her own theoretical work in *Les Temps Modernes*.

Different cultures, it is true, have different ideals of beauty—and different ideal objects of desire. In her desire to leave nothing out, Beauvoir goes on to say some things that, taken in isolation, are bizarre. In the end, she's going to say, the beauty myth amounts to the same thing, a male fantasy and a mystification, wherever and whenever it is found. But as with other "sandwiches" I've discussed, the road to this conclusion is mined with some troubling bits. So, a few pages later she embarks on a general discussion of what we would call "objectification":

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[150] For instance, at *DS* 1:282 we find "la Grande Mère asiatique" contrasted to the Virgin Mary, to the detriment of the latter.

[151] "Tous les poètes d'Orient et d'Occident ont métamorphosé le corps de la femme en fleurs, en fruits, en oiseaux. Ici encore, à travers l'Antiquité, le Moyen Âge et l'époque moderne, c'est toute une épaisse anthologie qu'il faudrait citer" (*DS* 1:261).

> when woman is handed over to the male as his possession, what the latter demands is that, in her, the flesh be present in pure facticity. Her body is grasped, not as the radiance of a subjectivity, but as a thing, heavy with immanence; this body does not refer to the rest of the world, it must promise nothing but itself: it must be the ending point of his desire.[152]

So far, so good. But then:

> The most naïve form of this demand is the Hottentot ideal of the Steatopygian Venus, since the buttocks are the part of the body least supplied with nerves, the part where flesh appears as a given without a destination. The preference of Orientals for fat women is of the same sort; they love the absurd luxury of this adipose proliferation, which no project animates, which has no meaning except to be there.[153]

Wait, what?

So, there is a footnote, which quotes from "Luquet, *Journal de Psychologie*, 1934, Les Vénus des cavernes,"[154] and here is what her footnote quotes:

> The Hottentots, among whom steatopygy is neither as fully developed or as constant as among bushwomen, consider this conformation as aesthetically valuable and massage the buttocks of their daughters to develop them. In the same way the artificial fattening of women, a real

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[152] "[Q]uand la femme est livrée au mâle comme son bien, ce que celui-ci réclame, c'est que chez elle la chair soit présente dans sa pure facticité. Son corps n'est pas saisi comme le rayonnement d'une subjectivité, mais comme une chose empâtée dans son immanence; il ne faut pas que ce corps renvoie au reste du monde, il ne doit pas être promesse d'autre chose que de lui-même: il lui faut arrêter le désir" (*DS* 1:264).

[153] "La forme la plus naïve de cette exigence, c'est l'idéal hottentot de la Vénus stéatopyge, les fesses étant la partie du corps la moins innervé, celle où la chair apparaît comme un donné sans destination. Le goût des Orientaux pour les femmes grasses est de la même espèce; ils aiment le luxe absurde de cette prolifération adipeuse que n'anime aucun projet, qui n'a d'autre sens que d'être là" (*DS* 1:264).

[154] I haven't entirely succeeded in tracing this; it would appear to be Luquet, "Les Vénus paléolithiques," but this article is, for some reason, unobtainable. Luquet seems to have been a scholar of paleolithic art: Gunter Berghaus, in *New Perspectives on Prehistoric Art*, refers to his book "L'art et la religion des hommes fossiles" (1926) and to a 1910 article comparing paleolithic figures to graffiti.

> force-feeding whose two essential methods are immobilization and the copious ingestion of particular foods, chiefly milk, can be found in various parts of Africa. It is still practiced by well-to-do Arab and Jewish city-dwellers of Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco.[155]

This sounds unlikely, doesn't it? But if someone made it up, that someone was not Beauvoir. And what is she *doing* with this "example"? Her paragraph continues:

> Even in civilizations with more subtle sensibility, where notions of form and harmony come into play, a woman's breasts and buttocks continue to be prized because they blossom out and develop in a gratuitous, contingent way. Customs and fashions often work to sever the female body from its transcendence: the Chinese woman with bound feet can scarcely walk; the polished claws of the Hollywood star deprive her of the use of her hands; high heels, corsets, bustles, farthingales, crinolines are intended not just to exaggerate the curves of the female body, but to render it useless.[156]

Once again, she's not saying it's worse, she's not saying it's better, and she's not using the Eastern example as an allegory for the others. She's piling up all the examples she can find, to make a general point that is, I feel, still relevant:

> Weighed down by fat, or too slender and delicate to exercise any effort, paralyzed by awkward clothes and by the rituals of propriety, [her body] thus appears to man as his thing.[157]

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[155] "Les Hottentotes chez qui la stéatopygie n'est ni aussi développée ni aussi constante que chez les femmes bushman considèrent cette conformation comme esthétique et malaxent les fesses de leurs filles dès l'enfance pour les développer. De même l'engraissement artificiel des femmes, véritable gavage dont les deux procédés essentiels sont l'immobilité et l'ingestion abondante d'aliments appropriés, en particulier du lait, se rencontre dans diverses régions de l'Afrique. Il est encore pratiqué par les citadins aisés arabes et israélites d'Algérie, de Tunisie, et du Maroc" (*DS* 1:264).

[156] "Même dans les civilisations d'une sensibilité plus subtile où interviennent des notions de forme et d'harmonie, les seins et les fesses demeurent des objets privilégiés à cause de la gratuité, de la contingence de leur épanouissement. Les coutumes, les modes se sont souvent appliquées à couper le corps féminin de sa transcendance: la Chinoise aux pieds bandés peut à peine marcher, les griffes vernies de la star d'Hollywood la privent de ses mains, les haut talons, les corsets, les paniers, les vertugadins, les crinolines étaient destinés moins à accentuer la cambrure du corps féminin qu'à en augmenter l'impotence" (*DS* 1:264–65).

[157] "Alourdi de graisse, ou au contraire si diaphane que tout effort lui est interdit, paralysé par des vêtements incommodes et par les rites de la bienséance, c'est alors qu'il apparaît à l'homme comme sa chose" (*DS* 1:265).

Some like us fat, some like us thin, but *either way*—well, beauty is a trap. And so is the pursuit of beauty, because men are funny about what they want in a woman: "Nature," or the opposite of nature, or some impossible combination. (Pacaly comments, "splendide double-bind!")[158]

> Among primitive peoples, the idea men seek simply perfects the common type: a race with thick lips and flat noses creates a thick-lipped, flat-nosed Venus; later a more complicated canon of beauty applies. But in any case, the more a woman's form and features seem deliberately crafted, the more she gladdens the heart of man by appearing to avoid the fate of all natural things. A strange paradox ensues: wanting to take hold of nature, but nature transfigured, man dooms woman to artifice. She is not merely *physis*, but equally *antiphysis*, and this is true not only in the civilization of electrically permed hair, leg-waxing, and latex girdles, but also where African women wear plates in their lips, and in China, and everywhere on Earth.[159]

Something similar happens in a discussion of the social function played by wives:

> A man boasts of his wife as he boasts of his house, his lands, his flocks, or his riches, and sometimes more so; through her, he displays his power in the eyes of the world, she is his earthly portion, his worth. In the Orient, the wife must be fat; visibly well-fed, she brings honor to her master. [A footnote refers to the earlier citation from Luquet.] A Muslim gains consequence from the number of wives and their flourishing appearance. In bourgeois society, one role that falls to the wife is to *represent*: her beauty, her charm, her intelligence, her elegance are the outward signs of her husband's wealth, like the make and model of his car.[160]

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[158] Pacaly, "La femme et les mythes," 174.

[159] "Chez les peuples primitifs, l'idée est seulement celle de la perfection du type populaire: une race aux lèvres épaisses, aux nez plats forge une Vénus aux lèvres épaisses, au nez plat; plus tard on applique aux femmes les canons d'une esthétique plus complexe. Mais en tout cas, plus les traits et les proportions d'une femme paraissent concertés, plus elle réjouit le cœur de l'homme parce qu'elle semble échapper aux avatars des choses naturelles. On aboutit donc à cet étrange paradoxe que, souhaitant saisir dans la femme la nature, mais transfigurée, l'homme voue la femme à l'artifice. Elle n'est pas physis seulement mais tout autant antiphysis; et cela non seulement dans la civilisation des permanentes électriques, de l'épilation à la cire, des guêpières de latex, mais aussi au pays des négresses à plateaux, en Chine et partout sur la terre" (*DS* 1:266).

[160] "[L'homme] s'enorgueillit de sa femme comme de sa maison, ses terres, ses troupeaux, ses richesses, et parfois même davantage; c'est à travers elle qu'il manifeste aux yeux du

East or West, zaftig or svelte, a wife is just one more luxury item. Beauvoir closes this discussion with the example of Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew,* where Petruchio calls on all his neighbors to marvel at the docile paragon Katharine has become.[161]

A bit later, cross-cultural examples will again support Beauvoir's explanation that adultery, and men's fear of adultery, is an inevitable result of marriage, and why: marriage involves a mystification, since by claiming to socialize the erotic, it only succeeds in killing it.[162]

> Thus [woman] is doomed to infidelity: it is the only face her freedom can wear. She is unfaithful quite aside from her own desires, thoughts, consciousness; regarded as an object, she is offered up to any subjectivity that chooses to seize upon her; shut up in a harem, hidden beneath veils, she may still awaken someone's desire; to awaken a stranger's desire is already to have sinned against one's husband and society. Then too, she is often complicit with this fate; only through deceit and adultery can she disprove men's pretension and show that she belongs to no one. Thus male jealousy is quickly aroused; legends tell us that a woman can be suspected without any reason, then condemned on the barest suspicion, like Geneviève de Brabant and Desdemona; Griselidis is subjected to the harshest of trials even before any suspicion of her can arise; this story would be absurd if woman was not suspect in advance; he does not have to prove her crimes, it is up to her to prove her innocence. That is also why jealousy can be insatiable; we've already shown that possession can never be positively realized; one does not own the spring from which one drinks, even if one forbids others to draw water there, as the jealous man knows very well.… Across all literatures, in the *Thousand and One Nights* as in the *Decameron*, women's ruses are seen to triumph over the prudence of men.[163]

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monde sa puissance: elle est sa mesure, et sa part sur terre. Chez les Orientaux la femme se doit d'être grasse: on voit qu'elle est largement nourrie et elle fait honneur à son maître. Un musulman est d'autant plus considéré qu'il possède un plus grand nombre de femmes et qu'elles sont d'apparence plus florissante. Dans la société bourgeoise, un des rôles dévolus à la femme, c'est de *représenter*: sa beauté, son charme, son intelligence, son élégance sont les signes extérieurs de la fortune du mari au même titre que la carrosserie de son automobile" (*DS* 1:288–89).

[161] "[L]e héros de *La mégère apprivoisée* convoque tous ses voisins pour leur montrer avec quelle autorité il a su dompter sa femme" (*DS* 1:289).

[162] "[I]l y a dans le mariage une mystification puisque prétendant socialiser l'érotisme, il n'a réussi qu'à le tuer" (*DS* 1:305).

[163] "La voilà donc vouée à l'infidélité: c'est le seul visage concret que puisse revêtir sa liberté. Elle est infidèle par-delà même ses désirs, ses pensées, sa conscience; du fait qu'on la re-

The mythic patrimony (so to speak) is here being treated as a kind of grab-bag or anthology: neither a set of binary contrasts nor a universal same in which differences are flattened out. Beauvoir's examples may appear to have been chosen almost at random, but they appear side by side rather than in separate boxes, much less in a hierarchical arrangement; the veiled lady whose seclusion fails, here, to truly contain her has precisely the same status as Shakespeare's Desdemona, Bocaccio's Griselda, and the legendary Frenchwoman Geneviève de Brabant. And when Beauvoir says "[t]here is, however, no feminine figure—virgin, mother, wife, sister, servant, lover, fierce virtue, smiling odalisque—capable of encapsulating the inconstant yearnings of man," she is telling us that all these images of Woman are equally imaginary—and none the less powerful and damaging.[164]

6 Anti-orientalism in *The Second Sex*: Plus Jamais Claudel

Markowitz professes to find it "curious" that Beauvoir "seems to be all but unaware of her own Orientalism," especially in the light of Beauvoir's strong critique of "the Jewish personality and the black soul."[165] In fact, while the ritual gestures of white feminist self-abasement are indeed absent, the myth chapters of *The Second Sex* do contain some rather biting critiques of European male fantasies of an exotic "other," fantasies Beauvoir links to nationalism and colonialism. (Markowitz may not have seen this because it is advanced by

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garde comme un objet, elle est offerte à toute subjectivité qui choisit de s'emparer d'elle; enfermée dans le harem, cachée sous des voiles, on n'est encore pas sûr qu'elle n'inspire à personne du désir: inspirer du désir à un étranger, c'est déjà manquer à son époux et à la société. Mais, en outre, elle se fait souvent complice de cette fatalité; c'est seulement par le mensonge et l'adultère qu'elle peut prouver qu'elle n'est la chose de personne et qu'elle dément les prétentions du mâle. C'est pourquoi la jalousie de l'homme est si prompte à s'éveiller; on voit dans les légendes que la femme peut être soupçonnée sans raison, condamnée sur le moindre soupçon, telles Geneviève de Brabant et Desdémone; avant même tout soupçon, Grisélidis est soumise aux plus dures épreuves; ce conte serait absurde si la femme n'était pas d'avance suspecte; il n'y a pas à démontrer ses fautes: c'est à elle de prouver son innocence. C'est pourquoi aussi la jalousie peut être insatiable; on a dit déjà que la possession ne peut jamais être positivement réalisée; même si on interdit à tout autre d'y puiser, on ne possède pas la source à laquelle on s'abreuve: le jaloux le sait bien.... À travers toutes les littératures, dans *Les mille et une nuits* comme dans le *Décaméron*, on voit les ruses de la femme triompher de la prudence de l'homme" (*DS* 1:307–308).

[164] "[I]l n'est aucune figure féminine: vierge, mère, épouse, soeur, servante, amante, farouche vertu, souriante odalisque qui ne soit susceptible de résumer ainsi les ondoyantes aspirations des hommes" (*DS* 1:315).

[165] Markowitz, "Occidental Dreams," 278.

means of literary example, and because many of the writers discussed are unfamiliar today outside France.) One strong instance occurs within Beauvoir's discussion of how the figure of Woman comes to serve as an abstraction "assimilated" to cities, regions, nations:[166] "This assimilation is not only allegorical; it is realized on the level of feeling [*affectivement*] by many men." A footnote adds:

> It is allegorical in the shameful poem Claudel has recently committed, where he calls Indochina "that yellow woman"; on the other hand, it is emotional [*affective*] in the verse of the Black poet:
>
> The soul of the black land where the old ones sleep
> lives and speaks
> tonight
> in the trembling strength along your hollow thighs[167]

There is nothing accidental in this juxtaposition, I would submit. My readers may remember Beauvoir's use of Claudel as a target in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, where he figured as an example of the "serious man": as well as supporting Franco and defending Pétain, Claudel was literally "le Colon," the colonial administrator, whose patriotic pride figured in his attack, in 1925, on the decadence of Surrealism. The "poète noir" to whom Beauvoir contrasts him was Guy Tirolien (1917–88), a close friend and collaborator of Senghor's; the poem she quotes from, "Black Beauty," is addressed to a particular (though unnamed) woman who reminds the speaker of Africa in her face and way of walking (*démarche*), and in her voice, as well as her body. It is hard not to see this quotation, from a poet of color who was associated with the resistance to colonialism both in literature and in life,[168] as a rebuke to Claudel's (literally) imperialist pretensions, which linked a traditionalist nostalgia for "family values" with a vision of the Mission of France Beauvoir found nauseating.[169]

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[166] She begins by citing Jung on this point, but her examples soon exceed the point he was making.

[167] "Cette assimilation n'est pas seulement allégorique: elle est affectivement réalisée par quantité d'hommes. [Note: Elle est allégorique dans le honteux poème que Claudel vient récemment de commettre et où il appelle l'Indochine "C'te femme jaune"; elle est affective au contraire dans les vers du poète noir:
L'âme du noir pays où dorment les anciens
vit et parle
ce soir
en la force inquiète le long de tes reins creux]" (*DS* 1:292).
I am indebted to Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier for identifying the poet.

But I wish she had quoted from Claudel's poem, too. It was called "Saint Michel-l'archange, patron des parachutistes du corps expéditionnaire d'Indochine" (Saint Michael the Archangel, Patron Saint of Paratroopers in the Indochina Expeditionary Corps). Dated July 16, 1948, it was written to celebrate France's effort to regain its former colonies after World War II. I found some of it in Claude Roy's autobiography, *Moi je*, in the course of a discussion of what various writers did during the German occupation of France. Roy refers to Claudel's well-known 1915 ode to Pétain—*Tant que vous voudrez, mon général!*—and to his call for bloody reprisals against Republican Spain, describes him as beating a deaf man's drum to which other collaborators danced in tune, and notes that "He had time, before he died, to consecrate a last ballad to the parachutists of Indochina," from which Roy quotes:

> Hail, champion of Ocean!
> Hail, policeman of God!
> Breton saint! Brutal saint! Colonel, Soldier of a kind,
> Help me from above to make her understand, that yellow woman, that this land where we are gaining ground is our land, for which we have paid dear.

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[168] Born in Guadeloupe, Tirolien studied in France, met Senghor in the Stalag where both were German prisoners, was among the founders of *Présence Africaine* and held a number of official posts in French African countries, both before and after independence. I wish I knew more about him.

[169] In May 1968, observing among the wall slogans "PLUS JAMAIS CLAUDEL" (Never Again Claudel), Leiris would burst out: "In other words: to hell with this elephantine gymnast of the word, bulwark of the bourgeois status quo, sometimes wearing the mask of a very mandarin, very colonial exoticism, and sometimes that of a bookish mystic. (That's how I see things, at least, and I've no reason to think there were different motives behind the rejection so clearly expressed at Nanterre.)" [Autrement dit: foin de ce gymnaste mammouthéen du verbe, ferme appui du *statu quo* bourgeois, sous le masque tantôt d'un exotisme très mandarin colonial, tantôt d'une mystique de fort-en-thème. (C'est, du moins, comme cela que je vois la chose et je n'ai aucune raison de penser que ce rejet, si catégoriquement exprimé à Nanterre, n'était pas ainsi motivé.)] Other slogans included "Intellectuels apprenez à ne plus l'être" (intellectuals, learn not to be), "la vie vite" (live fast) and "soyez réaliste demandez l'impossible" (be realistic, demand the impossible). Leiris, *Frêle Bruit*, 167.

> And I hear the clarion call to the clarion down there which answers across the ricefield…[170]

(My attempt at literal translation is clumsy, but so is the original poem: it's "honteux," shameful, on more than one level.) I found a bit more of it on the blog of one Michel Volkovitch, under the title "Andouille en parachute":

> The Will of God suddenly vertical and severe
> Which seizes you by the shoulders, plucks you out and throws you back like a stone,

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[170] Roy, *Moi Je*, 221: "Et un autre très grand poète, Paul Claudel, ponctue des roulements d'un tambour de sourd les marches et contremarches des autres. Entre deux vagues du lyrisme le plus ample qu'exhale une poitrine vivante, il va jouer pendant trente ans le Colonel Scrongneugneu de l'intelligentsia. *Tant que vous voudrez, mon général! Tant qu'il y en aura un seul! Tant qu'il y en aura un seul de vivant, les vivants et les morts tous à la fois,* mâchonnait-il déjà en 1915. En 1937, devant l'Espagne en sang, il récidive: '*Le temps de l'amputation pour l'arbre a fini et c'est le temps des représailles.*' Sa pensée politique sera un éternel *Tant que vous voudrez!* Tant que vous voudrez, mon général Franco! Tant que vous voudrez, monsieur le maréchal Pétain! Tant que vous voudrez, mon général de Gaulle! Il aura le temps, avant de mourir, de consacrer une dernière ballade aux parachutistes d'Indochine:

> Salut, champion de l'Océan!
> Salut, gendarme de Dieu!
> Saint breton! Saint brutal! espèce de colonel et de militaire
> Aide-moi lui faire comprendre, elle aussi, c'te femme jaune, par là-dessus
> que cette terre où nous prenons pied, c'est la nôtre que nous avons payée cher
> Et j'entends le clairon au clairon là-bas qui répond à travers la rizière…"

Tant que vous voudrez, mon général!, the refrain from Claudel's poem of the First World War, is usually translated as, "As many as you wish, my general!" ("as many" meaning, as many men, young men for cannon fodder, "until there will only be one left"…); but sometimes it is translated to mean "as far as you wish!" (a simple gesture of blind obedience to authority). In his repetition of the phrase, Roy also alludes to Claudel's bloody-minded and self-righteous early support for Franco, and to his (brief, and later retracted) support for Pétain as leader of the Vichy government. (Roy incidentally displays an unflattering view of General de Gaulle that parallels Beauvoir's view of *that* General's authoritarian response to the Algerian crisis.) Interestingly, this all comes at the end of a chapter where Roy is attempting to explain why many intellectuals (including himself) moved from right-wing commitments in the 1930s to become resistance fighters, and later militants for the French communist party; by the time he wrote this, he (and many others) had moved away from Communism as well, in response to the evolution of the Soviet Union, the revelation of the labor camps, and other factors. Claudel, in contrast, never seems to have learned anything. (Roy also mocks him as "le Colonel Scrongneugneu de l'intelligentsia": using a phrase, first attested in an 1884 novel, for "un vieux militaire bougon," a grumpy old military man; "Scrongneugneu" is a blasphemy-avoiding substitute for "sacré nom de Dieu." [See Alice Develey, "Mais d'où vient le mot 'scrongneugneu'?"] No, you didn't need to know that, sorry.)

So that thundering, unexpected, amid the bulrushes and the unknown,
You continue (since I was made for this) the combat of France against the Dragon.
All this to testify to people, one more time, about this Good Thing coming out of the sky
(This Good Thing, with all its weight, to which one's harness is attached)
And may the Dragon be proved wrong once more when he tries to argue with Saint Michael!
Hail, champion of the Ocean! hail, policeman of God!
Representative of everything, in sky, on earth, that tries to understand what it can
Of all the universal which is right against the particular
Of all the spiritual which is right against the secular
Of all that is upright against that which is twisted!
Hail, warrior full of peace and confident of this Father,
Who since there is no other way, tries to make himself understood in bolts of thunder!, etc.[171]

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[171] "La volonté de Dieu tout à coup verticale et sévère
Qui vous saisit par les épaules, vous arrache et qui vous lâche comme une pierre,
Afin que foudroyant, inopiné, à travers l'inconnu et le jonc,
On continue, puisque je suis fait pour ça, le combat de la France contre le Dragon.
Tout ça est pour attester aux gens une fois de plus cette bonne chose qui vient du ciel
(Cette bonne chose de tout le poids qu'on est à quoi l'on est attaché avec des bretelles),
Et que le Dragon n'a pas raison une fois de plus quand il essaye de discuter avec Saint Michel!
Salut, champion de l'Océan! salut, gendarme de Dieu!
Représentant de tout ce qui là-haut dans le ciel, sur la terre, essaye de se faire comprendre comme il peut,
De tout cela universel qui a raison contre le particulier,
De tout cela spirituel qui a raison contre le séculier,
De tout cela rectiligne qui a raison contre l'entortillé!
Salut, guerrier plein de paix et confident de ce Père,
Puisqu'il n'y a pas moyen autrement, qui essaye de se faire comprendre à coups de tonnerre!" etc.
(Quoted by Volkovitch, "Andouille en parachute.")

Volkovitch fills in the picture and replies with an angry poem of his own, noting that the "clarion call" would be answered by the 1954 defeat of the French at Dien Bien Phu.

St. Michael appears to have been officially claimed as patron saint by French paratroopers as early as World War I; one can buy, on the internet, vintage military medals depicting him, a reminder of the near-total fusion of Church and State Beauvoir describes

Shameful indeed. One could certainly label this language "orientalizing," but the problem here is of a different order, if I may say.[172] As Fanon put it in 1952, the Indochinese rose up against the French, not because they had discovered the value of their own culture, but because it was simply becoming impossible for them to breathe.[173]

On a happier note, my search for this piece of garbage (I can't call it a poem) led me to Thi Tuyet Trinh Nguyen's dissertation, *L'imaginaire colonial français de l'Indochine 1890–1935*, from which I also learned something about one of the few women writers Beauvoir mentions with unmitigated approval in *The Second Sex*: Andrée Viollis, whose 1935 book, *Indochine SOS*, was a courageous piece of reportage on behalf of the immiserated *indigènes* and a denunciation of French practices there.[174] Beauvoir's autobiography mentions reading Viollis's other book, *L'Inde contre les Anglais*, when it appeared in 1930.[175] India against the English. 1930. Hmm.

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in *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*. This is the France for which Claudel, and Beauvoir's bourgeois readers, were nostalgic.

Wikipedia, however, informs me that those who carried out France's colonial war "included colonial troops from the whole former empire (Moroccan, Algerian, Tunisian, Laotian, Cambodian, and Vietnamese ethnic minorities), French professional troops and units of the French Foreign Legion. The use of metropolitan recruits was forbidden by the government to prevent the war from becoming even more unpopular at home. It was called the 'dirty war' (*la sale guerre*) by leftists in France."

[172] One can see why W.H. Auden mentions Claudel in the same breath as Kipling in the quatrain from his Yeats elegy that constitutes the only time many Anglophones are likely to have heard his name: Claudel is the French version of the "white man's burden." One does not, however, see why Auden thought that Time would pardon Paul Claudel "for writing well." However, I did find some surprising literary-critical *éloges* of Claudel's later poems, which reflect his "love" of the East by translating from languages he never seems to have learned (despite his long sojourn as a diplomat in China and Japan). "And yet, this apparent lack of knowledge might also be considered an advantage (as Roland Barthes later stated about his own inability to speak Japanese); the poet came to learn of these cultures through his own direct experiences" (Pamela Genova, "Knowledge of the East? Paul Claudel and the Equivocal Nature of Cultural Exchange," 105). Despite the title, there is no mention here of such post-Saidian sins as "cultural appropriation." Sometimes scholarship seems to take place in sealed compartments.

[173] "Ce n'est pas parce que l'Indochinois a découvert une culture propre qu'il s'est révolté. C'est parce que, 'tout simplement' il lui devenait, à plus d'un titre, impossible de respirer" (*PNMB* 183, *BSWM* 176).

[174] See Thi Tuyet Trinh Nguyen, *L'imaginaire colonial français de l'Indochine 1890–1935*. Beauvoir says, simply, that "no male journalist has outdone Andrée Viollis's accounts of Indochina and India" [aucun journaliste masculin n'a surclassé les témoignages d'Andrée Viollis sur l'Indochine et sur les Indes (*DS* 2:635)].

[175] *FA* 58.

Perhaps Beauvoir's invocation of these telling names feel like asides, and perhaps they are. But insofar as Beauvoir's anti-imperialist commitments merely "haunt the margins" here (in contrast to the way they are foregrounded in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947*, and especially *La force des choses*), it seems to me this was in part because she expected her readers to easily follow such sideways references as "the shameful poem Claudel recently committed." (Fellow intellectual Claude Roy, for instance, seems to have quoted it from memory in a book he wrote twenty years later.) It is unlikely that readers outside France would have picked up on these particular references, even at the time; but I think Beauvoir's political point resonates through the paragraph that follows her discussion of Tirolien and Claudel. She is listing various instances where women figure as stand-ins for what is different or Other about a land across a border.

> It often happens that the traveler asks woman to provide the key to lands he visits: holding in his arms an Italian or Spanish woman, he thinks he possesses the delicious essence of Italy or Spain. "When I arrive in a new city, I always go first to the brothel," a journalist has said. If a cup of hot chocolate spiced with cinnamon can reveal all of Spain to Gide, how much more strongly the kisses from an exotic mouth render up to the lover a country's flora and fauna, its traditions, its culture. Woman does not sum up its political institutions nor its economics; but she embodies at the same time the marrow of its flesh and its mystical mana. From Lamartine's *Graziella* to the novels of Loti and the stories of Morand, it is through women that we see the foreigner trying to appropriate for himself the soul of a region. Mignon, Sylvie, Mireille, Columba, Carmen unveil the most intimate truth of Italy, the Valais region, Provence, Corsica, Andalusia. When Goethe made the Alsatian Frédérique his lover, it seemed to the Germans a symbol of the annexation of Germany; reciprocally, when Colette Baudoche refused to marry a German, that was for Barrès Alsace refusing itself to Germany.[176]

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[176] "Il est fréquent que le voyageur demande à la femme la clef des contrées qu'il visite: quand il tient une Italienne, une Espagnole dans ses bras, il lui semble posséder l'essence savoureuse d'Italie, de l'Espagne. 'Quand j'arrive dans une nouvelle ville, je commence toujours par aller au bordel,' disait un journaliste. Si un chocolat à la cannelle peut découvrir à Gide toute l'Espagne, à plus forte raison les baisers d'une bouche exotique livreront à l'amant un pays avec sa flore, sa faune, ses traditions, sa culture. La femme n'en résume pas les institutions politiques ni les richesses économiques; mais elle en incarne à la fois la pulpe charnelle et le mana mystique. De *Graziella* de Lamartine aux romans de Loti et aux nouvelles de Morand, c'est à travers les femmes qu'on voit l'étranger tenter

Here is some of the same generalized touristic exoticism/eroticism that we saw in *L'invitée*. But the cure "in the real" that I described at the end of that book seems to have happened more fully by the time of *The Second Sex*. Or at least, this is a more overt diagnosis. Remember (again) that the discussion is embedded in a lengthy recital of male fantasies and why they matter. The German/French examples, at least, show clearly her awareness of the wider political stakes of what Lévi-Strauss called the "exchange of women," and not just among the Yanomami or the Sabines but *de nos jours*. At the infamous 1925 banquet, when Soupault swung from the chandelier and Leiris was arrested for shouting "Vive l'Allemagne!" the Surrealists were protesting exactly this sickly blend of patriotism expressed across women's bodies, attacking the symbolist writer Rachilde for the same sentiments expressed in Maurice Barrès's novel *Colette Baudoche*. Like the Surrealists, Beauvoir connected this to anticolonialist critique. It is not a coincidence that several of the writers she mentions here—Loti, Morand, Barrès—were right-wing writers, deplorers of "decadence," apologists for empire, and racists of the non-subtle sort. Morand, for instance, directly collaborated with and served the Vichy government, and while Barrès did not live long enough to do so, he certainly prepared the ground with novels such as *Les déracinés*.[177] Loti, Claudel, Morand all served in colonial armies and/or as bureaucrats (you will recall the pride Claudel took in this when rebuking the Surrealists).

I said earlier, near the discussion of *L'invitée*, that it was not a simple matter to disentangle Beauvoir's relationship to some of the orientalizing and eroticizing discourses about race that she found in her social and intellectual circle, and that is true also here. But I want to ask *which* orientalism we are really dealing with. Just saying "orientalism" as an ahistorical moniker is not especially helpful if (and I guess that's a big if) we're trying to actually *understand* the thing. National traditions differ. The eighteenth century and the twentieth century differ. And, as Emily Apter explains in an important article, even then there's a lot to know.

> An immediate problem in addressing these concerns lies in the fact that French colonial literature is made up of a nasty tissue of Orientalist

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de s'approprier l'âme d'une région. Mignon, Sylvie, Mireille, Columba, Carmen dévoilent la plus intime vérité de l'Italie, du Valais, de la Provence, de la Corse, de l'Andalousie. Que Goethe se soit fait aimer de l'Alsacienne Frédérique est apparu aux Allemands comme un symbole de l'annexion de l'Allemagne; réciproquement, quand Colette Baudoche refuse d'épouser un Allemand, c'est aux yeux de Barrès l'Alsace qui se refuse à l'Allemagne" (*DS* 1:292).

[177] See Renee Winegarten, "Who Was Paul Morand?"

> clichés; romantic physiognomical and characterological typologies, racist sexual fantasies, and frozen, "postcarded" images of native subjects indiscriminately shuffled between black, brown, métis, Asiatic, Arab, Kabylian, Moorish, Ottoman, Bedouin, Islamic, and Byzantine cultural frames. The reader risks reinforcing these stereotypes even in endeavouring to undo them. Equally complicated is the historiographical task of constituting a textual canon. A motley assortment of authors falls under this rubric, including Parisian literati interested in updating realist exoticism, modernist Orientalists seduced by the spectacular stage-setting of the East, North African writers writing in French, amateur ethnographers with a taste for the tourist sublime, colonial civil servants proselytizing for *la mission civilisatrice*, cross-dressing journalists, female voyeurs, and ex-harem wives.[178]

Markowitz speculates that Beauvoir's "orientalism" might have come to her from Hegel via Marx; she also refers to the work of Alain Grosrichard, a psychoanalytic reading of "the Western imagination" starting from the eighteenth century and Montesquieu. But Beauvoir knew Hegel directly, and we can tell that the orientalism with which *The Second Sex* overtly engages comes not from philosophy but from storybooks.

Beauvoir's association of "the East" with a different, and a forbidden, sexuality does in fact run very deep: she tells us so herself in *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*. At a very young age (the First World War had not yet ended), she describes the masochism that her pious upbringing inspired;[179] in the absence of any precise information about sexuality, she identified in fantasy with Mary Magdalene wiping the feet of Christ with her long hair, with saints and martyrs (including Geneviève de Brabant) who suffered nobly at the hands of men, and with Bluebeard's wives.

> Certain of my fantasies would not bear the light of day; I had to indulge them in secret. I was always extraordinarily moved by the fate of that captive king whom an Oriental tyrant used as a mounting-block; from time to time, trembling, half-naked, I would substitute myself for the royal slave and feel the tyrant's sharp spurs riding down my spine.[180]

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[178] Emily Apter, "Female Trouble in the Colonial Harem," 207–8.

[179] "Ma piété me disposait au masochisme" (*Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*, hereinafter *MJFR*, 80).

[180] "Certains de mes phantasmes ne supportaient pas la lumière; je ne les évoquais qu'en secret. Je fus extraordinairement émue par le sort de ce roi captif qu'un tyran oriental

I haven't identified exactly what Beauvoir was reading, but her account seems like a fitting synecdoche for the process by which Christian Europe, ashamed of and yet fascinated by sexual desire, denied the importance of the body (to the extent of refusing to educate children about it), connected eroticism to the mortification of the flesh, and then simply outsourced the whole subject to "the East." Throughout her adolescence, Beauvoir had a significant encounter with a rather steamy (and seamy) turn of the century literature that was indeed connected with Empire, in that it was written by many of the same people responsible for carrying out the Empire's actual work. Gide, Loti, Morand, and Barrès all exoticized and eroticized the mysterious East, and they were all writers the young Beauvoir had liked and valued (as for that matter was Claudel, one of her best friend Zaza's particular favorites). We've seen already what an important influence Gide was: in fact, when she and Sartre first crossed the Spanish border, almost the first thing they did, following his instructions, was to order a cup of bitter hot chocolate and religiously inhale it in order to "drink in all of Spain."[181] By the time she wrote the memoir, she was telling this as a funny story, amused at the credulity of her younger self; but the fact is that, in their later travels through the Maghreb, they were explicitly following Gide's traces and his instructions that there was something important to see there, something that could not be found in France.[182] Even on the solo trip where she saw the women living in the cave, she notes signs that Gide had been there before her (his signature in a hotel register in Nefta, and carved into a public bench in El Oued).[183] However, she also recounts her discomfort on a train whose conductor, after cursing and cuffing the Arab passengers, tells her that because she is a European she does not have to pay.

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utilisait comme marchepied quand il montait à cheval; il m'arrivait de me substituer tremblante, demi-nue, à l'esclave dont un dur éperon écorchait l'échine" (*MJFR* 81).

[181] *FA* 97–8.

[182] And there was, though it may not have been what Gide meant them to see. The case of Gide is more complicated than that of his old arch-adversary Claudel, and of the other writers discussed here; I can't really go into it fully now. Gide's profound and perfectly old-fashioned, erotically-inflected orientalism may keep us from fully enjoying *L'immoraliste*: sexual freedom, bien ok, but for whom? (What freedom exists for the boy? For the woman in the harem—and here I mean Gide's own harem.) However, his orientalism didn't keep him from speaking out against the abuses he saw on his trip to the Congo, and throwing his considerable cultural weight behind this; and his leftist sympathies didn't prevent him from saying what he saw in *Retour de l'URSS*. Perhaps his embrace of Whitman's sublime insouciance about contradicting oneself was productive? Lives are more complex than labels.

[183] *FCh* 1:87–8, *FCirc* 66–67.

Given this context, the paragraph I quoted above about women and cities has the flavor of an exorcism. When you're young, you read what's put in front of you, you read what the people around you are reading, you look for what you need in all the wrong places. But then you *grow up*. Beauvoir's mature work mentions these orientalist writers, I think, largely for the same reason the story of the captive king figures in *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*: because she outgrew them.

An even more obscure example of this "self-cleansing" in *The Second Sex* relates to Jean-Richard Bloch's 1925 novel, *La nuit kurde*. After describing the inextricable mixture of love and hate that characterizes men's sexual myth of Woman (lover and mother, representative of their own fleshly contingence and thus their own finitude), Beauvoir says, introducing a very long quotation: "A revealing text where we will find a synthesis of almost all these myths is the scene where Jean-Richard Bloch in *La nuit kurde* describes young Saad's sexual encounter with a woman older than himself, but still beautiful, in the course of the sack of a city."[184] Now, in her memoirs, Beauvoir describes her mother discovering *La nuit kurde* among her adolescent reading, leafing through it, and turning pale.[185] And Mme. de Beauvoir was right, for once: the book is vile. It is a lyrical but lurid fantasy involving a variety of racial mythologies: a half-Kurdish, half-Christian hero, somewhere in Asia Minor (?), carries out rape, pillage, and cannibalism against the Greek Christian village where his beloved lives. The narrative is prefaced by a declaration of extreme French nationalism on the part of the author, and concludes with a breathless "farewell to Asia," making the geographical "outsourcing" of sexual fantasy absolutely explicit. It is easy enough to see what made Maman feel faint, and also easy to see why this would, during Beauvoir's period of imaginative revolt against the stifling atmosphere of her home and the Cours Desir, have seemed like a point in its favor.[186]

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[184] "Un texte significatif où nous allons trouver une synthèse de presque tous ces mythes, c'est celui où Jean-Richard Bloch dans *La nuit kurde* décrit les étreintes du jeune Saad avec une femme plus âgée que lui, mais encore belle, au cours du sac d'une ville" (*DS* 1:274).

[185] *MJFR* 313.

[186] "I was in exactly the same position as these disoriented young men from good families; I wanted to separate myself from the class I belonged to, but where, then, was there to go? … I vowed allegiance to the cult of Disquiet [l'Inquiétude]…. I was just as quick to embrace Immoralism. Of course, I did not approve of people stealing out of self-interest or jumping into bed just for pleasure; but I was unflinchingly prepared to accept all kinds of vices, rapes, assassinations, as long as they were gratuitous acts, acts of desperation and revolt—and, needless to say, imaginary. Doing evil, that was the most radical way to repudiate any complicity with respectable people." [J'étais exactement dans la même situation que ces fils de famille désaxés; je me séparais de la classe à laquelle j'appartenais:

It is harder to understand why the grown-up Beauvoir would have found this bizarre fantasy of enduring interest, even as a source of "myths," powerful (wrong) visions of women. From the very few critics who have taken an interest in Bloch, I have learned that his early work deals with questions of anti-Semitism and Jewish assimilation in bourgeois France, and that he became a passionate Zionist, and later a communist writer, praised by Aragon.[187] None of which sheds much light on *La nuit kurde*, and in particular on what I must simply call racism of a disturbingly sexualized sort.[188] The book is the fantasy product of an identity crisis on the part of its author, who had seen no more of the Arab world than Boris Vian saw of America, but who nonetheless (over and over and over) attributes what someone says or does, down to the most minute physical detail or trembling nuance of feeling, directly (and explicitly) to that person's racial heritage.

However, apart from the book's title, there's nothing *in Beauvoir's quotation* that situates what it describes anywhere on Earth—and the entwined, vibrating bodies involved are not racialized in any way. What we see is pretty simply a sex-murder, and Beauvoir quotes not with tweezers but with scissors, a habit of hers with which we are by now familiar. I think we are simply meant to be fascinated and appalled by the extent to which lust and woman-hating can fuse into a single impulse.

Parshley seems to have had the same response to *La nuit kurde* as Beauvoir's mother did: he simply left the whole thing out, and for once it's hard to blame him. In fact, I must confess that Bloch's book is so repellent that I have been unable to read it through from cover to cover. Every page drips with sexual

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où aller? ... Je me vouai à l'Inquiétude.... Je ne mis pas moins d'empressement à embrasser l'immoralisme. Certes, je n'approuvai pas qu'on volât par intérêt ni qu'on s'ébattît dans un lit pour le plaisir; mais s'ils étaient gratuits, désespérés, révoltés—et bien entendu imaginaires—j'encaissais sans broncher tous les vices, les viols et les assassinats. Faire le mal, c'était la manière la plus radicale de répudier toute complicité avec les gens de bien (*MJFR* 270).]

[187] See Jean Albertini, "Jean-Richard Bloch, de l'affaire [Dreyfus] à *La nuit kurde*," and Michel Trebitsch, "'De la situation faite à l'écrivain juif dans le monde moderne': Jean-Richard Bloch, entre identité littérature et engagement." These scholars have convinced me that Bloch was, in fact, a complex and interesting writer, and a sincerely engaged man of the left (much as might be argued for Boris Vian). But neither scholar has much good to say for *La nuit kurde*, which the always cogent and insightful Trebitsch compares to an "OVNI," a UFO. At best it can be situated, and explained, as a partial allegory for the uniquely torturous position occupied at that period by "assimilated" Jewish writers in a virulently anti-Semitic culture. An explanation, but not an excuse.

[188] He also published a *récit de voyage* called *Première journée à Rufisque*, which apparently takes up homosexual questions described by Paul Renard as "épineuses et choquantes," thorny and disturbing (Paul Renard, "Jean-Richard Bloch," 47).

feeling, and scenes proceed at a glacial pace in order to emphasize this. It is very much a young man's book.[189] In this case, the young man happens to be a kind of "tragic mulatto," since his mother was a Christian, and (stereotype piled on stereotype) racial currents are fighting themselves out *within* the hero, as well as between the nomadic group to which he (uneasily) belongs and the Nestorian Christians in the town where his beloved lives.[190] I cannot really give an account of "what the book is trying to say." Like Vian's, it was cobbled together from other books, rather than informed by actual knowledge.[191] As such, it reveals a great deal about what fantasies were received as "authentic" at a certain time—or at least authentic enough to sell. But I do not think it tells us anything much about Beauvoir, who simply seems to have unzipped it from the cultural context and used it to illustrate *something else*: the close approach, in the structure of male fantasy, between sex and death. The reason it is quoted at such length is—excuse my French—*to show how fucked up this is*. And if the response is, "but, Madame, this is *typique*," her response would be: "right, my point exactly."

But one is always more influenced than one thinks. On the very next page she returns to cultural comparison, with the same confusing mixture of synchrony and diachrony we saw in the history section, some of the same points, and some of the same problems.

> Many different attitudes are available for the man, as he may emphasize one aspect or another of the carnal drama. If a man does not have the idea that his life is unique, if he is not concerned with his singular destiny, he does not fear death and accepts his animal nature with joy. Among Muslims, woman is reduced to a lowly condition because the feudal structure of society permits no recourse to the State against the family, on account of religion which, expressing the warrior ideal of this civilization, has dedicated man directly to death and deprives woman of her magic: what need he fear, who is ready to plunge from one moment to the next into the voluptuous orgies of the Mohammedan paradise? The man can thus calmly enjoy woman with no need of defense, either against

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[189] Young Saad has an awful lot in common with such French juvenile heroes as Marcel Arland's Étienne or even Benjamin Constant's Adolphe: the case could be made that this is, in fact, a book about France, and that Beauvoir was right to disregard the setting.

[190] Those who wish to claim Bloch as an important and neglected twentieth-century writer tend to understand this as a tortured reflection on the situation of the Jewish writer in France.

[191] Albertini ("Jean-Richard Bloch, de l'affaire à *La nuit kurde*," 251) says it was built around a *fait divers* ("human interest story") Bloch read by chance in the newspapers in 1920.

> himself or against her. The stories of the *Thousand and One Nights* regard her as a source of creamy delight in the same way as fruits, preserves, opulent cakes, perfumed oils. Today the same kindly sensuality can be found among many Mediterranean peoples…[192]

The examples which follow are from a modern Italian novel, but I think it is possible that what makes least sense in this paragraph bleeds over from the confused imaginary of *La nuit kurde*. However, this is merely the opening salvo in a paragraph that runs for no fewer than five solid pages without drawing breath. I simply cannot quote it, but after this brief introduction to Oriental "bienveillance" toward women, the "on the other hand" part—everything that is vile about the *Christian* view of women (quotes from Tertullian, etc.)—takes up fully four of those pages. The point is the paradox. Eastern and Southern peoples subjugate women socially and politically, but treat them with appreciation as sexual partners; Christianity pretends to elevate woman to the status of a human being, but this is a dirty trick: she is still reduced to a debased and hateful Other by her association with the corruptions of the flesh. This is equally true of all that follows in Christianity's wake, for instance, psychoanalysis.

> Facing [the woman], man feels the strongest conviction of his own fleshly passivity. Woman is a vampire, a slut, an eater and drinker of men; her sex organ feeds gluttonously upon his. Certain psychoanalysts have tried to give a scientific basis to these fantasies: supposedly all the pleasure woman derives from intercourse would come from symbolically castrating the male and appropriating his penis. But it seems that these theories themselves call out to be psychoanalyzed, and that the doctors who invented them have projected their own ancestral terrors.[193]

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[192] "Beaucoup d'attitudes sont ici possibles à l'homme, selon qu'il met l'accent sur tel ou tel aspect du drame charnel. Si un homme n'a pas l'idée que la vie est unique, s'il n'a pas le souci de sa destinée singulière, s'il ne redoute pas la mort, il acceptera joyeusement son animalité. Chez les musulmans, la femme est réduite à un état d'abjection à cause de la structure féodale de la société qui ne permet pas le recours à l'État contre la famille, à cause de la religion qui, exprimant l'idéal guerrier de cette civilisation, a voué directement l'homme à la Mort et a dépouillé la femme de sa magie: que craindrait sur terre celui qui est prêt à se plonger d'une seconde à l'autre dans les voluptueuses orgies du paradis mahométan? L'homme peut donc tranquillement jouir de la femme sans avoir à se défendre contre soi-même, ni contre elle. Les contes des *Mille et une nuits* la regardent comme une source d'onctueuses délices aux même titre que les fruits, les confitures, les gâteaux opulents, les huiles parfumées. On retrouve aujourd'hui cette bienveillance sensuelle chez beaucoup de peuples méditerranéens" (*DS* 1:276).

[193] "C'est en face d'elle que l'homme éprouve avec le plus d'évidence la passivité de sa propre chair. La femme est vampire, gouge, mangeuse, buveuse; son sexe se nourrit gloutonnement

Yes, evidently. You know, it's really tough for me to see this as a progress narrative. There hasn't been any progress.

7 Pour en finir avec Montherlant

The "Oriental" sexual appreciation of women makes a final appearance in Beauvoir's discussion of Henri de Montherlant, a deservedly forgotten Fascist writer,[194] whose attitude toward women was as violent and domineering as his racism was glaring. Montherlant gets his own chapter in the part of the myth section given over to "myths of women in five authors." As I said in my discussion of Surrealism, these chapters often feel skippable, but they are important because they show that "myths" are still with us in the modern age, and because by close-reading male writers who are usually viewed as representing divergent, even opposite, literary "schools," and nonethless drawing remarkably similar conclusions, Beauvoir creates an implicit category of, well, masculinist writing. Entering the arena of combat about what literature should be, and do, she attacks her living compatriots, and condemns them out of their own mouths. As Susan Suleiman showed for the chapter on André Breton, Beauvoir's method is "death by citation"—actually taking seriously what men say their ideas about women are, actually *listening* to them, could be enough to bring on a rousing cry of "goodbye to all that." (In the words of a recent meme: "When someone tells you who they are, believe them.") Margaret Zimmerman sees this chapter in particular as a "mise à mort" or execution which harks back to Christine de Pizan and the *querelle des femmes* and looks forward to the feminist critiques of the 1970s.[195] Montherlant's vision of women as monstrous destroyers of all that is virile and valuable is exposed and mocked as a self-aggrandizing fantasy: the emperor has no clothes, and his despisal of the feminine is revealed as a fear of confronting his equals, a fear of the real.

In this chapter it becomes even clearer that when Beauvoir speaks of "the Oriental attitude" toward women, she is speaking of a Western fantasy. The "Oriental male" here is not simply a foil for any Westerner, he is specifically a

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du sexe mâle. Certains psychanalystes ont voulu donner des bases scientifiques à ces imaginations: tout le plaisir que la femme tire du coït viendrait de ce qu'elle châtre symboliquement le mâle et s'approprie son sexe. Mais il semble que ces théories elles-mêmes demandent à être psychanalysées et que les médecins qui les inventèrent y aient projeté des terreurs ancestrales" (*DS* 1:279–80).

[194] For some good background on French fascism in the realm of letters, see Richard Golsan, *French Writers and the Politics of Complicity: Crises of Democracy in the 1940s and 1990s*.

[195] Margarete Zimmerman, "Le mythe de la femme et les écrivains: Montherlant ou le pain du dégoût," in Galster, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 192.

foil to Montherlant, who believes (wrongly) that he has inserted himself into the tradition of the *Thousand and One Nights*.

> Women's appropriate role, according to Montherlant, is to be purely flesh. He approves of the Oriental attitude: as an object of pleasure, the weaker sex has a place on Earth, a humble place it is true, and yet a worthwhile one, justified by the pleasure the male derives from her and by that pleasure alone. The ideal woman is perfectly stupid and perfectly submissive; she is always ready to receive the man, asking nothing in return. Such a one is Douce, who Alban [the hero of Montherlant's *Le songe*], appreciates when it suits him, "Douce, admirably foolish and more desirable the more foolish she is; when not making love she is useless, and then he gently but firmly avoids her." Such a one also is the little Arab Radidja, a peaceful love-beast who docilely accepts pleasure, and money. Such, we imagine, was that "female animal" he came across on a Spanish railway train: "She seemed so brutish [*abruti*] that I began to desire her." The author explains, "what is so annoying about women is their claim to reason; when they concentrate on their animality, they begin to be superhuman."[196]

But Montherlant's disgust for women's bodies, and for the fear of his own flesh he experiences in their presence, reveal a more modern (and more Christian) attitude.

> However, Montherlant is not in the least an Oriental Sultan: to start with, he has no sensuality. He is far from delighting without a backward glance in "female animals": they are "sick, diseased, never entirely clean." The Oriental partakes voluptuously of woman and thus a carnal reciprocity is established between lovers: that is what we see in the ardent invocations

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[196] "Ce qui convient à la femme, c'est d'être purement chair. Montherlant approuve l'attitude orientale: en tant qu'objet de jouissance, le sexe faible a sur terre une place, humble sans doute, mais valable; il trouve une justification dans le plaisir qu'en tire le mâle et dans ce plaisir seul. La femme idéale est parfaitement stupide et parfaitement soumise; elle est toujours prête à accueillir l'homme, et ne lui demande jamais rien. Telle est Douce, qu'Alban apprécie à ses heures, 'Douce, admirablement sotte et toujours plus convoitée à mesure que plus sotte … inutile en dehors de l'amour et qu'il évite alors avec une douceur ferme.' Telle est la petite Arabe Radidja, tranquille bête d'amour qui accepte docilement plaisir et argent. Telle peut-on imaginer cette 'bête féminine' rencontrée dans un train espagnol: 'Elle avait l'air si abruti que je me suis mis à la désirer.' L'auteur explique: 'Ce qui est agaçant chez les femmes, c'est leur prétention à la raison; qu'elles exagèrent leur animalité, elles ébauchent le surhumain'" (*DS* 1: 325–26).

> of the Song of Songs, the tales of the *Thousand and One Nights*, and so many Arab poems to the glory of the beloved; some women are bad, of course; but others are delightful, and in their arms the sensual man abandons himself confidently, feeling no humiliation. Montherlant's hero, on the contrary, is always on the defensive: "To take without being taken, that is the only acceptable motto for the superior man's relation to woman."[197]

I cannot recognize, here, Markowitz's "generalized Oriental male, who cannot or will not rouse himself from his lethargic sensuality," and certainly Montherlant's modern *misreading* of the *Thousand and One Nights* is no improvement on the original: Beauvoir is arguing just the opposite.

The discussion also fails to confirm Markowitz's claim that "Beauvoir, a trenchant critic of the notions of the 'Jewish personality' and the 'black soul,' has nothing more to say about" this "Oriental male," nor do I see any purchase for the rather condescending concession with which she follows up: "After all, mainstream Western feminist discourse, even when questioning itself about race, has until recently lacked the sort of theoretical framework that could bring these remarks into sharp relief and suggest how to understand them."[198]

In fact, Beauvoir did have such a framework, as we saw in her discussion of the bad faith of *le colon* in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*; its main points are reprised here. In the last chapter of the myth section, which pulls together her previous arguments, she investigates the myth of woman's supposed "Mystery." She describes this as providing men with "an alibi which flatters both their laziness and their vanity,"[199] and as entirely oppressive to those who are seen as "mysterious" rather than as fully human. True, their status of dominated Other can lead women to play along with the game:

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[197] "Cependant Montherlant n'est en rien un Sultan oriental: il lui manque d'abord la sensualité. Il est loin de se délecter sans arrière-pensée des 'bêtes féminines'; elles sont 'malades, malsaines, jamais tout à fait nettes.' … L'Oriental goûte voluptueusement la femme et par là s'établit entre amants une réciprocité charnelle; c'est ce que manifestent les ardentes invocations du Cantique des cantiques, les contes des *Mille et Une Nuits*, et tant de poésies arabes à la gloire de la bien-aimée; certes, il y a de mauvaises femmes; mais il en est aussi de savoureuses, et l'homme sensuel s'abandonne à leurs bras avec confiance, sans s'en trouver humilié. Tandis que le héros de Montherlant est toujours sur la défensive: 'Prendre sans être pris, seule formule acceptable entre l'homme supérieur et la femme'" (*DS* 1:326).

[198] Markowitz, "Occidental Dreams," 273.

[199] "[U]n alibi qui flatte à la fois la paresse et la vanité" (*DS* 1:399).

> Sometimes, like all oppressed people, she deliberately conceals her real face: the slave, the servant, the *indigène*, all those who depend on the caprices of a master have learned to meet him with a changeless smile or an enigmatic impassivity, carefully hiding their real feelings and their real activities. Woman too is taught from adolescence to lie to men, to be cunning, to sidestep the issue.[200]

But the question is deeper. "Quite apart from any secrecy that comes from dissimulation, there is a mystery of the Black, the Yellow [*Jaune*], insofar as they are considered absolutely as the inessential Other."[201]

I suppose Markowitz can be forgiven for not noticing the word "Jaune" amid so many densely argued pages. But the idea that Beauvoir "lacked" the right "sort of theoretical framework" to understand her own remarks…? It might be better simply to accept that, as Toril Moi has shown for other matters, Beauvoir's questions were not ours. Her framework was not missing, but different. What was it? Beauvoir notes that not all cultural differences are seen as mysterious:

> Note that the American citizen, whom the average European finds deeply disconcerting, is nonetheless not considered "mysterious"; we say, more modestly, that we just don't understand him. Thus, while women don't always "understand" men, there is no "masculine mystery." Rich America, and the male, are on the side of the Master, and Mystery is a property of the slave.[202]

It is a question of relative social power—as she says a bit earlier, there is "an infrastructure of feminine mystery which is of an economic order"[203]—and she provides a class analysis which cuts across cultural boundaries:

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[200] "[I]l arrive que, comme tous les opprimés, elle dissimule délibérément sa figure objective; l'esclave, le serviteur, l'indigène, tous ceux qui dépendent des caprices d'un maître ont appris à lui opposer un immuable sourire ou une énigmatique impassibilité; leurs vrais sentiments, leurs vraies conduites ils les cachent soigneusement. À la femme aussi on apprend depuis l'adolescence à mentir aux hommes, à ruser, à biaiser" (*DS* 1:402).

[201] "[I]l y a, par-delà le secret que crée leur dissimulation, un mystère du Noir, du Jaune, en tant qu'ils sont considérés absolument comme l'Autre inessentiel" (*DS* 1:403).

[202] "Il faut remarquer que le citoyen américain qui déconcerte profondément l'Européen moyen n'est cependant pas considéré comme 'mystérieux': plus modestement on assure qu'on ne le comprend pas; ainsi la femme ne 'comprend' pas toujours l'homme, mais il n'y a pas de mystère masculin; c'est que la riche Amérique, le mâle, sont du côté du Maître et que le Mystère est propriété de l'esclave" (*DS* 1:403).

[203] "[U]ne infrastructure du mystère féminin qui est d'ordre économique" (*DS* 1:401).

> Thus we see that myth is mostly explained by the use men make of it. The myth of woman is a luxury. It can only appear if man escapes the urgent grip of his needs; when relationships are more concretely lived, they are less idealized. The fellah of ancient Egypt, the rural Bedouin, the medieval artisan, the workingman today has, through the rigors of work and poverty, too specific a relationship with the particular woman who is his companion to gild her with magical powers to help or harm. It is the eras, and the classes, which have sufficient leisure to dream that have built the dark and the gleaming statues of femininity. But luxury too has its uses; these dreams are imperiously driven by vested interests.[204]

This sort of analysis should by now feel familiar.

Where Beauvoir's hatchet job on Montherlant was tending was towards her general theory of domination, which applied to the question of men and women but did not stop there (and as we have seen did not originate there). Montherlant's heroes first render women abject and then despise them; this is also the attitude of the author himself, not just toward women but toward the "weak" generally, as can be seen in his denunciations of the vanquished French, his collaboration with Vichy, his worship of Force, and his contempt for those who have been defeated simply *because* they have lost. As she says, he sums up this attitude himself, in *Solstice de juin*, where he describes pissing on a nest of caterpillars, choosing with a lordly power to save some from the fire—those who show some "fight"—and to let the rest perish. (As with the Claudel poem I discussed above, Beauvoir expects her readers to be familiar with this infamous passage and does not quote or really explain it.) The scene, she says, expresses the same capricious domination Montherlant's heroes show for women, having first reduced them to the status of animals; it is the same contempt the whites of Georgia and Alabama show to the Blacks, the same "avilissement" and dehumanization the Nazis practiced in concentration camps. And "there is nothing accidental," she says, about this parallel: "Montherlant's admiration for the Nazis is well known."[205] The rest of the chapter goes on to document this, to call out his hypocrisy and mock him for seeing his own abasement before the victors as implying that he partakes of their superior force, rather than revealing his own cowardice.

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[204] "Ainsi nous voyons que le mythe s'explique en grande partie par l'usage que l'homme en fait. Le mythe de la femme est un luxe. Il ne peut apparaître que si l'homme échappe à l'urgente emprise de ses besoins; plus des rapports sont concrètement vécus, moins ils sont idéalisés. Le fellah de l'ancienne Égypte, le paysan bédouin, l'artisan du Moyen Age, l'ouvrier contemporain ont dans les nécessités du travail et de la pauvreté des rapports trop définis avec la femme singulière qui est leur compagne pour la parer d'une aura faste ou néfaste. Ce sont les époques et les classes à qui étaient accordés les loisirs de rêver qui ont dressé les statues noires et blanches de la féminité. Mais le luxe a aussi une utilité; ces rêves étaient impérieusement dirigés par des intérêts" (*DS* 1:404).

Margaret Zimmerman notes that Beauvoir moves from Montherlant's attitude toward insects and women to the Southern racists and the Nazis with a simple "ainsi" (thus)—"an argument that today seems a little 'facile.'"[206] But it would not have seemed facile to readers for whom French collaboration with the occupiers was still a gaping wound, who remembered that the journal *Je suis partout*—to which Montherlant contributed—had called for the murder of Jews, and pointed out their hiding-places.[207]

8 But We Know So Much More about This Now

What Markowitz means by the "theoretical framework" which Beauvoir lacked but which we, luckily, have, is perhaps exemplified by Emily Apter's well-known article, “Female Trouble in the Colonial Harem,” to which I referred earlier. Apter opens with two epigraphs. The first is from *The Second Sex*:

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[205] "La clé de cette attitude, c'est l'apologue des chenilles qui nous la fournit: quelle qu'en ait été l'intention cachée, il est par soi-même assez significatif. Compissant des chenilles, Montherlant s'amuse à en épargner certaines, à en exterminer d'autres; il accorde une pitié rieuse à celles qui s'acharnent à vivre et les laisse généreusement courir leur chance; ce jeu l'enchante. Sans les chenilles, le jet urinaire n'eût été qu'une excrétion; il devient instrument de vie et de mort; en face de l'insecte rampant, l'homme qui soulage sa vessie connaît la solitude despotique de Dieu; sans être menacé de réciprocité. Ainsi devant les bêtes féminines, le mâle, du haut de son piédestal, tantôt cruel, tantôt tendre, juste et capricieux tour à tour, donne, reprend, comble, s'apitoie, s'irrite; il n'obéit qu'à son bon plaisir; il est souverain, libre, unique. Mais il faut que ces bêtes ne soient que des bêtes; on les choisira à dessein, on flattera leurs faiblesses, on les traitera en bêtes avec tant d'acharnement qu'elles finiront bien par accepter leur condition. Ainsi les Blancs de Louisiane et de Géorgie s'enchantent des menus larcins et des mensonges des Noirs: ils se sentent confirmés dans la supériorité que leur confère la couleur de leur peau; et si l'un de ces nègres s'entête à être honnête, on l'en maltraitera davantage. Ainsi se pratiquait systématiquement dans les camps de concentration l'avilissement de l'homme: la race des Seigneurs trouvait dans cette abjection la preuve qu'elle était d'essence surhumaine.

Cette rencontre n'a rien d'un hasard. On sait assez que Montherlant admire l'idéologie nazie" (*DS* 1:333–34).

[206] "[U]ne argumentation qui paraît aujourd'hui quelque peu 'facile'" (Zimmerman, "Le mythe de la femme," 191).

[207] Montherlant still has his literary defenders, but the guilt Beauvoir alludes to is documented in enormous and convincing detail in Golsan, *French Writers and the Politics of Complicity*. On *Je Suis Partout*, see also Alice Kaplan, *The Collaborator: The Trial and Execution of Robert Brassilach*, especially 32–4. Similar parallels between Fascism and misogyny had been drawn by Woolf in *Three Guineas*, written "with the sound of guns in [our] ears" (2).

> He takes great pride in his sexuality only in so far as it is a means of appropriating the Other—and this dream other is abolished as such, it is consumed and destroyed: only the Sultan in *The Arabian Nights* has the power to cut off each mistress’s head when dawn has come to take her from his couch.

The other is from Hélène Cixous’ 1975 “Sorties,” from *La jeune née*.

> It is in writing, from woman and toward woman, and in accepting the challenge of the discourse controlled by the phallus, that woman will affirm woman somewhere other than in silence, the place reserved for her in and through the Symbolic. May she get out of booby-trapped silence! And not have the margin or the harem foisted on her as her domain!

After the epigraphs, Apter’s article proper opens as follows.

> In attempting to interpret Western projections of an “other” eroticism in French colonial fiction between 1870 and 1955, one becomes increasingly aware of the uneasy relationship between postcolonial theory and feminist psychoanalysis. Western feminists from Simone de Beauvoir and Hélène Cixous to Gayle Rubin and Sandra Lee Bartky have drawn on the language of apartheid, racism, and colonization to dramatize the world-historical situation of women. Economically and socially “enslaved,” sexually conquered as “other,” placed under the dominion of a despotic Super-phallus identified with the Orientalist sultan, their bodies “trafficked,” their voices quelled by the “silence of the harem,” feminist critics have qualified their subordination to a phallic regime through the language of colonialism.
>
> There are of course some obvious problems that come with this appropriation of Third World discourse for First World universalizing ends…[208]

Now, given Cixous’s deliberate self-positioning as the *antidote* to Beauvoir (a favor Beauvoir returned), the choice of epigraphs could be seen as what Tina Chanter was complaining about, the lumping together of writers of disparate views to create a seamless feminist genealogy. And I'm not sure that the quotation from Beauvoir means what Apter wants it to mean, since in context, Beauvoir is showing the problem with a (Western) male fantasy.[209] But both quotations do use Eastern images (the sultan, the harem) to describe woman's unfreedom, and I guess that is close enough: Apter's opening section makes lucid sense, and cogently quotes the relevant authority, Gayatri Spivak, whose "French Feminism in an International Frame" "alerts us to the 'misfiring' of theoretical signifiers in an internationalist context, particularly when those terms blind the reader to cultural and class difference even as they open up to view the history of phallocentric injustice." "This all seems obvious to us now," Apter says, and indeed it does.[210]

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[208] Apter, “Female Trouble in the Colonial Harem,” 205.

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[209] See my discussion above. Beauvoir is explaining that an authentic sexual encounter poses risks for men, as well as for women, and that fantasies of "possession" are doomed to fail, by the very nature of the sexual act. "Now he will experience the strongest evidence for the ambiguity of his fleshly condition. He can only assume his sexuality with pride insofar as it is a means to appropriate the Other, and this dream of possession only ends in failure. In an authentic possession, the other as such is obliterated, it is consumed and destroyed; but only the Sultan of the *Thousand and One Nights* has the power to cut off the head of his mistresses as soon as dawn takes them from his bed; woman survives man's embraces, and thus she escapes him; as soon as he re-opens his arms, his prey once again becomes a stranger to him; there she is, new, intact, ready to be possessed by a new lover, in the same ephemeral manner." [Mais c'est alors qu'il va expérimenter avec la plus grande évidence l'ambiguïté de sa condition charnelle. Il n'assume orgueilleusement sa sexualité qu'en tant qu'elle est un mode d'appropriation de l'Autre: et ce rêve de possession n'aboutit qu'à un échec. Dans une authentique possession, l'autre s'abolit comme tel, il est consommé et détruit: seul le sultan des *Mille et une nuits* a le pouvoir de trancher la tête de ses maîtresses dès que l'aube les retire de son lit; la femme survit aux étreintes de l'homme et par là même elle lui échappe; dès qu'il a ouvert les bras, sa proie lui redevient étrangère; la voilà neuve, intacte, toute prête à être possédée par un nouvel amant d'une manière aussi éphémère (*DS* 1:271).]

[210] For the record, the main target of Spivak's polemic was Julia Kristeva and other post-structuralist French feminists whose work entered the Anglophone world with the 1980 anthology, *New French Feminisms*, edited by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron. Spivak mentions Beauvoir only once: to note (giving credit to Michèle le Dœuff's "Simone de Beauvoir and Existentialism") that the "new French feminists" were making a deliberate break with Beauvoir, just as Althusser and Derrida were writing in opposition to Sartre.

In 1981, when Spivak's article appeared, I was a young graduate student, intimidated by "Theory"; finding it largely incomprehensible, I set the article aside, with the thought that I might return to it when I was older and smarter. Well, I'm older … and I must admit that parts of it remain opaque to me, for reasons that are probably not the author's fault. However, I find myself in hearty agreement with the parts of it that I *do* understand, notably Spivak's "dissatisfaction with the presupposition of the necessarily revolutionary potential of the avant-garde, literary or philosophical" (169), and with her long excoriation of Kristeva's *Des Chinoises* as incoherent, speculative, nostalgic, and condescending.

What seems odd to me, though, is that Apter never returns to the questions about "appropriation of Third World discourse for First World universalizing ends" with which she began. Her article's real concern is to argue, against Alain Grosrichard, that "the sexual fantasies codified in harem texts may be used to construe an antiphallic, gynarchic model of 'what a woman wants' mediated by cultural difference." She calls for a rethinking of psychoanalysis in the light of these fantasies, and a recuperation of women writers like Isabelle Eberhardt and Myriam Harry as *feminist* orientalizing writers, who appropriated harem themes "in a feminocentric fashion." She describes this as "subversive"—and the article ends with a discussion of "jouissance" under the sign of Irigaray, Montrelay, and the "new Italian feminism" described by Teresa de Lauretis. This is certainly extremely interesting and may well be quite right (having not read the authors in question, I'm in no position to know). My question is this: how do the two parts of the article fit together? They are joined by a disclaimer, of sorts:

> While I do not pretend to have escaped in my own theoretical framings some of the very methodological pitfalls that I have outlined here, I hope at the very least to have introduced a measure of critical self-consciousness into the discussion of post-colonial interpretation.[211]

This is obviously better than the prophylactic "footnote one" many writers at the "Spelman moment" hastily applied to almost-finished books that had only discussed white women—"more research would be needed to demonstrate whether my conclusions apply across," etc., etc. And both parts of Apter's article are usefully thought-provoking. But I am still having trouble harmonizing the two parts of the argument, absent any synthesizing return at the end. If writers like Eberhardt and Harry can be forgiven for their (quite overt) orientalism, what exactly remains unforgiveable about Beauvoir?

Apter's is a fine article, and I have learned a great deal from her work. My question is what these ritual opening gestures (and they are very familiar ones) really amount to. Does the signifier "Spivak" function as a kind of "open sesame" which gives permission for her argument that some of the texts she is interested in are actually *not* all that bad, or at least, that the "harem" can be read in more than one way and was sometimes a source of pleasure (if not of

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Indeed, now that I have read *Des Chinoises* (and not simply the rather anodyne excerpts that appeared in Marks and de Courtivron and in *The Kristeva Reader*), Spivak seems if anything to have understated her case.

[211] Apter, "Female Trouble in the Colonial Harem," 206.

freedom)? (A similar "open sesame" would now require other names: Anzaldúa, Mohanty, Lugones, and so on.) There's nothing at all unreasonable in this. It just seems unfair to blame Beauvoir for not making those ritual gestures, especially since it's not her fault that the gestures she *does* make (such as body-slamming Claudel and Montherlant) are inaudible to us now.

But since the door to the harem is now, so to speak, open, let me return to the question of how "Oriental" the harem, by the middle of the twentieth century, even was. I don't want to make too much of the fact that the Collins Robert dictionary now translates the phrase "entouré d'un veritable harem" as "surrounded by a bevy of girls":[212] that it has become a "dead metaphor" doesn't mean it's not objectionable. However, for what it's worth, it's possible to collect instances of the word "harem" in Beauvoir's work that don't reference the East at all directly. In the "Woman in Love" chapter of *The Second Sex*, the term is applied in the middle of a long discussion of Victor Hugo and Juliette Drouet—he confined her to a small room and forbade her to go out.[213] In *Les mandarins*, Paule uses the term to make a joke about Claudie Belzunce and her group of male lovers, including Scriassine.[214] In *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947*, the harem crops up in the course of a discussion of whether American women really are freer than French women, or only think they are; she concludes that the "demanding and defiant attitude" (*attitude de revendication et de défi*) she observes in American *bourgeoises* is simply another mask for their weakness.

> Whether she is docile or demanding, man remains the king; he is the essential and woman the inessential; the praying mantis is the antithesis of the submissive harem servant, but both depend on the male. The dialectic of master and slave proves true in this domain as well: the woman who sets herself up as an idol is, in reality, enslaved to her worshippers.[215]

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[212] *Collins Robert French Dictionary*, 439.

[213] "Despite her efforts to be of service to her idol, the hours were too empty; the seventeen thousand letters she wrote to Hugo, at a pace of three or four hundred each year, testify to that. Between the master's visits she could only kill time. The worst horror, in the condition of the harem woman, is that her days are deserts of boredom; when the male makes no use of the object she is for him, she is nothing." [Malgré ses efforts pour rendre service à l'idole, les heures étaient trop vides: les dix-sept mille lettres qu'elle écrivit à Hugo au rythme de trois cents à quatre cents chaque année en témoignent. Entre les visites du maître, elle ne pouvait que tuer le temps. La pire horreur, dans la condition de la femme de harem, c'est que ses jours sont des déserts d'ennui: quand le mâle n'use pas de cet objet qu'elle est pour lui, elle n'est absolument plus rien (*DS* 2:572).]

[214] *Les mandarins*, 1:300.

[215] "[À] travers la docilité ou l'exigence, l'homme demeure roi; c'est lui l'essentiel, et la femme l'inessentiel; la mante religieuse est l'antithèse de la servante soumise du harem: tous

Here she describes the *French* women, who smile and put up with the moods of their men (*toujours prêtes à sourire à leurs mâles et à supporter leurs humeurs*), as submitting to the harem; the supposed "praying mantises" are, um, us, or at least us as we were at mid-century. And finally, in *Faut-il brûler Sade?* Beauvoir uses the term to describe the situation of Justine and her companions.[216] (The issue here is complex, and I don't want to get off track; but once again the issue seems to be, not "harem" so much as "enfermée.") Surely if a harem can be imposed, not just on French women, but *on French women by Christian monks*, we could declare the term free of an automatic taint of orientalism, which would release us to listen to what Beauvoir is actually saying.

The fact is, we are hypersensitive now to that one word, "harem." We are no longer in the place where Lorraine Hansberry could extend particular approval to Beauvoir's description of the Tunisian women in the cavelike darkness, or indeed where Beverly Guy-Sheftall could allude to the fact that Anna Julia Cooper "mentioned Muslim harems and the Chinese practice of footbinding on the first page of *The Voice of the South*" as a sign that Cooper, and other early Black feminists, were "aware of the differential experiences of women" and aiming toward "a broad feminist movement to end *all* kinds of domination." Guy-Sheftall reads this as a sign of Cooper's internationalism, which I agree with her it was;[217] I'd be tempted to make the same argument for Hansberry, though the passage feels unfinished to me.[218] Could we get back to a place where a gesture of … well, *cosmopolitanism* (?) would feel refreshing rather than setting off alarm bells? (Are there alternatives to the hermeneutics of finger-pointing?)

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deux dépendent du mâle. La dialectique hégélienne du maître et de l'esclave se vérifie aussi dans ce domaine: la femme qui se veut idole est en vérité asservie à ses adorateurs" (*AJ* 454). See Ruhe, "Femmes, juifs, noirs," 88, for further discussion of this passage.

[216] "Faut-il brûler Sade?," *Privilèges* (1955), 72.

[217] "Introduction," *Words of Fire*, 10. Guy-Sheftall also mentions the Pan-African Congress, organized in Paris in 1919 by W.E.B. DuBois, at which Cooper spoke, and traces other Pan-Africanist strands within the Black women's club movement.

[218] Hansberry writes that "when one speaks comparatively of anything, the compared is liable to assume whatever dimensions its opposite does not possess. As long as an observer is able to report passages like the following speaking of our own times, it becomes clearer on what rests the celebrated 'equality' allegedly enjoyed by the American woman…." (And here she quotes, from Parshley, Beauvoir's recollection of the cave-dwellers, "silent and veiled.") Hansberry continues: "Not to even become involved in the variants on the place of women which the world's religions may or may not alter to one degree or another as is the case with Islam, or Christianity, Catholicism or Protestantism, etc., we may still suppose that woman condemned to stay indoors through the hours of light would have been of little use in helping to clear the American fields or sowing grain" ("Simone de Beauvoir and *The Second Sex*: An American Commentary," 136–37).

But I certainly wouldn't feel all that comfortable using the term "harem" myself without a good deal of hedging. And I don't think Beauvoir would have had much truck with Apter's argument that the harem was a "gynophilic" space, wherever that harem was located (on Earth, in people's heads, everywhere or nowhere). In volume 2 Chapter IX, "Situation et caractère de la femme," she says

> Many of the faults for which [women] are reproached—mediocrity, shyness, pettiness, laziness, frivolity, and servility—simply express the fact that the horizon is blocked for them. Woman, it is said, is sensual, she wallows in immanence; but first she was confined to it. The slave imprisoned in a harem does not feel any morbid passion for rose jelly and perfumed baths: she has to kill time somehow; inasmuch as the woman is stifling in a dismal gynaeceum—brothel or bourgeois home—she will take refuge in material comfort; moreover, if she avidly pursues sexual pleasure, it is often because she has been deprived of it.[219]

(The preceding paragraph ended, "When women are called to concrete action, when they identify themselves with specified goals, they are as strong and brave as men.")[220] Whatever the "gynophilic" pleasures available to the harem woman, *or* the bourgeois *femme d'intérieur*, may be, Beauvoir is calling on us to leave them behind.

9 Harem Trouble 2.0: The Veil

At one time I had intended to conclude this chapter by using Beauvoir's theory to get to grips with French debates over the banning of Muslim headscarves.

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[219] "Beaucoup des défauts qu'on leur reproche: médiocrité, petitesse, timidité, mesquinerie, paresse, frivolité, servilité, expriment simplement le fait que l'horizon leur est barré. La femme est, dit-on, sensuelle, elle se vautre dans l'immanence; mais d'abord on l'y a enfermée. L'esclave emprisonnée dans un harem n'éprouve aucune passion morbide pour la confiture de roses, les bains parfumés: il faut bien qu'elle tue le temps; dans la mesure où la femme étouffe dans un morne gynécée—maison close ou foyer bourgeois—elle se réfugiera aussi dans le confort et le bien-être; d'ailleurs, si elle poursuit avidement la volupté, c'est bien souvent qu'elle en est frustrée" (*DS* 2:491).

[220] "Quand on appelle concrètement les femmes à l'action, quand elles se reconnaissent dans les buts qu'on leur désigne, elles sont aussi hardies et courageuses que les hommes" (*DS* 1:491).

But the writing of this book has been slow, and events have overtaken it.[221] What now seems clear (at least to me) is that "the veil" is not one thing, that as an abstraction it is dangerous, that as part of a "mobile army of metaphors" it may be empowering or the opposite, that feminist as well as anti-feminist ideologies are hidden in its folds, that its meaning may be as individual as the woman who wears it, that the power structure which imposes it and the power structure which bans its wearing have an awful lot in common. To borrow again from Annabelle Golay's excellent article: "In Fanon's terms, the veil has 'a historical dynamism.'"[222] It is tempting to ask where Beauvoir would have stood in these debates, if she had lived long enough to participate in them; tempting, but probably dangerous. As she said in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, one can never know how one's project will be taken up by others. Still, as I said in my introduction, Beauvoir remains the terrain on which we play out our own arguments about feminism, about the history of feminism, and (in this case) about the relationship between gender and colonialism, since it is impossible to understand France's relationship to its non-white population today apart from its relation to its former colonies. (As British campaigners put it, "we are here because you were there.") And it may be illuminating to see how Beauvoir's legacy has been (once again) invoked to justify two irrevocably opposed and deeply held political positions.

At the height of the debate, Christine Delphy, who is Beauvoir's heir on the materialist side, published a book arguing against the headscarf ban, which she saw as racist and Islamophobic, similar to "feminist" arguments made by the American government in favor of the war in Iraq.[223] But at the Paris conference in January 2008 celebrating the centenary of Beauvoir's birth, the French organizers announced that a prize in Beauvoir's honor had been awarded to Ayaan Hirsi Ali, the self-styled "Voltaire noire," whose position appears to be that Muslim women *do* need saving, and that Western enlightenment values will rescue them from the backwardness and violence of Islam. Hirsi Ali is an enormously polarizing figure. At that time she was already controversial because, while a member of parliament in the Netherlands, she had supported restrictions on immigration, including opposing the law that had made it possible for her to gain asylum and then citizenship there herself as a refugee from Somalia. As a result of these public stances she had been embraced by thinkers who are clearly right-wing, such as the Hudson Institute in the US.[224]

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[221] For a good summary of the intractable issues involved, see Yasmin Rehman, "How have we come to this?" (reviewing Delphy, *Separate and Dominate: Feminism and Racism After the War on Terror*): "Very few issues attract as much attention or public discussion as the niqab or face veil. Is it a symbol of oppression or of minority women asserting their religious identity? In 2004, when France became the first country in Europe to introduce legislation banning the wearing of religious symbols in schools, the law was initially presented as a matter of *laïcité* and what it means to be French. This ban in schools was later extended to wearing of the hijab in public spaces in 2007. It was followed by a ban on face coverings in 2011 based on security concerns." See also Joan Scott, *The Politics of the Veil.*

[222] "Il existe donc, selon les termes de Fanon, 'un dynamisme historique du voile'" (Golay, "Féminisme et postcolonialisme," 412).

[223] Delphy, *Separate and Dominate*. See also the 2006 special double issue of *Nouvelles Questions Féministes*.

The prize committee was headed by Julia Kristeva, who also organized the conference. Despite Kristeva's earlier position in "Women's Time" that the Beauvoirian feminism of the "project" had been (or ought to be) superseded by a poetic restructuration of the Symbolic, now she seems to embrace Beauvoir's legacy, while continuing to disagree with a major part of it by insisting on women's "difference" as underwritten by a Lacanian Oedipus and rooted in "the maternal"—a disagreement that Beauvoir would hardly have considered trivial. Nonetheless, there she was. The prize committee also included Elisabeth Badinter, whose position on the question of "the maternal" is just the opposite of Kristeva's: Badinter's book, *Fausse route*, makes a strong critique of the maternalist and essentialist strain in French feminist thinking, and claims the mantle of Beauvoir in this (I think rightly, though she exaggerates Beauvoir's view); Kristeva is more accurate when she describes her own position on "the maternal" as a departure from, and a criticism of, Beauvoir, though her claim that her departure is an *advance* on Beauvoir is not one I can accept.[225] Given their opposite positions about essentialized and biologized "difference," it is hard for me to imagine how Kristeva and Badinter can sit down at the table together, but in affirming the heroic status of Ayaan Hirsi Ali they seem to have found common ground.

Kristeva's prize-giving speech endorsed some positions of Hirsi Ali's that raise red flags with respect to the racial and national situation of women (and men) in Europe today. Focusing on Beauvoir's prioritizing of "freedom," Kristeva noted that Hirsi Ali "has written numerous articles denouncing the dangers of communalism, which she considers an obstacle to integration, and calling for a period of Enlightenment for European Islam," and describes her as "a woman passionately engaged in favor of effective interaction between women of immigrant origin, especially Muslims, and European society."[226] Terms such as "integration" and "communalism" (*communautarisme*) may seem innocuous, but in context they are code words indicating Hirsi Ali's support for policies that have led to closed borders, lack of respect for cultural difference, and (it is at least arguable) Islamophobia. (And one might ask what "effective interaction" even means: on whose terms is this interaction to take place?)

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[224] The prize was also given to Taslima Nasreen, a less well-known writer who has also been critical of the Islamic milieu in which she was raised. See Kristeva, "Beauvoir aux risques de la liberté."

[225] Ibid. Kristeva's rather condescending statement (in her prize-giving speech) that Beauvoir did not have access to the insights of psychoanalysis seems particularly obtuse: as we've seen, she *did* have access to them and lucidly rejected their normalizing and biologically deterministic underpinnings. From the perspective of anyone convinced by Judith Butler's exposure in *Gender Trouble* of the heteronormative grounding of Lacan's theories and of their uptake by the "new French feminists," it would seem to be Kristeva who is "behind the times" here, but never mind.

Kristeva's position in the sphere of real-world politics (including feminist politics) has always been … difficult to map (to put it as charitably as I can).[227] But Elisabeth Badinter, who has a platform as a prominent public intellectual in France, has been an outspoken opponent of multiculturalism there. Elsa Dorlin points in particular to the fact that, when invited by French legal authorities to speak about the burka, Badinter called it the worst expression of sexism, saying "France has to protect women who want to wear *une jupe* (a skirt)."[228] Badinter has spoken, not just in defense of *laïcité* (state secularism) but in favor of specifically French values, of the "French exception" and "la France de souche," France at its origin, the rootstock of France.

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[226] "Elle est l'auteur de nombreux articles dénonçant les dangers du communautarisme, qu'elle considère comme un obstacle à l'intégration, et réclame pour l'Islam d'Europe une période des 'Lumières' … une femme passionnément engagée en faveur d'une interaction effective entre les femmes issues de l'immigration, en particulier musulmane, et la société européenne" (Kristeva, "Beauvoir aux risques de la liberté," 15).

[227] It is hard also to square this praise of the self-described "Black Voltaire" with the "concerted epistemic critique" of "Enlightenment rationality" through which Kristeva and her collaborators on *Tel Quel* rose to fame.

[228] Elsa Dorlin, "The Future of Intersectionality," delivered at 2009 Symposium at NYU titled "Feminism/s Without Borders?: Perspectives from France and the US." See also Thomas Lancelot, writing in *Le Monde*: "Nonetheless, [Badinter] has quite consistently declared: 'Frankly, for a long time, in mainstream [*de souche*] French society, whether Jewish or Christian, one cannot say that women are oppressed' (*L'Arche*, November-December 2003). Her honesty has the merit of drawing a line in the sand. What do French women have to complain about since they are neither oppressed nor disadvantaged? The feminist struggle is not addressed to them, but 'to the young women of the first generation of new arrivals, or young women of Maghrebi origin. It is for them that one must carry on the struggle.' So, patriarchy is still rife 'down there,' in Arab and African countries, or here at home but only on the outskirts (*banlieue*) among men and women who come from 'down there,' but not really 'here at home,' not in the French Republic." [Par ailleurs, conséquente avec elle-même, [Badinter] a déclaré: "*Franchement, depuis longtemps, dans la société française de souche, que ce soit le judaïsme ou le catholicisme, on ne peut pas dire qu'il y ait une oppression des femmes*" (*L'Arche*, novembre-décembre 2003). Sa franchise a le mérite de mettre les pieds dans le plat. De quoi se plaignent les Françaises puisqu'elles ne sont ni opprimées, ni discriminées? Le combat féministe ne s'adresse pas à elles mais "*aux jeunes femmes de la première génération de nouveaux arrivants, ou encore aux jeunes*

Now, the idea that some French people are "français de souche" (and that others are not) is a very old idea—it is Barrès, it is Maurras. It was used against Jews ("rootless cosmopolitans" that we were and are); it was what slapped Frantz Fanon in the face when he served in the French army; and it seems to be alive and well today. (Look, a Muslim!) It is a very powerful idea—even Simone Weil fell for it.[229] But Simone de Beauvoir, as we have seen, did not fall for it, and to use her name (and her legacy) to sanction it is a bit breathtaking.

Kristeva spoke of Beauvoir's commitment to freedom—the name of the prize, in fact, is "Le prix Simone de Beauvoir pour la liberté des femmes." And of course Beauvoir was unabashed in her support of "freedom," but to say so is merely to kick the can down the road, since "freedom" means quite a few different things: its mobilization by US foreign policy (remember "freedom fries"?) is particularly gruesome to contemplate. Kristeva was right also to say

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filles d'origine maghrébine. C'est pour elles qu'il faut le conduire" (ibid.). Le patriarcat sévirait donc ailleurs, "*là-bas*," dans les pays arabes et africains, en Iran et en Afghanistan, ou chez nous, mais seulement en banlieue chez les hommes et les femmes originaires de "*là-bas*," mais pas "*chez nous*," pas dans la République française (Lancelot, "Elisabeth Badinter fait fausse route.")]

See also Mehamed Amadeus Mack, *Sexagon: Muslims, France, and the Sexualization of National Culture*, 293: "Badinter is infamous, in some circles, for declaring that her conclusions about the 'fragility' of masculinities in Western society do not apply to men outside of Western civilizations, and that, if she calls for increased tolerance for the expression of masculinity at all, it is not for the excessive virilities of non-European men who haven't been subjected to the same 'emasculation.' This analysis echoes right-wing psychoanalyst Michel Schneider's comments on immigrant men." Badinter's concern for young Muslim women must be seen against the backdrop of her dismissal of many positions we would consider feminist—for instance, she denounced the Clarence Thomas hearings as a "witch hunt," and much of *Fausse route* makes arguments against so-called "victim feminism" that parallel those of Christina Hoff-Sommers and Katie Roiphe. This is also oddly connected to anti-Americanism: see Eric Fassin, "The Purloined Gender." (Fassin's quotation about Clarence Thomas comes from *Le Nouvel Observateur*, October 17–23, 1991). Among Badinter's many inconsistencies is her insistence that feminism itself is an American export and therefore "un-French." An English translation of *Fausse route* was published by Polity Press in 2006 (with the assistance of the French Ministry of Culture), under the title *Dead-End Feminism*. Or at least, this purports to be a translation, but it is 126 pages long, whereas the French original was 221 pages. I'm not sure any purpose would be served by going into this further, or explaining what a terrible book it indeed is.

[229] See Simone Weil, *L'enracinement*. Apparently even Léopold Senghor fell for it: David Macey describes him as "influenced by the nationalism of Maurice Barrès, who defined the French national identity in terms of fidelity to the land and its dead" (Macey, *Frantz Fanon*, 179).

that no one owns Beauvoir's legacy: "Whatever the merits of those who are inspired by the works of Simone de Beauvoir, no one, neither friend nor scholar, can stand in for her or claim a monopoly on them."[230] But as Michèle le Dœuff remarked in a different context, some things are just too much.[231] If Badinter's idea of "freedom" purports to be a reading of "what freedom is possible to the woman in a harem," it is a lamentable distortion.

Among those who were horrified on the spot by this misappropriation of Beauvoir's mantle was Beauvoir scholar Karen Vintges, who, since she is herself Dutch, had a more acute sense than most of those present of who Ayaan Hirsi Ali even was. Protesting the prize in a later article written with Bart van Leeuwen, Vintges argues forcefully against placing Beauvoir in the tradition of Enlightenment "liberal" thinking.[232] The question Vintges and van Leeuwen ask is "whether Beauvoir's work is open to a politics of difference from the position of oppressed or marginalized groups, or whether her work endorses liberal feminism, as claimed by Badinter and others."[233] And they make a good textual case for the former view. It is easy to find support for the authenticity of socially-grounded minority identities in *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947*, and to discover scorn for liberal constructions of the self in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*. As Vintges and van Leeuwen point out, Beauvoir there criticizes the Enlightenment dream of reason as "hollow"; absolute universal man, she says, exists nowhere, *nulle part*.[234] It must be said, too, though, that Beauvoir never abandoned belief in universal human *rights*, in the Amnesty International sense of human rights, and that for her as for most people, such rights include bodily autonomy and self-development.

But I think we can answer Badinter and Kristeva in a less abstract way. Whatever may be true in the abstract about "liberal individualism," *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* clearly requires us to inform ourselves about the *actual political stakes* of what we say and do, at the moment and in the place that we say and do it. The effect of awarding the prize was to legitimate Hirsi Ali as a feminist voice, and to ally international feminism with the forces of reaction. Beauvoir would never have endorsed Hirsi Ali because she would have found the idea of closed borders, and the argument for the superiority of European (read, white) culture morally, and historically, repugnant. Moreover, as I hope I have shown, Left and Right were meaningful terms to her, and she would have done the math, and come out with a different answer than Badinter's.

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[230] "[Q]uelles que soient les qualités de celles et ceux qui s'inspirent de l'œuvre de Beauvoir, personne (ni ami ni spécialiste) ne l'incarne ni n'en possède le monopole" (Kristeva, "Beauvoir aux risques de la liberté," 11).

[231] "In 1986, the Italian Communist Party asked me to lead a debate in Milan with Marisa Rodano on Simone de Beauvoir, in which Marisa was to say that *The Second Sex* is not a feminist book. I protested: of course, many misunderstandings of Simone de Beauvoir's work are possible, but that is just too much" (*Hipparchia's Choice*, 47).

[232] Bart van Leeuwen and Karen Vintges, "A Dream, Dreamed by Reason … Hollow Like All Dreams: French Existentialism and its Critique of Abstract Liberalism." See also Vintges, "Surpassing Liberal Feminism," and *A New Dawn for* The Second Sex*: Women's Freedom Practices in World Perspective*.

[233] van Leeuwen and Vintges, 655.

[234] PMA 162, *EA* 112.

In fairness, this is clearer now than it was in 2008, though all the signs were there.

Hirsi Ali is at present such a polarizing figure that I am unable to cite a neutral source about her and can only summarize the situation by giving a range of views. She has certainly stated publicly that Islam is an intrinsically violent religion and has endorsed the Huntingdon doctrine of the "clash of cultures"; this has endeared her to the American Enterprise Institute and other clearly right-wing groups in the US. She has repeatedly endorsed restrictions on immigration and requirements that immigrants assimilate to Western culture. Meanwhile, some on the left have gone as far as to assert that Hirsi Ali's powerfully moving story of her own abuse in the name of Islam (including a forced marriage from which she heroically escaped) is a fabrication.[235] The well-respected and usually reliable Southern Poverty Law Center accepts these claims, and includes Hirsi Ali (along with David Horowitz and Charles Murray) in its "Field Guide to Anti-Muslim Extremists." Both Blumenthal and the SPLC were vitriolically attacked at the time (2015) by Hirsi Ali herself, and she was supported by right-wing outlets such as the *National Review*, which attempted to demonize the SPLC. As I said, I am not in a position to independently judge any of this. Around the same time Rula Jebreal, writing in *Salon*, did not contest the facts of Hirsi Ali's own life story, but made a reasonable-sounding case that in the current political climate her views, and their prominence in mainstream media, were causing harm to moderate Muslims like herself. Her headline read: "Ayaan Hirsi Ali is dangerous: Why we must reject her hateful worldview. To endorse Hirsi Ali—as pundits everywhere from Fox News to network news have—insults and mocks a billion Muslims."

It would appear from recent coverage in mainstream media that Hirsi Ali has won her argument against those who question her story; she is still considered "mainstream" enough to have a platform from which she has attacked Western feminists, including in *The New York Times*. In 2017 she cancelled a book tour to Australia after a group of Muslim women there protested that she did not speak for them: according to the *Guardian*, the women had "criticized her for past descriptions of Muslim women as docile and irrational, accused her of using the language of white supremacists and profiting from 'an industry that exists to dehumanize Muslim women'"; Ali replied by accusing them of "'carrying water' for radical Islamic organizations like the Muslim Brotherhood, Islamic State and Boko Haram, and stated that 'Islamophobia is a manufactured term.'" Make what you will of all this: it's certainly clear what the stakes are.

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[235] See in particular Max Blumenthal, "Exposing Hirsi Ali's Latest Deception."

I am honestly not sure whether it is legitimate or not to say, hmm, the Southern Policy Law Center is against her, and she's been defended by the *National Review* … I'll go with the Left answer. But I *am* sure that it is a kind of reasoning with which Beauvoir would have been very comfortable: the ethical engagements one undertakes are undertaken *with others*, she says, and despite the importance of maintaining one's intellectual independence, it is no small matter to rethink such shared projects. The supposedly disinterested, disengaged intellectual who pretends to be above the fray ("both sides commit abuses … perhaps the truth lies somewhere in between … it's too early to judge") is a particular target of her scorn in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*.

However, it's easier to see why Hirsi Ali and Badinter are wrong than to decide what a reasonable feminist position would actually be. Beauvoir's theory can perhaps help us here, but only up to a point. Yasmin Rehman, in summing up the issues, quotes Meredith Tax in terms strikingly reminiscent of the dilemmas posed in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*:

> When US diplomats invoke the oppression of Muslim women to sanctify war, how do we practice feminist solidarity without strengthening Orientalism and neo-colonialism? When the US targets jihadis for assassination by drone, should human rights defenders worry about violence perpetrated by those same jihadis or focus on violations by the state?[236]

One answer to this particular question, based on Beauvoir's attitude during the Algerian crisis, might be that we should focus first on the wrong our own governments are doing, since that violence is undertaken in our names, whatever excuse may be given. Harder to answer is a question with a similar shape, as laid out by Traci West in her good article about Fanon:

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[236] Meredith Tax, *Double Bind: The Muslim Right, The Anglo-American Right, and Universal Human Rights*, quoted in Rehman, "How Have We Come to This." "Conversely," Rehman continues, "how does one raise the points discussed by Delphy with regard to the war on terror, drone strikes, Guantanamo, and the denial of any discussion about the real or perceived causes for terrorism, without feeding the Islamist agenda and reinforcing the Muslim victim narrative?"

> Because of the colonizer's campaign against it, the practice of wearing the veil became an important symbol of resistance within the struggle for independence. [Marie-Aimée] Hélie-Lucas articulates the problem that resulted for Algerian feminists who wanted to criticize this practice: "how, therefore, could we take up the veil as oppressive to women without betraying the nation and the revolution?"[237]

I think Beauvoir would have refused to answer this question, just as she refused to pass judgment on Richard Wright for refusing to support the war effort of the US government, or on the colonized people who did not fight alongside the Allies. Here both sides of the dilemma do have merit, the demands are indeed incompatible, and it is for *them* to decide. As *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* reminds us, there are no recipes.

But the veil in Algeria and the veil in France are different matters; and about the latter, she might well have felt the need to take a position, since it was, in fact, the actions of her own government that were in question. She would certainly have detected the hypocrisy and bad faith of a policy that, under the banner of "secularism" and civic education, banned Muslim "insignia" while continuing to permit the display of Christian and Jewish insignia—for example, the wearing of a cross around the neck. Her own secularism was absolute, and it was hard-won.[238] And overall, I think she would have agreed with Elsa Dorlin that "intersectionality should not be an alibi, or substitute for politics of resistance."[239] In a late interview with Hélène Wenzel, the latter raised the issue of women of color critiques, with particular reference to the issue of female genital mutilation. Here is the exchange.

> Wenzel: In the States over the last decade, there has been a large increase in the numbers of voices raised, and in the writings emerging, from women of color. Both individually and collectively, these loud, clear, and multiethnic voices have sought to remind us—white, predominantly university women who too often think we speak for all women and who define

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[237] Traci West, "Extending Black Feminist Sisterhood in the Face of Violence: Fanon, White Women, and Veiled Muslim Women," 176.

[238] The communal "culture" that comes in for the greatest excoriation in *The Second Sex* is clearly Christianity, in particular Catholicism. Let's not forget that *The Second Sex* was on the Index for many years, and that one of her own teachers wrote a book denouncing her from a devout, orthodox perspective. Republic or no Republic, the world Simone de Beauvoir grew up in had elements of theocracy: we may find this hard to see but she did not.

[239] Elsa Dorlin, "The Future of Intersectionality." *La force des choses* also contains, at various points, a forthright attack on what the English call "what-about-ery."

> feminism in our writings—that the women's fight is much more complex than either we, Betty Friedan or *Ms.* magazine seem to think it is, and write about it. Is there a similar situation in France, have other voices, other writings begin to manifest themselves?
>
> De Beauvoir: There aren't many, there aren't many women who speak.... Yes, there have been women who have spoken, for example, about the problem of excision (clitoridectomy), which is a particularly African problem and there have been a number of books about this ... there have been groups, both Western and African, who have met to combat the problem of excision. And there is presently much talk about this problem.
>
> Wenzel: That is very interesting, because in the States, some women have begun to write and to speak out against these manifestos decrying excision. There are Black women, and African women who have begun to say that for Western women to look at African women's problems....
>
> De Beauvoir: It has nothing to do with Western women, yes, that's it. I've heard that. But there are nevertheless African women who say that the problem belongs as much to Western women as to others, because it's a question of human rights.
>
> Wenzel: Exactly.
>
> De Beauvoir: And it's not a question ... and there's a kind of racism, on the contrary, in not wanting to look at these sorts of conditions.... Because that means that deep down one doesn't care what happens to little black girls, and there are about thirty thousand a year who undergo excision, and to find that trivial, finally, not to deal with that, that proves that we think it's fine for them, naturally. We don't want any part of it. And it's much more feminist, logical and universal, and not racist, to be involved in these sorts of questions.[240]

(I'm not unaware of post-colonial and feminist critiques of the discourse of "universal human rights." As I was writing this paragraph, Donald Trump pulled the United States out of the UN Human Rights Council. Perhaps we'll soon get to find out more about what a world without that "discourse" will look like.)

Sorry, carry on. In any case, Beauvoir's point about "excision" was that African women were opposed to it; they were, and they are. In the passage I used above from *Tout compte fait*, where she sees that Fanon was mistaken when he thought women would be freed by the Algerian revolution, she refers to "a courageous Algerian woman who has written a book"—though I do not know which woman and which book she means. Perhaps it is worth returning to that passage in its entirety; what emerges is how fully her thinking about "women's position" is embedded in a fact-based, complex understanding of the broader picture, including its paradoxes and tragic ironies.

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[240] Hélène Wenzel, "Interview with Simone de Beauvoir," 16. This is the same interview where Beauvoir wished to speak of matters going beyond her feminist works, but Wenzel did not.

> A disappointment of another kind was the evolution of Algeria. Of course no one could look for a miracle that would suddenly bring about the reign of socialism and prosperity: the war had killed more than a million people; the finest leaders had been killed in the guerilla fighting; and the departure of a million Europeans [pieds-noirs] who ran the country left it in economic confusion. At the time when the Algerians won their independence, eighty-five percent of the adults were illiterate. The reorganization of the economy could not fail to be a difficult task. The disaster foretold by the colonialists did not occur; but a third of the male working population is under-employed, another third unemployed altogether, and five hundred thousand have emigrated. The circumstances were unfavorable for the setting up of socialism, but the leaders have made no serious effort in that direction whatsoever. What they have done is to install a state capitalism that has nothing socialist about it apart from the name. In agriculture they have not encouraged the collectivization of the land; in industry they have not encouraged management by the workers. Instead of attempting to make the masses politically conscious they have urged them to return to the values of the Arab, Islamic world. Unlike Tunisia and Egypt, Algeria has made no attempt at checking the birthrate—a birthrate so high that the population is increasing far more rapidly than its resources. The condition of women is deplorable and one of them has spoken out about it in a courageous book. They are given no more than a minimum of education, and this is justified by Muslim tradition; they still wear veils; and they are confined either to their father's home or to that of the husband they are obliged to marry. Fanon was profoundly mistaken when he foretold that the Algerian women would escape from male oppression because of the part they had played in the war. Algeria's foreign policy is held out as "progressive" and it is indeed anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist. But the country's home policy is both nationalist and reactionary. There is nothing to show that it is likely to change its nature for a very long while.[241]

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[241] This analysis, and indeed these developments, are in line with Fanon's own predictions in *Les damnés de la terre* that post-colonial society might actually not be much better than

And such changes as have occurred there since, she would hardly have welcomed.

Beauvoir certainly had no love for "the veil" as such, and sometimes, as here, she takes it as one index of women's subjugation and exclusion. Edward Said himself has reported another such instance, in a rather mean-spirited account of his disappointment upon meeting Sartre and Beauvoir in 1979. The meeting was instigated by the *Temps Modernes* team, though it took place in Foucault's apartment.[242] Said had been hoping for a statement from Sartre denouncing Zionism and expressing support for the Palestinians, but found the written result of the dialogue disappointingly tepid, and described Sartre as mentally extinguished by age and illness and as manipulated by his acolyte, "Pierre Victor" (Benny Lévy).

> Beauvoir was already there in her famous turban, lecturing anyone who would listen about her forthcoming trip to Teheran with Kate Millett, where they were planning to demonstrate against the chador; the whole idea struck me as patronizing and silly, and although I was eager to hear

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what it replaced. "Une déception d'un autre ordre, c'est celle que m'a fait éprouver l'évolution de l'Algérie. On ne pouvait certes pas escompter qu'un miracle y ferait régner dans un bref délai le socialisme et la prospérité; la guerre a fait plus d'un million de morts, les meilleurs cadres ont été tués dans les maquis, le départ d'un million de pieds-noirs qui contrôlaient le pays l'a laissé dans une situation économique confuse. Le jour où l'indépendance fut conquise, 85% des adultes étaient analphabètes. La réorganisation de l'économie ne pouvait être que difficile. Les catastrophes prédites par les colonialistes ne se sont pas produites. Mais un tiers de la population masculine active est sous-employé, un tiers sans emploi: cinq cent mille travailleurs ont émigré. Les circonstances n'étaient pas propices à l'établissement du socialisme; mais les dirigeants n'ont fait aucun effort sérieux en sa faveur. Ils ont instauré un capitalisme d'État qui n'a de socialiste que le nom. En agriculture ils n'ont pas encouragé la collectivisation des terres; dans le secteur industriel, ils n'ont pas poussé les travailleurs à l'autogestion. Au lieu d'essayer de politiser les masses, ils les ont incitées à revenir aux valeurs arabo-islamiques. Contrairement à ce qui se produit en Tunisie, en Égypte, aucun effort n'a été fait pour ralentir une natalité galopante telle que la population s'accroît beaucoup plus vite que les ressources. La condition des femmes est déplorable: une Algérienne l'a dénoncée dans un livre courageux. Au nom de la tradition musulmane on ne lui accorde qu'un minimum d'éducation; elle continue à porter le voile, elle est confinée dans le foyer de son père ou du mari qui lui est imposé. Fanon s'est bien trompé quand il prédisait que grâce au rôle qu'elles ont joué pendant la guerre les femmes algériennes échapperaient à l'oppression masculine. La politique extérieure de l'Algérie se veut 'progressiste'; elle est anticolonialiste et anti-impérialiste. Mais à l'intérieur elle est nationaliste et réactionnaire. Rien n'indique qu'elle doive avant bien longtemps changer de caractère" (*TCF* 561–62, *ASD* 442–43).

[242] This at first struck me as odd, given that Sartre and Foucault are positioned as antagonists in the usual story about "French theory." However, where practical politics were concerned, they often signed the same manifestos, and were photographed at the same demonstrations … Here, a "sustained epistemic critique" *had* emerged. And yet…

> what Beauvoir had to say, I also realized that she was quite vain and quite beyond arguing with at that moment. Besides, she left an hour or so later (just before Sartre's arrival) and was never seen again.… Beauvoir had been a serious disappointment, flouncing out of the room in a cloud of opinionated babble about Islam and the veiling of women. At the time I did not regret her absence; later I was convinced she would have livened things up.[243]

The sexism here speaks for itself.[244] Beauvoir's own account of the meeting with Said is considerably more generous; she agrees that Benny Lévy's attempt at "dialogue" was pointless and ineffectual, but sticks to the facts.[245] (This is not the place to explore the developing attempts of *Les Temps Modernes* and of Lanzmann himself to find middle ground from which to support both the Palestinian cause and the existence of the state of Israel; as with Sartre's earlier involvements with the French Communist Party, the resulting positions would appear to have satisfied no one.[246])

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[243] Said, "Diary." For some reason this story recirculates gleefully through the blogosphere from time to time. See Eugene Wolters, "A Bitter Disappointment," and Yasmin Helal, "Edward Said Recalls His Depressing Meeting." For a riposte, see Shiraz Socialist, "Anti-Orientalist Meets Western Feminist."

[244] I am afraid the dismissive attitude toward women intellectuals on display here is not contradicted by my own memories of Said, whose office at Columbia was across the hall from mine in my grad school days. His obituary by friend Alexander Cockburn ("Edward Said: A Mighty and Passionate Heart") includes the phrase, "even in his pettiness he was magnificent"; I too remember the rages over small matters Cockburn describes (the walls of Hamilton Hall were hardly soundproof), but their "magnificence" eluded me. None of which, of course, does anything to tarnish his pioneering intellectual and political contribution or diminish the fact that his death was a sad loss to the world of letters.

[245] "The speeches were more or less interesting, more or less touching, but in general it was always the same old story—the Palestinians wanted a territory of their own and the Israelis—all chosen from the Left—agreed, but they wanted their security guaranteed. In any event, these people were intellectuals who possessed no kind of power at all. Victor was nevertheless exultant. 'It's going to be an international scoop,' he told Sartre. He had to eat his words. For various reasons the issue, entitled 'Peace Now' after an Israeli pacifist movement that did not play any great part in politics, only appeared in October, and it fell flat. During the summer of 1980. Edward Said, whom Victor looked upon as the member of the conference with the greatest prestige, told some common friends that he did not understand why he had been made to come from America. The meeting had seemed to him a wretched affair while he was attending it, and even worse when he read the proceedings. But in March 1979 Sartre shared Victor's optimism, and I did not tell him about my doubts" (*Adieux*, 113–14). [Les interventions furent plus ou moins intéressantes, plus ou moins émouvantes, mais en gros c'était toujours la même rengaine: les Palestiniens réclamaient un territoire, les Israéliens—tous choisis à gauche—étaient d'accord mais exigeaient des garanties de sécurité. De toute façon, il s'agissait là d'intellectuels qui n'avaient aucun pouvoir. Victor n'en jubilait pas moins: "Ça va être un scoop international," a-t-il dit à Sartre. Il a dû déchanter. Pour diverses raisons, le numéro intitulé "La paix maintenant"—du nom d'un mouvement israélien pacifiste qui n'a pas joué un grand rôle politique—n'a paru qu'en octobre et est tombé à plat. L'été 80, Edward Saïd—qui était aux yeux de Victor le membre le plus prestigieux du colloque—a dit à des amis communs qu'il ne comprenait pas pourquoi on l'avait fait venir d'Amérique: le colloque lui avait

In a different context, Lanzmann's autobiography shows Beauvoir as unafraid to confront Muslim men about the position of women in their own countries.[247] But Kate Millett's account in *Going to Iran* describes a rather different and more complex motivation for the trip, on which Beauvoir was ultimately too ill to accompany her, than Said's dismissive summary conveys. Millett had been working with a (mixed gender) group of young Iranians who opposed the repression of the Shah, touring American campuses to build support for attempts to topple the regime. When the revolution finally came, that group invited her to come to Tehran (and bring others) to bear witness and

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paru minable sur le moment même, et davantage encore quand il en avait lu le compte rendu. En mars 79, cependant, Sartre partageait l'optimisme de Victor, et je ne lui ai pas fait part de mes doutes (*La cérémonie des adieux*, 160).]

[246] Around the time of the Six-Day War, Beauvoir wrote, "I was not in complete agreement with any of my friends.... As a result of my positions on the Middle East question, I almost always feel in an awkward position in my relations with leftist militants. I am entirely for the Black Panthers and I admire Cleaver's book, *Soul on Ice*; but I was deeply depressed when he attacked the Jews in his *Temps Modernes* interview. I regret that the Left should have grown almost as monolithic as the Communist Party. A leftist must necessarily admire China without the least reservation, take Nigeria's side against Biafra and the Palestinians' against Israel. I will not bow to these conditions. Which doesn't prevent me from feeling very close to the leftists on the terrain that most closely concerns them, in the action they carry out in France" (*ASD* 436–37, translation altered). [Avec aucun de mes amis je ne me suis trouvée en parfait accord.... À cause de mes positions sur la question du Moyen-Orient, je me sens presque toujours en porte à faux dans mes rapports avec les militants de gauche. Je suis de tout cœur avec les Panthères noires, j'admire le livre de Cleaver, *Soul on Ice*; mais cela m'a attristée que dans l'interview qu'ont publiée *Les Temps Modernes* il s'attaque aux Juifs. Je regrette que le gauchisme soit devenue presque aussi monolithique que le parti communiste. Un gauchiste doit admirer inconditionnellement la Chine, prendre parti pour le Nigeria contre le Biafra, pour les Palestiniens contre Israël. Je ne me plie pas à ces conditions. Ce qui ne m'empêche pas d'être très proche des gauchistes sur le terrain qui les concerne le plus directement: l'action qu'ils mènent en France (*TCF* 553–554).]

[247] Shortly after Fanon's burial, Lanzmann remembers, the Évian accords were signed and he was able to visit Algerian leaders who were being held in Fresnes prison, including Mohamed Boudiaf and Ahmed Taleb Ibrahimi. "The prisoners enjoyed considerable autonomy within Fresnes Prison. After they were freed, we took them in for several days. Taleb, as I have mentioned, stayed with my sister Évelyne; others stayed with me. Simone de Beauvoir attempted to persuade them to abandon polygamy, and they let her talk" (Claude Lanzmann, *The Patagonian Hare*, 347–48).

show support; as the revolutionary movement was coopted by fundamentalists, Millett and her companion were caught in the crossfire and expelled from the country.[248] Beauvoir's own attitude toward the trip is highlighted by Janet Afary and Kevin Anderson, in their book about Foucault's support for the Iranian revolution. They reprint the complete text of the speech Beauvoir delivered in March 1979 at a press conference in Paris, announcing the international delegation's departure for Teheran. Beauvoir emphasizes that the team has been invited by Iranian feminists to come and show their support. Most of the brief text is devoted to making clear that the main purpose of the trip is to gather information.

> We have created the International Committee for Women's Rights (CIDF) in response to calls from a large number of Iranian women. Their situation and their revolt have greatly moved us. We have decided to create this committee, which has set itself several tasks. The first one is information. It is a matter of becoming informed about the situation of women across the world, a situation that to a very, very great extent is extremely difficult, painful, and even odious. Therefore, we wish to inform ourselves, in very precise cases, of this situation.
>
> We then wish to inform others of it; that is, to communicate the knowledge that we have gained by publishing articles. And finally, we wish to support the struggle of the women who fight against the situation that affects them. That is the general idea of the CIDF.
>
> The first task we have taken up is a very, very burning one for today. It is the task of acquiring information concerning the struggle of the Iranian women, communicating that information, and supporting their struggle. We have received an appeal from a very large number of these women. We have also seen their struggles, their fights, and their actions. We have appreciated the depth of their utter humiliation into which others wanted to make them fall, and we have therefore resolved to fight on their behalf.
>
> Thus, the first practical step that will make our call to action concrete is a specific one. We are sending a women's delegation to Tehran, in order to gather information. We have sent a telegram to [the Iranian prime

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[248] *Going to Iran* is written in the characteristic moment-by-moment cinéma vérité style Millett first developed in *Flying* and put to good use in *The Loony-Bin Trip* and elsewhere. Some readers may find this experiment in radical honesty irritating—do we really need to know that Kate and Sophie cannot find their laundry bag?—but her use of it is consistent and principled, and there is no reason to doubt her account of unfolding events.

> minister] M. Bazargan, asking him if we will see us. I say "we," although for personal health reasons, I am not going. But I have many women friends who are going to travel to Iran on Monday. We have asked him to receive the delegation, but even if he does not reply, we are going anyway! In that case, however, it would no longer be a dialogue with a head of State. It would solely be an effort to gather information. Unless, of course, they turn us away completely, which is still a strong possibility. It is very possible that the mission will fail, inasmuch as they might turn it away the moment it arrives. Nevertheless the die will have been cast, and it is important to have a demonstration—on the part of a very large number of Western women, French women, Italian women, and others—of solidarity with the struggle of Iranian women.
>
> I reiterate, however, that this is essentially an effort to gather information, in order to put ourselves in contact with Iranian women, in order to know their demands and the ways in which they plan to struggle.[249]

As Karen Vintges comments, "[Beauvoir] thus emphasized the need to support Iranian women from their point of view, instead of imposing the point of view of Western feminists."[250]

To use the terms of *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, the trip was undertaken in response to the "appel" (call or appeal) from others for political solidarity.

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[249] Simone de Beauvoir, "Speech." The translation, by Marybeth Timmerman, later appeared as part of "Short Feminist Texts from the Seventies and Eighties" in the *Feminist Writings* volume of the Beauvoir Series. Introducing the piece there, Françoise Picq notes: "In March of 1979, women who had participated in the demonstrations against the Shah's regime and contributed to his fall, once again took to the streets of Tehran for five consecutive days. They were protesting against the obligatory veil. Attacked by counter-demonstrators, they were accused of playing into the hands of counterrevolutionaries and being manipulated by foreign agents. International feminist solidarity had to be shown, in spite of hesitations from the Left. On March 16, a demonstration was organized in Paris with the slogans, 'No Shah, no chador, no Russian tanks,' 'the Right veils women, the Left veils its eyes,' and 'Sails/veils unfurled … toward terror?'" Translator Marybeth Timmerman explains the plays on words: "When spoken in French, the words for 'shah,' 'chador,' and 'tanks' in the first slogan all sound similar: 'Ni shah, ni chador, ni chars russes.' The second slogan, 'La droite voile les femmes, la gauche se voile la face,' uses the expression 'se voiler la face' to mean "'look the other way.' The last slogan plays on the words 'le voile' (veil) and 'la voile' (sail): 'à toutes voiles' (meaning 'full speed ahead under full sail') also sounds like 'veils for all women'"(238).

See also Simine Nouri, "Face à une misogynie hors du temps." Beauvoir's texts circulated on the black market after being banned by the Mullahs, and influenced Maryam Radjavi, leader of an exiled Iranian resistance group.

[250] Vintges, "Surpassing Liberal Feminism," 20.

But debates about *how* best to do this seemed to pale in the light of facts on the ground: the Iranian feminist resistance was utterly crushed in a matter of days. Alice Schwarzer, who went to Iran with the European delegation, remembered that her group was invited to meet with the Ayatollah on condition that they wear the chador. This led to a furious and seemingly interminable debate among the members of the delegation, which Schwarzer resolved by telephoning Beauvoir in Paris; as Schwarzer told the story, Beauvoir listened to the whole thing and then said, "Enfin, c'est ridicule."[251]

10 One Last Imaginary Dialogue, and A Few Real Ones

Perhaps at a certain point "this is ridiculous" becomes the only possible response? That's the approach taken by a very strange, but rather wonderful, absurdist play, *Madah-Sartre: The Kidnapping, Trial & Conver(sat/s)ion of Jean-Paul Sartre & Simone de Beauvoir*, written (from exile) in 1995 by the Algerian playwright Alek Baylee Toumi, and translated into English by the author in 2007. The play's conceit is that Sartre and Beauvoir come back to life to attend the funeral of the Francophone Algerian writer, Tahar Djaout, who in real life was murdered in 1993 by the Groupe Islamique Armé (GIA). In Toumi's play, the existentialist couple is kidnapped on the way to Djaout's funeral by Islamist militants, whose leader "Madah" demands that they convert to Islam or be killed.[252] Sartre debates with Madah, giving voice to what seem to be the playwright's own views on politics, violence, atheism, foreign debt, the similarity between Madah and Le Pen, the hypocrisy of rape and violence in the name of Islam, the hijacking of the Algerian elections, and more; meanwhile Beauvoir, segregated with the "chadorettes" and accused by their "Chief Chador" of being the "master thinker of our homegrown feminists," interrogates those who are attempting to interrogate her and accuses her accusers of being "parrots" and of betraying the Algerian revolution.[253]

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[251] Presentation at the 2008 conference; no written version of this informal intervention appears to exist.

[252] In his introduction to the English version, James LeSueur explains that this character's name is short for Mad-d-Allah, "to symbolize Islamic fundamentalists," and that he is partly based on Anwar Haddam, a leader of the Islamic front (xiv). Madah's name and Toumi's title also riff on Peter Weiss's musical play, *Marat-Sade, The Persecution and Assassination of Jean-Paul Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton Under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade*, and Toumi, who is also a literary scholar, makes numerous other references to twentieth-century French literature, here and in his other works.

Madah/Sartre is deliberately anachronistic, to put it mildly, in that it shows Beauvoir and Sartre as aware of events that took place after they died. It demands to be read through its own historical moment: a violent power struggle between Islamist militants attempting to impose sharia, and the FLN government, socialist in name but violently repressive; there were daily attacks on intellectuals and artists—Djaout was one of many killed or driven into exile around that time—and, meanwhile, the poor of Algeria were ground between two millstones.[254] Toumi intercuts the debate scenes with a narrative featuring an ordinary Algerian man, a desperately impoverished taxi driver, who endures two unprovoked (and identical) attacks, one by the police and the other by Islamic militants, and then searches futilely for medical help in a corrupt and impoverished hospital system: seeking thread to have his wounds stitched closed, he is sent to the morgue, where limbs and heads are being sewn back on dismembered corpses.... While the taxi driver disappears at the end of act six on a note of despair, for himself and for his country, act seven concludes the play with a hopeful fantasy. Oddly enough, the atheist Sartre admits that there *is* a heaven—he has, after all, just come from there. But it is a multicultural heaven where atheists are accepted, people are judged based on their earthly deeds, and God (much to Madah's despair) turns out to be a woman. Beauvoir meanwhile convinces the chadorettes to use their veils as sails and fly away, and the play ends with a Berber dance and a song to "the Freewoman" and the female God.

As a reader, I admit to finding the ending less compelling than the debate,[255] where (among many other things) Toumi (through "Sartre") defends the right of Algerian intellectuals to be considered on their own terms, not as Westernized dupes.[256] And while Beauvoir is not afraid to lecture the chadorettes, she too does so mainly with reference to Algerian precedents.

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[253] *Madah/Sartre*, 58, 66.

[254] Toumi introduces the English version with a "warning" against confusing "Islamism" and Muslim peoples—"The victims are Muslims, while the killers, the assassins, the terrorists are Islamists" (xx). James LeSueur's introduction does a fine job of supplying historical details.

[255] The reverse might well be true in performance—it's difficult to judge.

[256] "Madah: If we have Francophone intellectuals, it is because of you. They imitate you.

Sartre: You're wrong again. If I am like this, it is thanks to one of your early ancestors. One of the great intellectuals of the world is Algerian. Born in Hippo-Annaba, thousands of years ago, the early Christian bishop Saint Augustine spoke Berber, was Berber, and wrote in Latin. We still have his *Confessions*. After him, there was Averroës in Spain, father of secularism ... he was Muslim! And many others that you don't know. Today there is

> You are a bunch of parrots. There are Algerian women who have been assassinated because they refused to wear it. Some were kidnapped and raped. Just out of respect for women like Kheira, who have been gang-raped, or Katia, who was gunned down because she stood up, you should remove it.[257]

She rips up the veil they have given her, saying, "This is what an Italian woman did in front of the Ayatollah!"[258] But she also argues that the Koran does not require the veil—"No. Isn't it said that she must 'cover' herself? Clothes are enough"[259]—and that the chador is not Algerian but an imported badge of "international fundamentalism." "Why don't you wear the traditional white haik, the veil of Algerian women?"[260]

> Chief Chador: Feminist propaganda. That's the work of Kahina. Not only has she read your books, but now it is you who read hers.... Unbowed! She escaped twice ... next time, she'll pay for it.[261]

"Kahina" is Toumi's name for Algerian feminist Khalida Messaoudi, whose book is called *Unbowed: An Algerian Woman Confronts Islamic Fundamentalism*. Like Sartre, Beauvoir is not afraid to call out the hypocrisy of claims to "piety"— "How many of you wear a mini skirt and a diaphragm under the chador?"—and in the end she says to the chadorettes, "Go see *The Battle of Algiers*. You don't even know your own history."[262]

Kateb, Mammeri, Djaout, Mimouni....They are agnostics, atheists, secular Muslims but all tolerant." *Madah/Sartre*, 94.

It's a stretch for me to imagine Sartre defending St. Augustine, or taking him as an intellectual ancestor. Perhaps he met Augustine in heaven and changed his mind? Sartre did, sometimes, change his mind ... or perhaps he was thinking of the influence of Augustine's *Confessions* on *Les mots*. Toumi is anyhow on firmer ground when he assumes that Sartre and Beauvoir would have continued to read the works of Kateb Yacine, who is mentioned in Beauvoir's memoirs as a good friend.

[257] *Madah/Sartre*, 63–4

[258] Ibid., 70.

[259] Ibid., 63.

[260] Ibid., 65.

[261] Ibid., 66. Messaoudi's book describes death threats, and living under fatwa, but is also critical of American government interventions in the region. An opponent to the unequal "family code," Messaoudi has since joined the Algerian government and served as Minister of Culture. The name "Kahina" originally belonged (Wikipedia tells me) to a "seventh century female Berber religious and military leader, who led indigenous resistance to Arab expansion in Northwest Africa."

[262] Ibid., 66, 67.

"Tell me who you haunt and I will tell you who you are"?[263] No, this is crazy. Ghosts can't offer evidence. And "Beauvoir's" statements about the veil in Toumi's play go far beyond anything Beauvoir herself actually said about it: the questions she answers in the play are not the same ones that arose in her lifetime. But it is hardly Toumi's project to give an accurate account of what Sartre and Beauvoir believed and did "in real life." (In fact, he gets some small biographical details wrong.) His project is to tell the world that Algerian feminism, and an Algerian nationalism that respects multiculturalism and human rights, are alive and well;[264] and secondarily, to explore the relation between the culture of France and her former colonies in a more nuanced and multi-directional way than is permitted by post-colonial orthodoxies, whether of the Left or the Right. But his reading of existentialism's legacy is a plausible one, and I include it here as part of my project to look, not just at what lay upstream from existentialist arguments, but also at what lay downstream, what could come of those arguments later. Perhaps Toumi's play suggests that incompatible goods (or, here, competing evils) need not paralyze us.

Without myself endorsing any position, I want to spend a little more time exploring and historicizing what can motivate a view like Toumi's. Around the time Badinter and Kristeva were awarding the Beauvoir prize to Hirsi Ali, Algerian feminist Marnia Lazreg wrote a book called *Questioning the Veil: Open Letters to Muslim Women* which made arguments rather similar to those Beauvoir's ghost offers in Toumi's play. Lazreg has no love for French attempts to ban the veil, or for Turkish ones either; but her analysis asks younger women, who are taking up the veil as a signifier of religious commitment or nationalist pride, to *think* about what they are doing, to see how it connects to a larger social and historical picture, and to remember the generation of women from Muslim cultures who discarded their veils in order, she says, to "seize their place in the human universe."[265] She begins by explaining her own standpoint, making it clear that she is no Hirsi Ali.

> In my previously published work, I have consistently objected to the manner in which Muslim women have been portrayed in books as well as the media.... [T]hey have been represented as oppressed by their religion, typically understood as being inimical to women's social progress.... [and] have been described as the weakest link in Muslim societies....

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[263] One way of translating the opening line of André Breton's *Nadja*.

[264] Another thread in "Sartre's" argument has to do with the problem of imposing classical Arabic as a "standard" on the Berber minority, to which Toumi belongs.

[265] Lazreg, *Questioning the Veil: Open Letters to Muslim Women*, 2009, 50.

> Such a view made it acceptable to hail the war launched against Afghanistan in 2001 as a war of "liberation" of women.... In this context, any Muslim woman who takes cheap shots at Islam and crudely indicts Muslim cultures is perceived as speaking the truth and is elevated to stardom.[266]

Nonetheless, feeling that she "can no longer keep quiet," she asks Muslim women to consider the ways that veiling—even where freely chosen—can be harmful to women who do it, whether they think so or not; and she also argues that Muslim women in France or the US who choose to "re-veil" show a failure of solidarity with women in Iran and Saudi Arabia where the veil, and other restrictions on women's free movement and full participation, are imposed with severe and sometimes violent sanctions. She respects arguments based on religious conviction, particularly when a woman has been convinced by her own study of religious texts, rather than by social pressure, or the preference of a father, brother, employer, or prospective husband, or as a matter of "strategy." "Nevertheless," she writes,

> [I]t is crucial that any woman who decides to wear any type of veil examine her conscience and determine whether the veil is the *only* manner for her to fulfill her spiritual needs. Because of both its role in the history of women's exclusion from social life outside the home and its resilience, the veil is overlaid with meanings that cannot simply be brushed away because a woman says so. Whenever a woman wears a veil, her act involves other women, including the girl child.[267]

For Lazreg, the meaning of the veil is always social, and historical, not just an individual "choice";[268] the veil, wherever it is worn, is about masculinity, male

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[266] Ibid., 1. See also 60—"Banning the veil is as much a political act as is mandating it.... Women are held hostage equally by radical secularists and Wahabists, Islamists and Shi'i Muslims. None of them trusts women with the capacity to decide for themselves how to manage their bodies and whether to wear a veil. None of them has asked women for their opinion in the matter."

[267] Ibid., 11.

[268] Ibid., 36. See also 128: "When a woman wears it, she garbles its meanings insofar as she never knows which one of these will be perceived by others as the one that she has attributed to it. Ironically, as a woman thinks that she is making a clear statement by wearing a veil, she loses control over its meaning. Yet she assumes all the meanings that have been historically associated with it."

There's a larger "theory of meaning" question here that is not geographically or culturally specific. Consider the survival in the USA of wedding rings (once marks of possession) or the custom of the bride being "given away" by her father. Is the social and historical dominance. “The veil is a man’s affair before it becomes a woman’s.” “A man’s absorption in the details of a woman’s relation to her body is an assault on her dignity.” “It is difficult to extirpate the veil from the thick history of men’s power.”[269]

Lazreg never mentions Beauvoir by name, but she describes her own approach as an “an existential-philosophical standpoint that peels away the justifications that women who wear it or intend to wear it usually invoke.”[270] She provides compelling phenomenological accounts rooted in her own experience; she also introduces and interprets stories about other women from various places and generations, in a way that feels similar to *The Second Sex*’s investigation of “lived experience” by the method Patricia Moynagh characterized as “exemplary validity.” Also like Beauvoir, Lazreg does not shrink from reinterpreting what she hears.

> Over the past fifteen years, I have spoken with and interviewed numerous women, old and young, in the Middle East, North Africa, France, and the United States who have worn one type of veil or another; women who took off their veil but felt they have to put it back on; and women who have been thinking of wearing one. I take these women’s arguments seriously but wish to subject them to scrutiny as I am convinced that only rational reflection can advance women’s understanding of themselves, particularly in times of political turmoil.[271]

She excavates a number of arguments that she regards as “rationalizations,”[272] and notes that the strongest male advocates of the veil (in Algeria, in Iran) have done nothing to protest violent attacks against women.

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meaning of these ancient customs erased because an individual woman says so? Why do these demeaning reminders of women’s subordination survive? Are they “resignified” in a subversive manner when applied symmetrically to both partners? Or when the partners are both women? Or do they simply take the edge off any potential threat to compulsory heterosexuality? “Oh, no one in the US would raise those questions.” But I just did.

[269] Ibid., 57, 121, 1.

[270] Ibid., 1.

[271] Ibid., 11.

[272] These include the idea of the veil as “protection” or “shield” against sexual harassment. Lazreg points out that “in practice, harm comes from men to women no matter whether they are practicing, veiled, or not”; what the veil “protects” is male identity and masculine privilege (ibid.,43). “If a woman’s veil is a symbol of modesty that protects her from sexual harassment, why do men not show modesty in their behavior toward women by refraining from harassing them?” Ibid., 52.

Lazreg is particularly critical of theoretical arguments that the decision of younger women to veil must be respected in the name of "agency."

> This is a delicate endeavor as the risk is great that a woman's rationale for wearing a veil might be discounted as a form of false consciousness, and her agency dismissed as illusory. As a social scientist, I cannot deny women's agency or substitute mine for theirs on the grounds that I am more equipped to make sense of their motivations than they are.… However, agency is not a free-floating capacity independent of the social framework within which it expresses itself; neither is it above questioning.[273]

In other words, while the question of agency is an important one, it is not reducible to how an individual woman *feels*.[274] Plus, there is a remainder in the form of ethical and political questioning: Agency for what? Agency on behalf of what? In solidarity with whom? "Agency must be distinguished from consciousness—the capacity to see through the myriad contingencies that determine the 'choice' that a woman makes for the good."[275] The agency Lazreg is taking up here for *herself*, then, is a kind of intellectual agency: the right to draw conclusions, to make judgments.

Beauvoir, as we have seen, never seems to have questioned her right to describe other women's self-understandings, however sincerely held, as complicit mystifications. (Insofar as women might have recognized themselves in the unflattering portraits she drew, this was supposed to induce them/us to *change*.)[276] But Lazreg is well-aware of subsequent feminist critiques that emphasize women's "agency," and she confronts those critiques head-on, naming a number of feminist works, the best-known to non-specialists probably being Saba Mahmood's *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*.[277] Lazreg writes:

> The reveiling trend coincides with an approach espoused by academic feminists that seeks to correct the notion that the veil is a sign of "oppression" but in reality makes oppression more intellectually acceptable. Although acknowledging that veiling may reinforce gender inequality, this approach uncritically and unapologetically foregrounds lower-middle-class women's stated reasons for taking up veiling. Its proponents engage

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[273] Ibid., 9.

[274] Also, the question of *power* is not reducible to the question of (individual) agency.

[275] Ibid., 74.

[276] I say "us" advisedly; it is women of her own race and class background who come in for her scorn in volume 2.

[277] Ibid., 75.

> in various degrees of sophisticated theoretical hairsplitting in order to excavate the operative agency assumed to be lurking behind the veil, subverting its use, and turning it into a tool of empowerment. The implication is that the "oppressed" are not so oppressed after all; they have power. Faced with this newly discovered power frontier, the researcher does no more than study its manifestations.[278]

Questions of meaning and agency also connect to questions of "authenticity" and authority: which women do we listen to, and why?

> In bending over backward to "give women a voice," adherents to this approach find it necessary to dismiss the reality of women who object to veiling.[279]

There's something deeply insulting about this. "The referent Westernization implies that a woman cannot think of change outside of a Western frame of reference."[280]

Now, others have made this general point before. Lila Abu-Lughod (author of "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?") has even mobilized Edward Said's work to do so.

> Following one of the most productive lines of thought made possible by *Orientalism*, with the division between East and West (and representation of each) to be understood not as a natural geographic or cultural fact but as a product of the political and historical encounter of imperialism, we argued that condemning "feminism" as an inauthentic Western import is just as inaccurate as celebrating it as a local or indigenous project. The first position assumes such a thing as cultural purity; the second underestimates the formative power of colonialism in the development of the region.[281]

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[278] Ibid., 5.

[279] Ibid. The conclusion restates this even more forcefully: "The veil has been tantalizing to Muslims and non-Muslims, including intellectuals. Attempts to present it as a tool of empowerment of women rest on a dubious postmodern conception of power according to which whatever a woman undertakes to do is liberating as long as she thinks that she is engaged in some form of 'resistance' or self-assertion, no matter how misguided.... (ibid., 125–26).

[280] Ibid., 114.

[281] Lila Abu-Lughod, "Review essay: 'Orientalism' and Middle East Feminist Studies," 106. Written for the twentieth anniversary of Said's book, Abu-Lughod's piece reflects on its productivity for feminist thinking, beyond what its author originally envisioned. "We"

What makes Lazreg's account particularly apposite to my point here is the historical cast of her argument.

> We seldom ask ourselves how the generations of women who wore veils felt about them. We cannot imagine them without their veils, as if they had been born with them; we expect them to wear them because *they* expected to wear them. Yet they experienced a more limited existence because of their veils.[282]

And many women from the generation of Lazreg's mother made lucid and deliberate choices to stop wearing veils, in their own interests and the interests of their daughters. In her concluding summary, "Why Women Should Not Wear the Veil," the first item Lazreg lists is "the need to recapture the historic role that women have played as agents of change."[283] Now, Lazreg's book is addressed to her Muslim sisters, and not to women like me—the word "letters" in her subtitle makes that crystal-clear—and I want to avoid any impression that I think I have the right to judge this question on their behalf. But if she's right that "the academic sanctioning of the veil turns it into a fixture of the Muslim landscape rather than an evolving phenomenon,"[284] then as an academic feminist I do have some standing, and indeed some obligation, to consider what my position and approach should be.

Like Toumi, Lazreg is saying to the young women who take up the veil their mothers rejected, "you do not know your own history." The particular value of Lazreg's book for my own investigation is that it reminds us to hear the voices Beauvoir heard on her visit to Tunisia, the urban women she met at the house of Mr. and Mrs. E. while she was there, whom she described as "thirsty for freedom" (right before the passage where she shows her sympathy for the wives in the dark cave).[285] In real life, Beauvoir's positions were very much informed by the testimony and activism of an older generation of feminists from the Arab world; Lazreg's discussion reminds us why she might have heard these

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here refers to a collection of essays she edited, *Remaking Women: Femininity and Modernity in the Middle East*.

[282] Lazreg, *Questioning the Veil*, 17.

[283] Ibid., 97. The other reasons include "doing away with the physical and psychological effects of veiling; awareness of the effect of the veil in the workplace; and demystifying propaganda that portrays women's desire for progress as mimicry of the 'West' and thus an offense to their culture and religion."

[284] Ibid., 6.

[285] *FCh* 1:83–4, *FCirc* 64.

"évoluées," as they would then have been called, as authentic and legitimate voices, and trusted what they told her.

Among "us" "now," this historicizing view is less well-known than Saba Mahmood's critique of feminism's "normative secularism" in *The Politics of Piety*, which many people teach as a groundbreaking text of feminist theory and an important corrective to the ethnocentrism that plagues US views of Islam and the Middle East. Karen Vintges, who likes the book, describes it as a

> critique of Western feminism's too narrow models of self and society … based on [Mahmood's] study of a grassroots women's piety movement in Cairo. The women participating in this Islamist movement, instead of being the oppressed creatures that Western feminists hold them to be, are religious agents who practice an ethical "self-cultivation" that engages their entire way of life. Liberal feminists with their "conceptions of the subject, autonomous reason, and objectivity, though which the pietists are understood to be lacking in faculties of criticism and reason" cannot imagine that Muslim women strive for completely different values: namely, a pious instead of a free, autonomous life.[286]

Mahmood herself, though, did not entirely envision this reading. In her preface to the 2012 edition, she wrote:

> Since its publication, *Politics of Piety* has elicited both the praise and the ire of feminists: some have hailed the book for restoring agency to religiously devout Muslim women hitherto denounced for their patriarchal proclivities. Others have condemned the book for precisely the same reason: insofar as the book is read as an exposé of the "agency" of the women who constitute the piety movement, it is charged with leveling critical differences between women who are upholders of patriarchal norms (dangerous, supine, submissive) and those who fight these norms in the name of liberty and freedom (heroic subjects of history). Both these readings ignore the fact that I was not interested in delivering judgments on what counts as a feminist versus an antifeminist practice, to distinguish a subversive act from a non-subversive one. While acts of resistance to relations of domination constitute one modality of action, they certainly do not exhaust the field of human action. Rather, the aim of this book is to

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[286] Vintges, *A New Dawn for* The Second Sex, 62–3, quoting Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, xii.

> develop an analytical language for thinking about modalities of agency that exceed liberatory projects (feminist, leftist, or liberal).[287]

So on some level, she sees both Vintges and Lazreg as missing her point.

Taken on its own terms, Mahmood's is unquestionably a brilliant book. She is certainly right that identity politics will not help us understand the dynamics of the piety movement, or much else. Her conclusion is especially powerful: she does not want to think along the logic that led to a "feminist" war on the Taliban, or to participate in the liberal discourse that has done even broader harms, in the colonial period and afterward. But what is the alternative? "By allowing theoretical inquiry some immunity from the requirements of strategic political action, we leave open the possibility that the task of thinking may proceed in directions not dictated by the logic and pace of immediate political events."[288]

In other words, we can think better (more clearly, more creatively) by bracketing what is actually (Beauvoir would say, "concretely") at stake. And I'm sure Mahmood is right. My question is whether thinking clearly and creatively is the (whole) point, or whether feminist thinking (as opposed to other sorts of good thinking) was supposed to *engage* with what's concretely at stake. The fact that I can't for the life of me come up with a more "up-to-date" verb than *engage* illustrates how fully irreconcilable these two *philosophical* positions are, even before one takes up the particular disputes about Islam, secularism, and the veil.

Let me try to clarify this by looking at one of Mahmood's examples, her analysis of two perspectives on the difficulties of life as a single woman in Egypt and of the role played by "*ṣabr*," which is not just a virtue but a practice, something she describes, following Foucault, as an ethical "technique of the self." Mahmood explains, "I have retained the use of *ṣabr* in this discussion rather than its common English translation, 'patience,' because *ṣabr* communicates a sense not quite captured by the latter: one of perseverance, endurance of hardship without complaint, and steadfastness." In the example-story, a woman called Nadia, who participates in the piety movement, uses the language of *ṣabr* in attempting to persuade her friend Sana to accept an offer of marriage from a man Sana does not much like, who already has a wife. Sana, a liberal Muslim, disagrees: she feels *ṣabr* encourages one to be passive, and prefers a virtue (or, if you like, a practice) she labels "self-esteem." Sana says,

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[287] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, x.

[288] Ibid., 196. Mahmood references Wendy Brown's *Politics Out of History* here.

> Self-esteem makes you independent of what other people think of you. You begin to think of your worth not in terms of marriage and men, but in terms of who you really *are*, and in my case, I draw pride from my work and that I am good at it. Where does *ṣabr* get you? Instead of helping you to improve your situation, it just leads you to accept it as fate—passively.

Mahmood glosses their disagreement as follows:

> Neither [Nadia] nor Sana, for a variety of reasons, could pursue the project of reforming the oppressive situation they were forced to inhabit. The exercise of *ṣabr* did not hinder Nadia from embarking on a project of social reform any more than the practice of self-esteem enabled Sana to do so. One should not, therefore, draw unwarranted conclusions between a secular orientation and the ability to transform conditions of social injustice. Further, it is important to point out that to analyze people's actions in terms of realized or frustrated attempts at social transformation is necessarily to reduce the heterogeneity of life to the rather flat narrative of succumbing to or resisting relations of domination. Just as our own lives don't fit neatly into such a paradigm, neither should we apply such a reduction to the lives of women like Nadia and Sana, or to movements of moral reform such as the one discussed here.

At this, my heart rose (to borrow Anne Bradstreet's phrase). Yes, Mahmood is right, I thought: her book has nothing at all to say about feminist questions. Because *what about Sana*? I completely accept Mahmood's argument that always looking for "resistance" to (or "resignification" or "subversion" of) the norm is often an oversimplification and an annoying tic. But her suggestion here is that we are wrong to ask the question, *even when that question is explicitly framed as such by the subjects themselves.*[289] If the ethical and methodological imperative is to "listen to the women," shouldn't we listen to *both* of them?[290] Moreover, the failure of any movement for "social reform," or at least the impossibility of either of these women participating in such a movement, is here taken as a given in advance. Why? As Lazreg would point out, history shows that such things do happen, have happened, could yet happen.

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[289] Mahmood tries to avoid describing the women she discusses as "informants," or labelling what they say as "data," in an attempt to avoid a patronizing ethnographic gaze; I appreciate her reasoning, but I still can't find a better word than "subjects": there remains a non-reversible relationship between the researcher and those she is writing about.

[290] Isn't Sana's practice of "self-esteem" also an ethical technique of the self? just like Nadia's, it embeds a vision of an underlying system of right and wrong, and a transpersonal salvific goal, whether or not Sana as an individual will reach that goal. (Notice that in describing it, she says "you," rather than "I," which sketches a further step toward "we," though she does not quite take that step.)

So the argument here is not really between Nadia and "Western feminists," it is between Nadia and Sana. (And since both of them are Egyptian, and both are Muslim, can I really be giving ground to Islamophobia when I find one response preferable, and the other, certainly understandable, but rather sad?) Nadia's faith practices not only help her cope with the less than ideal features of her own situation, but lead her to try to talk her friend into a disadvantageous marriage the friend lucidly does not want, simply because Sana is getting older, this is the only offer she is likely to have, and life as an unmarried woman is (they both agree) quite difficult. I completely accept the legitimate agentic rationality of both positions here. The problem is on a different level.

And indeed, there is nothing peculiar to Islam about the agency and energy with which the women in the *daʿwa* movements enact their self-subjection and help enforce the subjection of other women, nor about the interpretive dilemma this proposes for feminism. In the American Midwest, one can tune in to Christian radio and hear, at almost any hour, "women's Bible study programs," led by women for women, which do very much the same thing as the Egyptian *daʿwa* leaders and groups Mahmood describes, although the particular texts preaching women's submissiveness to husbands and church authorities are drawn from a different holy book. (When the daughters of these evangelical women turn up in my classes—*and they do*—surely I should have something more to offer them than the equivalent of "well, Nadia has a point, too"?)[291]

Mahmood herself, in her brilliant description of the process of "subjectification" (rooted in Foucault), often draws cross-cultural parallels: her book does not make a case based on cultural difference, not at all. But I am not sure that her dichotomy between "secular" vs "religious" motivations exactly names what's at stake here, either. Mahmood says in the passage I quoted above that we "should not … draw unwarranted conclusions between a secular orientation and the ability to transform conditions of social injustice." But do feminists really draw such conclusions? The more I think about this, the more it strikes me as a red herring. We all know that without religious motivation there would have been no Gandhi and no Martin Luther King (and no Anna Julia Cooper). As I write, the rightness or wrongness of Trump's gulag for migrant children is, bizarrely enough, being argued out in the public sphere through competing interpretations of the Bible; some "mainline Protestant" folks are putting themselves to the trouble of trying to get the Methodist church to expel Attorney General Jeff Sessions for citing the *wrong* chapter and verse and thereby misrepresenting "what Jesus would do"; meanwhile clergy from all denominations are lining up to be arrested, just as they did during the Vietnam war, and even the nuns on the bus are up in arms....

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[291] Feminist pedagogy asks us to be careful not to judge women's choices. But instead, we judge one another for doing so. I wish I knew who authored the brilliant meme which captures this: "I could tell the minute I saw her how effing judgmental she was."

You know, if America *has* a secular culture, I certainly have never succeeded in finding it. (Ask a Jew.) Mahmood's work after *The Politics of Piety* was devoted to showing that "the secular" is pretty much a mirage, an argument I find compelling. Then too, when feminism of any stripe enjoys widespread collective success, it undoubtedly employs practices and techniques of the self, such as consciousness raising, group exegesis (what else are you and I doing right now?), revival meetings (Take Back the Night), the adoption of particular watchwords and, yes, articles of clothing.[292] It would make more sense to me to say we should accord to Islamic feminisms the same respect we accord to Christian feminisms, and no less; and possibly, that we should accord to Islamist anti-feminist women the same respect we accord to Christian evangelical anti-feminist women, *and no more*.

Now, when a practitioner of Mahmood's sort of critique is asked, "what then would a *better* feminist praxis look like?" they may respond that answering that question is not their project, and that is fair enough.[293] But when one *does* want to do some feminist work in/on the world we live in, one then falls back, either on one's gut, or on an older theory.[294]

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[292] Why can't we recognize *feminist* ethics as a technique of the self? And as a recognition of the social and communal rather than the individual? It does not often succeed, for reasons Beauvoir explained, but that vision is always there, even in the most "lean in" of places.

[293] Why then is this book so important to (American) transnational feminist theory? Perhaps (through no fault of Mahmood's) because it supports the individualist self-actualization story parodied by *The Onion*: "It's official: women now empowered by anything a woman ever does." Perhaps it also meshes well with our custom that matters of religious conviction must be seen as beyond debate. Whether this is because we are a secular country, or because we are secretly still a theocracy, I leave you and history to decide.

[294] Even Judith Butler now walks under the banner of human rights, because she has come to care about Palestine, and feels some particular responsibility as a Jew. Is there some version here of the "there are no atheists in foxholes" thing? There are no posthumanists in detention camps? There probably are, though, or will be. Your theory will not protect you ... just as no one's aesthetic or philosophical commitments predicted what they did when the Occupation came, in *either* direction.

11 Last Thoughts

Where I'm going with this is that the "existentialist perspective" Lazreg shares with Beauvoir makes it possible to see certain things that Mahmood's approach leaves in shadow. Nadia and Sana share a social location; they are both intelligent and rational; they do not differ in their understanding of the situation of single women in Egyptian society, nor do they differ in finding it a bad situation. They simply disagree about what Sana should *do*. What we see here is that when people from the same cultural backgrounds are faced with the same oppressive conditions, some people struggle against those conditions as best they can. Other people find reasons to give up.[295]

And actually, I think Mahmood herself fails to notice a form of "rational agency" that would have been all too clear to Beauvoir, who recognized women's agency in *many* forms of action by women, not just "resistance to norms." Here that recognition would have taken the form of understanding that Nadia did have choices, including the choice not to betray her friend. Full human agency involves the ability to do harm.

Am I channeling Beauvoir's ghost here? Maybe, and that's weird, yes. But the argument between Nadia and Sana maps rather well onto the argument between Simone and her close friend Zaza that shapes the ending of *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*. Zaza's mother wanted her to make an arranged marriage, rather than an "unsuitable" love match; Zaza's reading of Claudel (that same Claudel) and of other Catholic writers was convincing her that submission to her mother's bourgeois values was required as a religious duty, and that her abjection was beautifully pleasing to God; and Beauvoir, raised in the same milieu, was like, I know you love your mother, and I respect your view, but, no. No. Just, no.

Harking back to the time, and the language, of the "évolués," Lazreg's book takes as epigraph a quotation from Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism*, though she inserts "women" where he had "men":

> We are not [wo]men for whom it is a question of "either-or." For us, the problem is not to make a utopian and sterile attempt to repeat the past, but go beyond it.[296]

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[295] Years ago, when I first started teaching feminist theory, a student asked me, "what makes people different?" (She was thinking of her sister, who was happily conforming to a set of norms for women she herself found unbearably oppressive.) I don't know, I said, feeling (then) like a bit of a failure for not knowing; and I've gone on worrying about it. But maybe "I don't know" is actually a good answer, and there is something to be said for the irreducible singularity of each human being.

[296] Lazreg, *Questioning the Veil*, iv.

Still, if taken seriously this familiar idea of “dépassement” can cut more than one way. Because the women in France who embrace the veil as a sign of a new Islamic *modernity* might respond to Lazreg: yes, exactly; why should we be bound by your mother’s interpretation of the veil? That was a new day for her, and today is a new day for us. (In the US, the first hijab-wearing woman was just hired to read the news on network TV. In a context of daily public attacks, some of them violent, against anyone who “looks Muslim,” surely this reads as a victory?) Once again, there are no recipes, and context is all.

So maybe if Beauvoir came back from the dead, what she’d have to say (to be perfectly consistent) would be, wait, what can you tell me about what is actually going on there now?

CHAPTER 6

Beauvoir in China

> And what is happening in China? That is a question I would really like to be able to answer.
>
> SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR, *Tout compte fait*[1]

Rather than speculate any further about what Beauvoir "would have felt" or might have done, suppose we go back to what she *did* do, and did say. I want to conclude my investigation of things people find embarrassing about Simone de Beauvoir, things she said that "we wouldn't say now," by looking at *La longue marche: essai sur la Chine* (1957).[2] As my own book's long march draws to a close, I note that the corners of Beauvoir's œuvre are increasingly well-explored, with unpublished writings finding their way into print and nearly everything available in English: even the prestigious Pléiade series has finally admitted her to the French literary canon by devoting two volumes to her work. But Beauvoir scholars still seem to shy away from her book about China, and it seems worth thinking about why.[3]

1 An Essay on China

La longue marche began as a report on a six-week trip Beauvoir and Sartre took in 1955, in response to Chou En-Lai's invitation at the Bandung Conference of non-aligned nations, where the first premier of the People's Republic had challenged the world to "come and see" what the Chinese revolution had achieved. Beauvoir and Sartre, along with many others on the European left, took him up

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[1] "Et que se passe-t-il en Chine? Voilà une question à laquelle je voudrais bien pouvoir répondre" (*Tout compte fait* [hereinafter *TCF*], 562, *All Said and Done* [hereinafter *ASD*], 443).

[2] The English version appeared the following year; the subtitle was not "an essay on China" but (in the US) "A Book on China" and in the UK "An Account of Modern China." The translation, by Austryn Wainhouse (better-known for his unexpurgated translations of the Marquis de Sade), is otherwise faithful and I have used it below, with a few minor alterations.

[3] One strong exception is a very good overview article by Sandrine Dauphin, "En terre d'Icarie: les voyages de Simone de Beauvoir et de Jean-Paul Sartre en Chine et à Cuba" (2004). William McBride, in "The Postwar World According to Beauvoir," now does a good job of providing general historical context, drawing comparisons with *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947* and with the present day, and a brief but helpful discussion can be found in Karen Vintges, "Surpassing Liberal Feminism."

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on it: they were among some 1,500 foreign delegates to the festivities celebrating the anniversary of the revolution in October of that year. As Leiris, who also went, observed, this was a "voyage engagé"—a committed, engaged voyage: "To participate in this organized delegation was implicitly to declare oneself a sympathizer."[4]

What kind of book is *La longue marche*? Beauvoir calls it an "essay on China," an "étude" or study, and it runs to five hundred pages, with chapters on "peasants," "the family," "industry," "culture," and "the defensive struggle," as well as "the discovery of Peking," "the first of October," and "cities of China." To pigeonhole it as "travel writing" does not really work, despite some familiar gestures of that genre. As Sandrine Dauphin writes: "To act as a witness did not simply mean to describe what they had seen. It was a question of explaining the context of China's revolutions, and analyzing them."[5] Dauphin quotes from Beauvoir's memoirs: "I have already written the story of my journey to China. It was not like my other trips. It was not just a wandering, not an adventure, not a journey made just for the experience, but a field study in which caprice played no part.… It is useless to try to describe this country: it demands to be explained."[6] Beauvoir does insist on the primacy of what she saw with her own eyes, and seems scrupulous to record exactly where she went, what she saw, and what she thought about it at the time. However, this is not by any means "China Day by Day." In contrast to her book about the US, and to the way she describes her travels in her memoirs, the travelogue portions of *La longue marche* are severely de-personalized, almost as if to say, my sensibilities are not the point here. Also, she draws just as heavily on what Americans call "book learning." Upon their return to France, Sartre contented himself with giving a few interviews and writing a brief journalistic piece,[7] and Leiris's impressions found their way diagonally into *La règle du jeu*, his rigorous and idiosyncratic experiment in radical introspection. Beauvoir, however, embarked on a sustained project of interdisciplinary research, comparable to the library work that had prepared her to write *The Second Sex*, and that she'd later repeat when writing *La vieillesse* (*Old Age*). *La longue marche* bears constant traces of her reading in history, philosophy, sociology, economics, contemporary journalism, and both classic and contemporary Chinese literature, including fiction and drama. *La longue marche* is also, from its opening pages, a polemic, a no-holds-barred response to French right-wing writers who had shown suspicion and hostility toward the Chinese revolution. As such it belongs with her other political writing—for example her 1954 essay "La pensée de droite aujourd'hui" (Right-Wing Thought Today)[8]—and her editorial work for *Les Temps Modernes.*

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[4] "[P]articiper à cette tournée effectuée en délégation était implicitement se déclarer sympathisant" (Michel Leiris, *Fibrilles*, 84). See also Alex Hughes, "The Seer (Un)seen: Michel Leiris's China."

[5] "Témoigner ne signifiait pas seulement décrire ce qu'ils avaient vu. Il s'agissait d'expliquer le contexte de ses révolutions, de les analyser" (119).

[6] "J'ai raconté mon voyage en Chine. Il ne ressembla pas aux autres. Ce ne fut ni un vagabondage, ni une aventure, ni une expérience, mais une étude, menée sur place sans caprice … [I]l est vain de prétendre décrire ce pays: il demande à être expliqué" (Dauphin 119, quoting *La force des choses* [hereinafter *FCh*], 2:78–9).

[7] Sartre, "La Chine que j'ai vu."

Beauvoir is honest about her initial confusion and the limits of officially managed tourism, and she was honest afterward that she thought *La longue marche* was not very good, that the task she had set herself was too hard. She is quite clear about the limits of what she was able to find out, quite aware that the sights she saw had been carefully prepared for her—as she says, her hosts told her as much. She did not like every single thing she saw, and she did not believe everything she was told: the book is definitely colored by optimism, but "it remains to see" what will happen. Still, *La longue marche* is very definitely a political intervention in a way that *The Second Sex* and *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* really were not. Despite the vicious red-baiting with which *La longue marche* was received, its primary commitment was not to communism as such, but to anti-colonialism and to the Third World movement which, at least initially, was trying to be beholden to neither bloc. She writes from the subject position of the European non-aligned, internationalist left, the position associated with Richard Wright and Frantz Fanon that is sometimes now referred to as "Bandung humanism."

Also, while there is a great deal about women in the book, I should say that this is not, or not mainly, a book about women: issues of gender equality, and the effects on women of the traditional Chinese family, arise within the context of a broader story of cultural transformation. This is not something new for Beauvoir, as we have seen.

A review of the timeline may be in order here. *La longue marche* is situated well after *The Second Sex*, but well before Beauvoir's sustained period of public feminist activism in the 1970s. It stands at the beginning of the period I discussed at the start of chapter 5, the time when her activism on behalf of the people of Algeria meant other issues had to take a back seat: in *La force des choses*, the section where she describes her *trip* to China and the section where she describes the process of *writing* about it are separated by some of her strongest pages about the crisis in the Maghreb, the massacres she compares to Nazi atrocities at Oradour, and the complicity with the oppressors on the part of almost all the French, including the French Communist party.[9] When Beauvoir went to China, she had not yet been to Cuba—she and Sartre would go there five years later. He had already been to the Soviet Union—she had not; but she had already written *Les mandarins* (1954), a novel which explores in great complexity the responsibilities of intellectuals and the ethical difficulties of speaking the critical truth about a regime one supports. The question of whether socialist fellow-travelers should speak openly against the labor camps in the Soviet Union had already been resolved in the affirmative, both in literature and in life.

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[8] First published in *Les Temps Modernes* in 1954, "La pensée de droite aujourd'hui" was collected the following year in *Privilèges*. It is translated in *Political Writings of Simone de Beauvoir*.

The paucity of in-depth scholarship about *La longue marche* may seem surprising given the book's importance to Beauvoir herself. She noted in her autobiography that writing it gave her the perspective and the tools to see beyond the "developed" world: "In writing it I acquired schemata, keys, which helped me to understand other underdeveloped countries."[10]

> Comparing my civilization with another, very different one, I discovered the singularity of traits which had seemed common to me. Simple words, like peasant, field, village, town, family, did not have at all the same meaning in Europe or in China … [T]his trip swept away my old reference points. Until now, in spite of my reading and a few casual glances at Mexico and Africa, I had taken the prosperity of Europe and the United States as the norm; the Third World only existed vaguely on the horizon. The Chinese masses unbalanced the planet for me; the Far East, India, Africa, their famine [*disette*], became the truth of the world, and our western comfort a narrow privilege.[11]

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[9] For the trip, see *FCh* 2:78–9, *FCirc* 344–46. For the writing of the book, see *FCh* 2:94–6, *FCirc* 357–59.

[10] "J'ai acquis en l'écrivant des schémas, des clés, qui m'ont servi à comprendre les autres pays sous-développés" (*FCh* 2:96, *FCirc* 359, translation altered).

[11] "Personellement, je tirai de cette étude un grand profit. Confrontant ma civilisation avec une autre, fort différente, je découvris la singularité des traits qui m'avaient paru communs; des mots simples, comme paysan, champ, village, ville, famille, n'avaient pas du tout le même sens en Europe ou en Chine; la vision de mon propre environnement s'en trouva rafraîchie.… D'une manière générale, ce voyage avait balayé mes anciens repères. Jusqu'alors, malgré mes lectures et quelques vues cavalières sur le Mexique et l'Afrique, c'était la prospérité de l'Europe et des USA que j'avais prise comme norme, le Tiers Monde n'existant que vaguement à l'horizon. La masse chinoise déséquilibra pour moi la planète; l'Extrême-Orient, les Indes, l'Afrique, leur disette, devinrent la vérité du monde, et notre confort occidental un étroit privilège" (*FCh* 2:96, *FCirc* 358–59, translation altered).

She even wrote in 1963, in a retrospective assessment of *The Second Sex*, that if she were to write that book "today," she'd take the more materialist approach she'd used in *La longue marche*, and would "ground the idea of *Other* not on an idealist, *a priori* struggle of consciousnesses, but on scarcity and need; I did that in *La longue marche*, when I spoke of the ancient subjection of Chinese women."[12] Nonetheless, *La longue marche* is the least widely read of Beauvoir's texts today, and it is overhung by an aura of embarrassment, for two sorts of reasons.

One set of reasons has to do with the Cold War. When the book appeared, it was strongly attacked both in France and in the US. Beauvoir and other "fellow-travelers" were described as duped by the Communists, or accused of knowingly covering up for Mao's failures and excesses, or both at once. Even today, her argument that the Chinese experiment was "passionnante" (thrilling), and that Chairman Mao was succeeding in feeding the Chinese people, does not go down well in the West and especially in the US, where Mao is often thought of as simply a monster.[13]

The other embarrassment, of course, has to do with the fact that *La longue marche* fails to praise Chinese culture, Chinese "difference," in the way Western multiculturalism, and especially multiculturalist feminism, would now seem to demand. There is indeed a great deal in *La longue marche* that "we wouldn't say now," and (unlike *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947*) it may not repay a lot of close reading. But I do think that if we sweep it under the rug we're missing an important puzzle piece, and a further chance to redress what I've seen as three major distortions of Beauvoir's reception in the US: our tendency to reduce cultural and historical differences to "race" (seen almost entirely in terms of Black and white); our failure to see how fully she was a woman of the Left; and our reluctance to appreciate her interest in empirical inquiry, in *facts*, not merely as an illustration or adjunct to philosophy or theory, but facts in themselves, as an urgent way of knowing the world.

As you might expect, I'm planning to show that a simple dismissal of Beauvoir's long and detailed study as "orientalizing" is an unhelpful oversimplification. But I do not intend by any means to argue that *La longue marche* is a neglected masterpiece.[14] The book is certainly wrong about many things, and was outdated almost before it appeared by the rush of events. Early in the book Beauvoir says, "One of the major objections that is likely to be leveled against this book is that it will be out of date (*dépassé*) tomorrow. That is very true." She wasn't wrong.[15] Another reason it is not much read is that it is quite boring. It's full of numbers, detailed objective descriptions of factories, villages, nurseries, etc., accounts of the Five-Year Plan, a long discussion of the process of wood-block printing, and so on. Like many visitors to China, Beauvoir complained about the long, factual lectures her group was given at every stopping point, but sometimes the style seems to have been contagious. And it's boring *on purpose*; it deliberately disavows the "picturesque."[16] This is not travel writing, not about charm or "local color," it's about hunger, scarcity, the contrast between the past suffering of the Chinese people under semi-colonialism, and the efforts toward modernization by which the Chinese were, she thought, building a better society. Beauvoir makes it clear in her opening pages that she is not visiting "the mysterious East." "J'étais indifférente à la Chine ancienne," she says.

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[12] "[J]e prendrais dans le premier volume une position plus matérialiste. Je fonderais la notion d'*autre* et le manichéisme qu'elle entraîne non sur une lutte a priori et idéaliste des consciences, mais sur la rareté et le besoin: je l'ai fait dans *La longue marche*, quand j'ai parlé de l'antique asservissement des Chinoises" (*FCh* 1:267, *FCirc* 202, translation altered).

[13] For a discussion of monolithic American views, see *Some of Us: Chinese Women Growing Up in the Mao Era*, edited by Yueping Zhong, Wang Zheng, and Bai Di, and see also Daniel Vukovich, "China in Theory: The Orientalist Production of Knowledge in the Global Economy."

> Ancient China did not interest me much. For me, China was this patient epic that starts in the dark days of *La condition humaine* and ends on the First of October, 1949, in an apotheosis on the Tien An Men; China, for me, was this stirring and reasonable revolution which had not only delivered peasants and workers from exploitation, but had rid an entire land of the foreigners.[17]

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[14] Early responses have showed me I need to be clear about this. If readers are looking to discover Beauvoir beyond her usual canon, I would suggest beginning instead with *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947* or *Les belles images*.

[15] "Un des reproches majeurs qu'on pourrait adresser à ce livre, c'est que demain il sera dépassé: je le sais; mais l'histoire qui se fait en Chine est assez passionnante pour que les différents moments méritent d'être enregistrés" (*La longue marche* 25, *The Long March* 28). In 1963 she judged parts of it "déjà caducs," already obsolete (*FCh* 2:96, *FCirc* 359, translation altered).

[16] Jean Jamin's introduction to Leiris's *Journal de Chine* aptly describes something similar, Leiris's deliberate suppression of "le rêve," of imagination, in favor of meticulously empirical "field notes" (11–13). Beauvoir's own gradual disavowal of "the picturesque" is marked also in *Les mandarins*: Henri sets off for Portugal yearning for the warmth and beaches of the East; what he finds is famine, and Salazar, and desperation. (The story is autobiographical and Beauvoir tells it elsewhere in the first person.) Sartre's introduction to Cartier-Bresson's book of photographs, *D'une Chine à l'autre*, begins: "À l'origine du pittoresque il y a la guerre" (the picturesque has its origin in war) (7).

[17] "J'étais indifférente à la Chine ancienne. La Chine, pour moi, c'était cette patiente épopée qui commence aux jours sombres de *La condition humaine* et s'achève en apothéose le 1er

"Old China did not interest me"—indeed, she does not disguise that she found Chinese painting incomprehensible and all pretty much the same, and Chinese public monuments for the most part very ugly. China for her was a site of struggle.

By 1955, the Cold War polarization Beauvoir described in *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947* had reached new levels, in France as well as the US. Nearly all Western accounts of China in the 1950s were embedded in a high stakes Politics of Truth that bordered on hysteria.[18] And since then, a vast literature has continued to pour withering scorn on several generations of Western travelers to China. Beauvoir comes in for a great deal of mockery, lumped in with such American writers as Edgar Snow, Agnes Smedley, and Anna Louise Strong, and the New Zealander Rewi Alley, who was an important source of information for her both in person (during her visit) and through his books. When *The Long March* appeared in English, one G.F. Hudson, writing for *Encounter*, began his review: "To-day the passionate pilgrims in search of the new Jerusalem go not to Moscow, but to Peking."[19] The whole piece is so nasty, and so scornful of Beauvoir for having *dared* to write about China in the first place, that I cannot stop myself from reminding you that *Encounter* was funded by the CIA.[20] (So much, once again, for my own attempt to get beyond Cold War politics.) Or see a very long very angry and dismissive response by the French comparative literature scholar René Étiemble: "Based on ignorance and arrogance, stuffed with as many errors as zealous lies, *La longue marche* is worthless…."[21] Étiemble's bad faith is evident in the way he quotes her selectively and out of context, his defensive display of his own pedantry through quoting of obscure texts and authors, his rhetorical flourishes, and his nit-picking complaints

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octobre 1949 sur la terrasse T'ien an Men; c'était cette révolution passionnée et raisonnable qui avait non seulement délivré de l'exploitation paysans et ouvriers, mais libéré de l'étranger toute la Chine" (*La longue marche* 8, *The Long March* 10). The reference is to André Malraux's 1933 novel whose title, meaning "the human condition," is often mistranslated as *Man's Fate*; it deals in a highly fictionalized manner with an unsuccessful 1927 uprising in Shanghai. (See *TCF* 212–16, *ASD* 170–73, for Beauvoir's revised assessment of Malraux, who eventually became quite right-wing, as a dishonest "mythomaniac.")

[18] Ian Birchall's *Sartre Against Stalinism* makes clear how extraordinarily difficult the French Communist Party made it to be an independent left intellectual; this was even truer in the US. To take only the examples personally closest to Beauvoir, the State Department refused her lover Nelson Algren a passport to come to France; their harassment of Richard Wright and other African-American expatriates is well known.

[19] G.F. Hudson, "Mme. de Beauvoir in China," 64.

[20] See David Caute, *The Fellow-Travelers: Intellectual Friends of Communism*, 323–34.

[21] René Étiemble, "Simone de Beauvoir, the Concrete Mandarin," 75.

about her writing style.[22] It is hard to understand why Elaine Marks chose to include this piece, along with Mary McCarthy's diatribe against *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947*, in a 1987 collection presumably intended to increase the interest and attention paid to Beauvoir's work by American scholars.[23]

But it is not hard to understand why Étiemble was literally incoherent with rage: *La longue marche* attacks him by name, along with David Rousset, Robert Guillain (author of a 1956 polemic against Maoism called *The Blue Ants*),[24] and others from the French Right. And Beauvoir doesn't pull any punches. Her quarrel with the Right seems to be unfolding in real time (for instance, she responds to nasty comments French newspapers were making about their trip)[25] and her rhetorical style, almost from the get-go, makes clear she's in this up to her neck. In a section called "La lutte défensive" (The Defensive Effort), she answers right-wing French attacks on the detention of subversives in China by pointing out that such things go on in France as well, reminding her readers of the Henri Martin affair, and of the recent detention of Claude Bourdet and other journalists who spoke out against the war on Algeria for "demoralization of the nation."[26] (The comparison of Chinese repression to the behavior of the French state seems less incongruous when we remember that at the moment she was writing Algerians and French citizens were being brutally tortured, both in Algeria and on French soil.) She also answers critics who complain that children in China are "indoctrinated" with the reminder that children are indoctrinated everywhere:

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[22] Étiemble especially dislikes her frequent use of the word "concrete," which Beauvoir does use rather insistently, to mark that she is evaluating *material* gains, not ideological arguments.

[23] Elaine Marks, ed., *Critical Essays on Simone de Beauvoir*.

[24] The book's French title was *Six cent millions de Chinois*, but "les fourmis bleues" became a catchphrase.

[25] *La longue marche* 350, *The Long March,* 360–61.

[26] *La longue marche* 366, *The Long March* 378–79. Henri Martin, a French soldier posted to Indochina, was jailed for protesting French attacks on the Viet Minh. Claude Bourdet was a hero of the Résistance who worked with Camus on *Combat*. His *New York Times* obituary explains the story: "On a spring dawn in 1956, when Mr. Bourdet was editor of *L'Observateur*, he was arrested at his home, handcuffed and hauled off to be strip-searched at Fresnes Prison, where the Gestapo had taken him upon his arrest in 1944. The 1956 seizure followed a series of articles in which Mr. Bourdet attacked the French campaign to destroy the guerrillas battling for Algerian independence and condemned plans to call up 100,000 military reservists."

"'One hundred thousand young Frenchmen are threatened with being thrown into the "dirty war" of Algeria, with losing the best years of their lives, perhaps with being wounded, indeed killed, for a cause that few among them approve, in a kind of combat that revolts most of them,' he wrote."

"At sundown Mr. Bourdet was released, and in his first post-prison editorial, he observed: 'When somebody rings your bell at 6 A.M. and it is the milkman, you are in a democracy'" (Lawrence Van Gelder, "Claude Bourdet").

> Mme. Rais claimed in *Paris-Presse* in December 1955 that all children are forced to enroll in the Pioneers, by concerted pressure. Mme. Berliouz shares with us that seeing Pioneers walking in the park brought disquieting images of Nazi youth groups into her mind. These are pure fantasies.... One must have decided in advance that New China is headed by a totalitarian regime to be reminded of the Hitler Youth by seeing Pioneers running up Coal Hill or playing ring-around-a-rosy in the middle of Pei Hai Park. As for the "indoctrination" of the children, they are, certainly, taught to love their country, to want to serve it, to respect the current ethic, and they are educated in the ideology that corresponds to the regime under which they live; and is it not the same in every other country? If Chinese educators are more convincing than their American colleagues, this, it would seem to me, ought rather to be set down to their credit than seen as a liability.[27]

Her Chinese guides take her to see a prison, which she compares favorably to the "model prison" she toured in the US.[28] And she responds to the outrage of French anticommunists at the idea of Chinese citizens being exhorted to put their country ahead of their family by reminding them that this is also considered an ideal in France, where right-wingers "admire ... those parents who with buttoned lip and uptilted chin smilingly see their sons risk their lives in Indo-China, in Algeria" and where "[t]he entire Right praised the conduct of the

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[27] "Mme. F. Rais affirmait en décembre 1955 dans *Paris-Presse* qu'une pression concertée contraint tous les enfants à s'inscrire comme pionniers. Mme. Berlioux nous confie qu'en voyant des pionniers se promener dans les parcs, elle a songé avec inquiétude aux formations de jeunesse nazies. Ce sont de purs rêveries .... Il faut avoir d'avance décidé que le régime de la Chine nouvelle est un totalitarisme pour évoquer les jeunesses hitlériennes en voyant des pionniers danser des rondes au milieu du parc Pei Haï, ou escalader en courant la colline de charbon.

Quant à 'l'endoctrinement' des enfants, certes on leur apprend à aimer leur pays, à vouloir le servir, à respecter la morale en vigueur, et on leur enseigne l'idéologie correspondant au régime dans lequel ils vivent: n'est-ce pas ce qu'on fait partout? Si les éducateurs chinois sont plus convaincants que leurs collègues américains il me semble que le fait doit plutôt être porté à leur crédit qu'inscrit à leur passif" (*La longue marche* 154–55, *The Long March* 159. Translation modified.).

[28] *La longue marche* 372–73, *The Long March* 384–85. Readers of *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947* will recall that on that occasion she was shown, and appalled by, the electric chair.

Francoist general who let his son be shot rather than surrender the Alcazar."[29] The battle lines are very clearly drawn, and Beauvoir's ire at these (now forgotten) writers echoes the denunciations of French bourgeois hypocrisy we've seen in her work as early as *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*.

Still, some of what Étiemble says is not wrong. In hindsight one can only blush to read that "the power [Mao] exercises is no more dictatorial than that of, for example, Roosevelt."[30] Beauvoir took at face value the claims that there were no political prisoners and no police state, that all was going well in Tibet, that trials were conducted fairly, that unlike in Stalinist Russia "no citizen in China is bothered on account of his opinions."[31] On this last point David Caute observed in 1988, "out of such declarations are the tablets of folly compiled."[32] As I said, I am not arguing that this is a good book. But it has been caught within, and distorted by, two different "grand narratives" about the twentieth century in ways that mask what was and is valuable about it. The story of Beauvoir's trip is the story of an honest failure, and a more interesting failure than an Étiemble, or a Markowitz, can let themselves see.

The fact is, events overtook *La longue marche* even as she was writing it. Her visit to China occurred before the most disastrous agricultural reforms, and even a critic as malevolent as G.F. Hudson admits that

> [i]n one respect Madame de Beauvoir is deserving of sympathy; her sojourn in China was in 1955–56, when the trend was toward a relaxation of the regime, and much of what she has written in defense of it (especially about the position of the Chinese intellectuals under Communism) has already been refuted by the intensified repression since the end of the "Hundred Flowers" experiment in the middle of 1957.

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[29] "En France on a toujours tenu pour hautement morale la subordination des sentiments familiaux à de nobles entreprises, et tout spécialement à la guerre. On admire que des parents acceptent avec le sourire de voir leurs fils risquer leur peau en Indochine, en Algérie.... [Note] Toute la droite a exalté la conduite du général franquiste qui laissa fusiller son fils plutôt que de rendre l'Alcazar" (*La longue marche* 156, *The Long March* 160–61).

[30] "[L]e pouvoir qu'il exerce n'est pas plus dictatorial que celui qu'a détenu par exemple un Roosevelt" (*La Longue marche* 414, *The Long March* 427). To be fair, she was probably thinking of the control of American economic and cultural life Roosevelt and the US central government did, in fact, take on during the Second World War, that is, under emergency conditions.

[31] "Aucun citoyen en Chine n'est inquiété pour ses 'opinions'" (*La longue marche* 366, *The Long March* 378).

[32] Caute, *The Fellow-Travelers*, 347. See also Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims: Travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba*, and Simon Leys, *Essais sur la Chine*.

But he continues:

> However, although she pays lip service to the proposition that "China must become more liberal," there is little ground in this book for supposing that Madame de Beauvoir would be upset by any degree of coercion which appeared to be required for the maintenance of Communist rule in China.[33]

And that point is not right: as Sandrine Dauphin points out, when the time came, Beauvoir would be quite critical, as she and Sartre were of Castro once the "honeymoon of the revolution" there was over.[34] In 1971, as part of a roundup of the world political situation, and directly following the explanation I quoted above for how and why Fanon's hopes for Algeria had been disappointed, she'd write,

> And what is happening in China? That is a question I really should like to be able to answer. I went there in 1955 and when I came back I wrote a book about it. Since then I have learnt all I could about the period of "the hundred flowers," the great leap forward, and the experiment of the communes. Whereas the USSR advanced a model of a wealthy socialism and preached patience to the under-developed countries, China put forward a model of a poor socialism and encouraged the oppressed nations to violent action; and our sympathies went to China.... But when the Cultural

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[33] Hudson, "Mme. de Beauvoir in China," 66.

[34] Beauvoir's honest documentation of shifts in her thinking, consonant with the general principle that one's political views can (and ethically should) change as situations develop and as one learns more, was described at the Diverse Lineages of Existentialism conference by Ofelia Schutte (for the case of Cuba) and by Robert Bernasconi (with respect to the US). Dauphin writes: "Nevertheless, when the moment came, Beauvoir and Sartre would criticize Castro and Mao.... To be sure, when the maoist editors of the French journal *La Cause du Peuple* were arrested in 1970, Jean-Paul Sartre assumed the role of responsible editor. But what led to his support was freedom of the press and sympathy for the younger generation, more than genuine support for maoist thinking." [D'ailleurs Beauvoir et Sartre sauront critiquer le moment venu Mao et Castro .... Lorsque nombre d'intellectuels se proclameront maoïstes, ils préserveront une certaine distance. Certes, lorsque les directeurs maoïstes de la revue *La Cause du Peuple* sont arrêtés en 1970, Jean-Paul Sartre assumera la direction de la revue. Mais ce qui le conduira à ce soutien, c'est davantage la liberté de la presse et sa sympathie envers les jeunes qu'un réel soutien à la pensée maoïste (Dauphin, "En terre d'Icarie," 120).]

See also Richard Wolin, *The Wind from the East: French Intellectuals, the Cultural Revolution, and the Legacy of the 1960s.*

> Revolution broke out, no one could give us a convincing explanation of the reality that underlay the words.[35]

At that stage she feels unable to fully credit either the frightening and contradictory stories appearing in the rightist press, or the propaganda emanating from the Chinese regime, or the conjectures from outside "China experts."[36] Two friends, Kateb Yacine and Alejo Carpentier ("le grand écrivain cubain") bring back disquieting eyewitness reports that images of Mao are everywhere and obligatory, that his *Little Red Book* seems to be the only book for sale, that loudspeakers are broadcasting its words and taxi-drivers and air hostesses repeating them mechanically, over and over.… Carpentier tells of seeing an "exemplary worker," a gatherer of dung, brought to the University to lecture to the professors.[37] A formal visit by Beauvoir and Sartre to the Chinese embassy in Paris leaves her "none the wiser."[38] By 1970 she feels better informed, and able to account for what she has heard: for instance, the dung-gatherer's lecture to the professors can be understood as "part of a great campaign to re-establish manual labor in the public esteem and to do away with the excessive prestige of intellectual work." Mao's idea of "continuous revolution" to prevent the hardening of bureaucracy makes sense to her.[39] But she disclaims any "blind confidence" and retains her right to judge, for instance with respect to the *Little Red Book's* "depressingly platitudinous elementary truths,"[40] and the "dogmatic naïvety" of publications directed at the West.

> When I am told that the workers have a right to three weeks of holiday but that they give them up because of their socialist enthusiasm, what stays in my mind is the fact that they do not take holidays: enthusiasm

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[35] "Et que se passe-t-il en Chine? Voilà une question à laquelle je voudrais bien pouvoir répondre. J'y ai voyagé en 1955 et à mon retour, je lui ai consacré un livre. Par la suite, je me suis renseignée le mieux possible sur la 'période des cent fleurs,' le grand bond en avant, l'expérience des communes. Tandis que l'URSS proposait un modèle de socialisme riche et prêchait la patience aux pays sous-développés, la Chine proposait un modèle de socialisme pauvre et encourageait les peuples opprimés à des actions violentes: c'est à elle qu'allaient nos sympathies. J'ai dit qu'à Helsinki, Sartre avait soutenu ses vues. Mais lorsque a éclaté la révolution culturelle, personne n'a pu nous expliquer de façon convaincante quelle réalité recouvraient ces mots" (*TCF* 562–63, *ASD* 443).

[36] *TCF* 563, *ASD* 443–44.

[37] *TCF* 563–65, *ASD* 444–45.

[38] *TCF* 565–66, *ASD* 445–46.

[39] "On le comprend à présent: cet épisode faisait partie d'une vaste campagne pour réhabiliter le travail manuel et refuser de surestimer le travail intellectuel" (*TCF* 564, *ASD* 445n).

[40] "[V]érités premières d'une décourageante platitude" (*TCF* 565, *ASD* 445).

> cannot be institutionalized.... Saying that China is a paradise is all the more absurd since the revolution has not yet been carried through, as Mao himself admits. But there is no need to make a myth of China in order to feel great sympathy for the country.[41]

As times change, one does the best one can to continue informing oneself, which may lead to a change in view. But is this really a reversal? She had already said, in the conclusion to *La longue marche*, "It is an error to judge China as though things were stopped."

> I have understood that, more so in China than anywhere else, there is one mistake you have to avoid: judging things as though they were final, fixed as such. In this country which is ceaselessly on the move, the present derives its meaning from the past it is leaving behind [qu'il dépasse], from the future it is ushering in.
>
> To denigrate the regime because the standard of living there is still low or because capitalism yet subsists is to be unmindful of China's situation: you need a place to stand if you are going to move the world, to transform China you must use the past as fulcrum and lever. But what aggravates me most is this shiny ready-made benevolence which permits certain travelers to extol as absolute those achievements which only make sense as stepping stones to something else. It is not true that a Chinese village is more comfortable and richer than a village in France; what is extraordinary about it is the progress it represents over the villages of the past. It is likewise untrue that *the* Chinese woman is generally the most emancipated in the world. It is naïve to be overawed by the fact that the Archbishop of Peking openly approves of the regime; if he didn't he'd lose his

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[41] "Empêcher une nouvelle classe privilégiée de se former, donner aux masses un authentique pouvoir, faire de tout individu un homme complet: je ne peux que me rallier à un tel programme. Cependant, je ne saurais accorder à la Chine cette confiance aveugle que jadis l'URSS a suscité dans tant de cœurs. La propagande des revues qu'elle destine à l'Occident me consterne par sa naïveté dogmatique. Si on me dit que les ouvriers ont droit à trois semaines de congé mais qu'ils en font sacrifice par enthousiasme socialiste, ce que je retiens c'est qu'ils ne prennent pas de congé: l'enthousiasme ne s'institutionnalise pas. Prétendre voir dans la Chine un paradis est d'autant plus absurde que, de l'aveu même de Mao, la révolution n'y est pas achevée. Mais il n'est pas besoin d'en faire un mythe pour se tourner vers elle avec sympathie" (*TCF* 568, *ASD* 447–48). Her comment that one need not make a "myth" of China dovetails with Wolin's less sympathetic account of what "les maos" were up to; unlike Beauvoir herself, they made no distinction between Mao's original revolution, and the upheavals of the late 1960s and early 1970s, or indeed between "les mythes et les faits." But we should bear in mind too Beauvoir's awareness that myths were no less powerful because of not being true.

> miter tomorrow. This rapturous enthusiasm offends me not only through the errors it leads to but because China deserves to be seen for what it is: you will sell its efforts short if you do not recognize the difficulties they involve. I very much fear that these perfervid bearers of good tidings with their travel diaries all but written up in advance will have trouble convincing the folks back home. It is a pity. This moment in Chinese history is stirring precisely because of the as yet incomplete character of the victories it has won, because of the immensity of the obstacles it has still to subdue and the toughness of the struggle it is engaged in.[42]

This is one of the few passages Étiemble cites with approval, while regretting that Beauvoir did not follow through on its insight. But as I said many pages ago about Spelman and Deutscher, which of these utterances gets to stand as "Beauvoir"? One may pick and choose in good faith, or otherwise. Overall, Beauvoir's relationship to China was and remained a dynamic engagement with a changing society, a materially-based engagement with China which changed in response to historical changes initiated *there*.

2 Reality-Testing and Cold War Frames

When I first started working through *La longue marche*, my idea was to find out "what really happened" and compare what Beauvoir said with "what we now know." I was looking for an objective set of benchmarks: what could she plausibly have seen or known, how might we read her book apart from the Cold War context of its writing and reception. I was unprepared for the continued absence of scholarly consensus about this period of Chinese history, the enduring reach of incompatible frames with roots in diverging political commitments, some dating from the Cold War itself and other from the 1960s. Even basic facts, such as how many people perished during which eras, and how much can be blamed on famine or flood versus how much can be attributed to Communism, continue to be bitterly disputed among scholars. I must leave such matters to be debated by others. What I can say, though, is that the written authorities Beauvoir turned to after her return, to fill out the gaps in her information, appear still to be reputable authorities today; her research strategy seems to have been a sound one. For instance, in her discussion of the peasants, she relies heavily on a 1925 book called *Country Life in China* by an American researcher named Daniel Harrison Kulp, who arrived in the 1920s on the coast of southern China, where he conducted anthropological and sociological fieldwork. I found a 2005 article by one Zhou Daming who wrote his dissertation by going back to the same village, and basically concluded that Kulp's conclusions were sound and can still stand, since he observed cultural continuities that had been interrupted from 1949 to the 1970s. Zhou describes Kulp's concept of "familialism" as an influential, and still correct, foundation concept.

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[42] "J'ai compris qu'en Chine, plus que partout, il y a une erreur à éviter: c'est de juger les choses comme si elles étaient *arrêtées*. Dans ce pays qui ne cesse de bouger, le présent tire son sens du passé qu'il dépasse, de l'avenir qu'il annonce. Dénigrer le régime sous prétexte que le niveau de vie y est encore bas, ou parce que le capitalisme y subsiste, c'est méconnaître sa situation: on ne peut transformer la Chine qu'à partir de ce qu'elle était. Mais je suis surtout agacée par cette bienveillance a priori qui amène certains voyageurs à admirer dans l'absolu des réalisations qui n'ont de sens que prises dans leur devenir. Il est faux qu'un village chinois soit plus confortable et plus riche qu'un village français: ce qui est remarquable, c'est le progrès qu'il constitue par rapport à ceux d'autrefois. Il est faux que *la* femme chinoise soit en général la plus émancipée du monde. Il est naïf de s'émerveiller parce que l'archevêque de Pékin approuve ouvertement le régime: s'il s'y opposait, il ne serait plus archevêque. Cet enthousiasme me choque non seulement par les erreurs qu'il entraîne, mais parce que la Chine mérite d'être reconnue dans sa vérité; c'est mésestimer ses efforts que de ne pas en voir les difficultés. Je redoute que la propagande de ces zélateurs ne se retourne contre eux: il sera trop clair que leur siège était fait d'avance. C'est dommage. Ce moment de l'histoire chinoise est émouvant justement par le caractère encore inachevé des victoires remportées, par la grandeur des obstacles à vaincre et la dureté de la lutte entreprise" (*La longue marche* 405–6, *The Long March* 419, translation modified, emphasis in original).

As in *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir draws on fictional works, such as Ding Ling's *Le soleil brille sur la rivière Sang kan* and especially Ba Jin's *The Family*, to flesh out her understanding of how living in China felt from the inside to those most directly involved. She also gives a lot of credence to the work of Pearl S. Buck: I was brought up to sniff at Buck as a sort of Book-of the-Month Club middlebrow, but well-respected China scholar Charles W. Hayford, writing in 1998, regards her as a good, unbiased source of information.[43] Some of the most compelling sections of *La longue marche* describe urban poverty and exploitation, particularly in Shanghai, in the years *before* the Revolution: this she did not see, but it was described to her vividly by Rewi Alley and others, and she corroborated what they told her by reading in sources that appear to still be valued by both Chinese and non-Chinese writers. The question of whether the average person was actually better off after the revolution, or not, does not appear to be one I can settle. However, what I can say is that this was the main, if not the only, question, in which Beauvoir was interested; it appeared to weigh more heavily for her and her companions than questions which affected intellectuals more directly and narrowly, such as the future direction of literature and the arts.

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[43] Daniel Harrison Kulp, *Country Life in South China: The Sociology of Familialism*; Zhou Daming, "Follow-up Investigations in Phoenix Village"; Charles Hayford, "What's So Bad About *The Good Earth*?" See also Xiaorong Han, *Chinese Discourses on the Peasant, 1900–1949*.

I must say I did not expect the extraordinary vindictiveness with which some commentators continue to settle scores from the Cold War. I had high hopes when I saw that Anne-Marie Brady's *Making the Foreign Serve China: Managing Foreigners in the People's Republic*, from 2003, included a discussion of Beauvoir. Brady made use of newly opened archives to trace the historical development of *waishi*, short for *waijiao shiwu* (diplomatic matters)—for instance the training received by the cadres and interpreters, and ordinary citizens who were instructed to smile at visitors. But Brady's book is absolutely cynical, and in viewing *all* attempts at cross-cultural "friendship" as Machiavellian manipulations she badly overstates her case. The sections on Beauvoir are a terrible misrepresentation: relying on the notoriously inaccurate biography by Deirdre Bair, Brady claims that Beauvoir was deliberately lying, painting a rosy picture of her China trip in *La longue marche* while sending the "truth"—that she found China "drab and boring," for instance—in letters to her American lover, Nelson Algren. In fact the phrase "drab and boring" appears nowhere in the (readily available) letters; most of what Beauvoir wrote to Algren about China is quite positive, and tracks accurately with what *La longue marche* has to say about the difficulties of "official tourism" and the reasons why she was nonetheless enthusiastic about the hope Mao was bringing to his people.[44]

Brady is especially nasty about Beauvoir's relationship with one of her interpreters, the writer Chen Xuezhao, who is referred to in *La longue marche* as "Madame Cheng." Brady quotes Beauvoir's own enthusiastic description:

> Never a word of nonsense or propaganda from her lips; she is so firmly convinced of the benefits conferred by the regime and its necessity that she has no need to tell fibs to herself or anyone else; independent, spontaneous, fond of laughing and fonder yet of talking, she knows nothing of self-censorship: witty, tranquil, her frankness in great measure made up for the inflexibility of most of the cadres I had dealings with.[45]

But, Brady claims, this account is falsified by Chen's own memoirs:

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[44] *A Transatlantic Love Affair: Letters to Nelson Algren*, 517–18.

[45] Anne-Marie Brady, *Making the Foreign Serve China: Managing Foreigners in the People's Republic*, 95.

> What De Beauvoir described as Chen's "frankness" and "spontaneity" was officially sanctioned by "the leadership," who allowed her to speak directly to the philosophers, rather than through the interpreter who accompanied them at all times. As planned, this resulted in the pair finding her more "believable" than others they spoke to.[46]

However, one volume of Chen's memoirs has been published in English under the title *Surviving the Storm*, and so I have been able to read it myself. I came away with a very different impression. It is true that Chen's encounter with Beauvoir was much less important to Chen than it was to Beauvoir. But it seems unlikely that Chen's sentiments of support for Mao were forced or feigned, since she was still saying much the same thing when she wrote the memoir in 1979, by which time she had suffered terribly, first in the anti-Rightist campaign, and then during the Cultural Revolution. Chen continues to talk, as she did to Beauvoir, about wanting to correct her faults as a bourgeois writer, to be more oriented to the people.[47] (I gather something similar is true of Ding Ling.)[48]

Like so much of this anti-Communist literature, with its talk of "brainwashing," Brady's work appears to subscribe to an extremely over-simplified picture of human subjectivity, as though people had a two-way switch in their heads labelled either "sincere" versus "fake," "society" versus "self."[49] It is undoubtedly true that there were many things Chen did not feel able or free to say to Beauvoir. But we should not be too hasty to assume that we know what they would have been, or to see the choices the Chinese woman would have made about this as externally imposed. That would be a very poor model indeed for intercultural feminism.

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[46] Ibid., 95.

[47] *Surviving the Storm* was written during the period of so-called "scar literature," when frank and critical accounts of the Mao period appeared as part of a reckoning with the upheavals of the Cultural Revolution. Despite her suffering (she was barred from Party membership, forbidden to publish, assigned to menial tasks, abused verbally and physically), Chen seems never to have rethought her strong desire to "go to the countryside," her insistence on working directly with rural peasants rather than urban intellectuals; quite late in the book she observes rather acidly that if she had wanted wealth and fame she would never have gone to Yan'an (loc. 2126— she joined Mao there in 1940, and was among his earliest supporters). About the encounter with Beauvoir and Sartre, she says, "an interpreter accompanied us, but the leadership said I could speak to them directly." Chen Xuezhao, *Surviving the Storm: A Memoir*, loc. 945.

[48] As described by Tani Barlow in her introduction to the selected writing of Ding Ling, *I Myself Am a Woman*, and in chapter 5 of *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism*.

[49] Even Simon Leys's debunking essays have uneasy moments where it is clear that some of the official spokespeople might actually have been as enthusiastic as they presented themselves as being. How would we know? Did *they* even know? See also Zhong et al., *Some of Us*, and Orville Schell, *Watch Out for the Foreign Guests! China Encounters the West.* Saba Mahmood's discussion of the complexities of developing subjectivities might be apposite here. A similar issue about subjectivity is the theme of Beauvoir's own late novel, *Les belles images*, set in Paris: Laurence, an advertising copywriter, wrestles with

What emerges from my own reading of *Surviving the Storm* is a highly sympathetic figure, and exactly the right person to have introduced Beauvoir to China. For one thing, her French was excellent—she had lived in France from 1927–35, during which time she studied with Marcel Granet.[50] But beyond this, there are striking parallels between the two women's lives that must indeed have made for conversation. Almost exact contemporaries, both were intellectual prodigies who felt stifled in traditional families; their early lives were marked by romantic rebellion and non-conformity, by the fear of turning into one's mother and the determination to earn one's own living. One big difference between them was that Chen found feminism, as an explicit set of ideas, at an early age, as a member of the New Culture movement.[51] Beauvoir had to wait a lot longer. In China, feminism and modernity were inextricably linked in the eyes of even the most prominent male modernists, whereas in 1920s France and England the response of high male modernism to the "woman question" had been at best ambivalent, and sometimes openly hostile.[52] Beauvoir is also not wrong to see that Chen had explored and was exploring some of the same desires, temptations, fears, moral issues that she and Sartre were confronting after the Second World War: a retrospective disgust with one's earlier individualist position, an understanding that one's earlier "rebellions" had been underwritten by class privilege, and a determined commitment to write differently in future. Chen is in no way exoticized or patronized as an "informant"; Beauvoir treats her, and the other French-speaking Chinese intellectuals she meets, in the way she treated Richard Wright and Nelson Algren on her first trip to

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the difficulty of separating her own voice from consumer culture's incessant incitements to desire, even in the confines of her own private mind.

[50] This is the same Marcel Granet quoted in the introduction to *The Second Sex*.

[51] In the 1920s and 1930s she became a valued colleague and friend of well-known writers Lu Xun, Mao Dun, and Qiu Qiubai; her prose poems and personal essays were popular with young readers who were seeking vernacular alternatives to traditional Chinese culture. In 1923 one of her first pieces, "The New Woman I Hope to Be," won second prize in an essay contest sponsored by the *Shanghai Shibao*. According to Jeffrey Kinkley, it "argued for equality between the sexes, insisting that Chinese women, like [Ibsen's] Nora, must be able to stand on their own two feet economically rather than depend on men" (loc. 134).

[52] One might remember for instance, the surrealists' mingled fascination and horror at the female body, or what happened to the feminist little magazine *The New Freewoman* when Ezra Pound took it over and renamed it *The Egoist*.

America. Again this seems to have been less a "working on" than a "working with."

I want to point to two particular moments of contact between them in *La longue marche* which strike me as, for lack of a better term, authentic. Chen explains that even though the marriage law of 1950 and the opportunity for women to earn their own living have liberated women in *theory*, many women continue to pursue marriage as their primary aim: "'They have always been viewed as merchandise,' Mme. Cheng said to me. 'Well, today they're viewing themselves as merchandise.'"[53] A bit later, the two women are at the opera: "On the stage a young heroine was desperately struggling in an emperor's lewd embrace. 'That's why Chinese women wanted the Revolution,' Mme. Cheng said ardently, 'in order to have the right to say no to that kind of thing.'"[54] Now, Beauvoir's denunciation of arranged marriage in *La longue marche* is uncompromising. Before we sneer at this as an example of Western bias, we could remember the many pages she devotes in *The Second Sex* to denouncing arranged marriage in France.[55] In *La longue marche*, while explaining why Mao's new family code of 1950—which did away with child marriage, infanticide, and concubinage, required the formal consent of both partners to any marriage, made divorce available to women as well as men and allowed widows to remarry—in practice had a hard time gaining acceptance, she explains that as a general rule the pace of cultural change is slower than written law can enforce: "Even in France common custom is, on this point, less enlightened than the law; matches are still arranged and some marriages are pure business deals."[56]

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[53] "'On les a toujours traitées comme des marchandises,' me dit Mme. Cheng, 'alors, maintenant, elles se traitent elles-mêmes comme une marchandise'" (*La longue marche* 144, *The Long March* 149).

[54] "J'ai été frappée par une réaction de Mme. Cheng, assistant à côté de moi à un opéra où se déroulait une scène de viol; la jeune héroïne se défendait éperdument contre les entreprises d'un empereur lubrique. 'Voilà pourquoi les femmes chinoises ont voulu la révolution,' me dit-elle avec feu: 'pour avoir le droit de ne pas aimer'" (*La longue marche* 149, *The Long March* 154). The translator omits "une scène de viol," a rape scene.

[55] We could also remember that she herself was the product of an arranged marriage, and saw some of its sadder results in the life of her mother. Indeed, in *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* she attributes Zaza's death to the intolerable psychological pressures of the bourgeois marriage system, pressures she herself escaped only because her father's financial ruin left him unable to offer a dowry.

[56] "Même en France, les mœurs sont sur ce point à la remorque du code; il existe encore des unions arrangées et certaines sont de véritables marchés" (*La longue marche* 139, *The Long March* 144). Lisa Greenwald's recent chronicle of feminist activism in France reminds me that "'familialism,' an obsessive focus on the family as the backbone of society and the countervailing force to the general loss of morals and depopulation, was the official doctrine of Vichy," and an important target of French feminist activism in the years

3 Orientalisms, Anti-orientalisms, Alternatives

To turn back to the dismissive footnote in *The Second Sex* that has so exercised Markowitz and others: the Chinese history that *The Second Sex* omits is given very fully in *La longue marche*, and in a very similar manner to the history chapters of that earlier work.[57] Attention is paid, not just to oppression, but to expressions of resistance—literary texts of all periods are mined for examples of both—and Beauvoir also carefully details such matters as changes to the family code and inheritance laws. However, I suspect her discussion of "familialism" and "feudalism" would still not satisfy Markowitz. The case of Chinese women provides Beauvoir with an even stronger illustration of her argument in *The Second Sex* that the history of women is inexorably linked to developments in the history of private property.[58] The story she tells is indeed an evolutionary story; however, it is a story of *economic* development (and social developments that follow from economic causes); it has nothing to do with race. This is not Darwin or Spencer, or even really Hegel; it is still, for better or for worse, Engels.[59] The same syncretic or synoptic cross-cultural gaze we saw in her earlier work is applied here, but from the other way around. And the conclusion she draws from her discussion of Mao's marriage law is the same conclusion she drew in *The Second Sex*: women's economic autonomy is an absolutely necessary condition for women's liberation, but not a sufficient one.[60]

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that followed. Greenwald, *Daughters of 1968: Redefining French Feminism and the Women's Liberation Movement*, 27.

[57] *La longue marche* 123–59, *The Long March* 127–64.

[58] "In every civilization the history of women's rights is directly linked to the history of inheritance [footnote: As I tried to show in *The Second Sex*] which has evolved as a dependent variable of the changing economic and social context. In China, however, what with the monolithic permanence of family structure from the beginning of recorded history down to the twentieth century, the right of succession did not alter." [Dans toutes les civilisations, l'histoire des droits de la femme se confond avec l'histoire de l'héritage. ([Note] J'ai essayé de le montrer dans *Le deuxième sexe*), qui a évolué en fonction de l'ensemble des transformations économiques et sociales. Or en Chine, étant donné la permanence de la structure familiale, depuis le début des temps historiques jusqu'au XX^{e} siècle le droit de succession n'a pas varié (*La longue marche* 126, *The Long March* 130).]

[59] In fact, several central positions taken in *The Second Sex*—that women will only be liberated by finding meaningful work to do, that the interests of women are not fully served by an individualist approach to "happiness"—are pretty close to what Mao said in the Yenan declaration, which need not imply "influence" in either direction. As I said several hundred pages ago, if an idea is a good one, more than one person will have it.

[60] Another similarity is that here, too, women are understood as among the greatest enforcers of traditional views that are oppressive to (other) women, and indirectly to all women including themselves: see Beauvoir's discussion of the role played by mothers-in-law in

But Markowitz does not mention Beauvoir's 1957 repair of her 1948 omission, and seems generally uninterested in the book's historical dimension.[61] After briefly noting *La longue marche*'s materialist approach, she writes: "But Orientalism is a hardy plant, and *The Long March* is, alas, itself peppered with a variety of Orientalist tropes: those of the Oriental despot, the absence of Chinese history, the effeminate Chinese male, and the Chinese lack of energy and personality." A footnote follows: "For tropes on history in *The Long March*, see 35–36 and 88; on sensuality and lack of personality, see 64–65; on sex and gender disorder, see 152–54 and 478; on backwardness in science and technology, see 203–4 and 363; and on the pre-Communist Chinese failure to be truly human, see 484."[62] Much of this is misleading: for instance, rather than "effeminacy" and "gender disorder," Beauvoir is actually discussing a lack of jealousy and competition shown by male university students toward their female counterparts, something she found surprisingly different from the Sorbonne, and rather refreshing. Markowitz seems again to have proceeded by generating a list of isolated "problematic" sentences, most of which she distorts by taking them out of context.

"Tropes" are, of course, an important key to a writer's underlying (conscious or unconscious) view. But are they more important than what the writer is arguing, and more important than the explicit analysis and empirical examples adduced to support that argument? (Can a "trope" even be said to have meaning, when detached from the argument or narrative on whose ground it arises?) Again, it feels a bit unfair to lean so heavily on Markowitz, since scholarship-by-search-and-replace is hardly unusual now: within the current consensus about feminist method, policing the texts of the past for things "we wouldn't say today" is standard operating procedure. But perhaps that methodological consensus itself is not beyond debate.[63]

However, I do not want to sugarcoat the extent to which *La longue marche* fails the current litmus tests of multiculturalism. Beauvoir shows no respect whatsoever for Chinese tradition; her discussion of ancient China is often dismissive, and she gets things wrong. She does not like the literati, calling them

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maintaining the cruelties of the "familial system," in particular *La longue marche* 141, *The Long March* 135.

[61] Despite the charge with which she opens her article, that scholars who overlook Beauvoir's "orientalism" are being ahistorical, she herself fails to note that *the Long March* is concerned not with "China" but with Mao's revolution.

[62] Markowitz, "Occidental Dreams," 280–81.

[63] Critique is, of course, indispensable; but a "search and destroy" attitude toward "tropes" can actually impede genuine critique, which needs to engage with what earlier writers are actually arguing.

an elite culture, a court culture. She finds Chinese monuments ugly and uninteresting, designed for empires and not for people; she thinks the Forbidden City goes on and on and resembles itself, she's particularly unimpressed by the ceramics;[64] what she says about Chinese painting, and its failure to develop, is quite cringe-making. She does confirm the value of Chinese medicine, which she says Chiang Kai-Shek had outlawed,[65] but she describes Chinese religion as superstition and magic.[66]

Confucianism and Taoism (of which she gives a somewhat confused historical account) are seen as stagnant, as having an "immanent rather than a transcendent ontology."[67] As descriptive terms, scholars of religion might actually not disagree with that last point, but as an existentialist, Beauvoir has to argue that transcendence is better, and she does. She takes Chinese ideas seriously as ideas, as philosophy, and argues against them, pitting Kant against Confucius, for instance, because Kant's individual is universal whereas Confucius's individual operates within a hierarchy where he must observe his place. A value judgment is clearly present in the critique of Taoist quietism and a Confucianist conformism as "bureaucratic" (du fonctionnaire). It is not however a question of the "sleepy East" vs the triumphant West, but rather a philosophical difference, argued philosophically. A view of the relation between subject and world as immanent rather than transcendent, as harmonious and unchanging, is deeply uncongenial to the existential framework of always trying to see the present in terms of the future project, of "devenir": we've seen this framework since *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, and Beauvoir applies it consistently when she says, "it is an error to judge China as though things were stopped."[68] Moreover, the existentialist framework dovetails seamlessly with a worldview based, not in race, but in political economy: a cyclic, or non-linear, conception of time, such as she sees in Chinese philosophy, cannot provide a resource for modernization.[69]

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[64] *La longue marche* 58–63, *The Long March* 62–7.

[65] *La longue marche* 345–49, *The Long March* 355–60.

[66] *La longue marche* 84, 222–35, *The Long March* 88, 228–42.

[67] *La longue marche* 253–62, *The Long March* 260–71.

[68] We might also bear in mind that when Beauvoir spoke against superstition, and in favor of the Enlightenment, it was as an ex-Catholic who had modernized herself by leaving God behind, against significant opposition from her own original social milieu.

[69] In an odd twist, this point was anticipated by Lorraine Hansberry, as an aside in her enthusiastic leftist reading of *The Second Sex*: "[T]oday American journalists try to find a desperate amusement or frivolity in the fact of the liberation of the women of China from the most barbaric forms of their former oppression. They cannot see that, suspending the liability to 'Communist sympathy' for a moment, a nation in fertile birth, or a *renaissance*, be it young America or ancient China, cannot afford the traditional misuse, and therefore

Should we produce an object called orientalism and say that this is that? Well, *which* orientalism would it then be? If one situates Beauvoir (as Markowitz does not do) within the history of French orientalist writing, which is indeed a shameful one, one can see that hers is not, for instance, the orientalism of a Pierre Loti. Loti arrived with the mopping-up army after the Boxer Rebellion and wrote in *The Last Days of Peking* about "an intolerable smell of the yellow race, impossible to define"; he describes his delight in rolling about in the Empress's bed after the sack of her palace.[70] This is not that. Nor is it the attitude, which Richard Wolin describes as "sinophilia," taken in the 1960s and 1970s by the group around the journal *Tel Quel*, especially Philippe Sollers and Julia Kristeva, whose quasi-feminist 1974 book *Des Chinoises* makes an essentialist romance of the inscrutable Chinese countenance. As Wolin writes, "China for them was a trope"; while some good developments came out of French "Maoism," particularly for Foucault, the arrogance of that encounter remains breathtaking, and a bit too close for comfort to the sinophiles of a previous generation, as Spivak shows.[71]

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virtual uselessness *of half its people.* The frontier demands work, hard work, and a dedication to the future. There is not the time to clutter it with the worthlessness of the uselessness of women. Nothing could better indicate the *artificial* nature of their oppression to begin with. If the Communists of China have indeed ideologically elevated woman to a place of dignity which is beyond her mere economic status, this is hardly a point of jest, but one of the more inspiring developments of modern history" (Hansberry, "An American Commentary," 136–37).

[70] "[U]ne intolérable odeur de race jaune qui ne se peut définir" (Loti, *Les derniers jours de Pékin*, 150).

[71] Richard Wolin, *The Wind from the East*, 20 and 114. For Wolin, "French Maoism operated at a dangerous remove from the reality principle. Mao's China becomes a projection—a Rorschach test—for the students' overheated revolutionary fantasies" (122). "[T]he role that bourgeois self-hatred played in their pro-Chinese worldview was inestimable" (137). See also David Macey, "Rebellion, or, Analysis," and Eric Hayot, *Chinese Dreams: Pound, Brecht, Tel Quel.* On Kristeva specifically, see Spivak, "French Feminism in an International Frame," and Lisa Lowe, *Critical Terrain: British and French Orientalisms*, 136–52.

Wolin's portrait of the *Tel Quel* group as opportunists is not falsified by Kristeva's own account in her autobiographical novel, *Les samouraïs*. The whole episode reminds me of Beauvoir's remark about the *Partisan Review* boys: "They would burn down the whole world to save their stupid rag of a magazine" (*Lettres à Sartre*, 296). Beauvoir's own view of the Cultural Revolution was considerably less romantic, as we saw above. And in explaining the support she and Sartre offered to the group of young activists around the journal *La Cause du Peuple*, she'd say that she sympathized with "les maos" "despite my reservations—especially, my lack of blind faith in Mao's China" (*ASD* 478). [Malgré quelques réserves—en particulier je ne saurais avoir une foi aveugle dans la Chine de Mao—je sympathise avec les Maoistes (*TCF* 607)].

In sharp contrast, when Beauvoir celebrates the sweeping away of decadent Chinese customs in favor of a cleaner and more equitable modernity, she is echoing, not French orientalists, but the Chinese writers of the May Fourth movement, whose influence was still very palpable among Chinese government leaders in 1955. This was especially true of Mao Dun, with whom she records some long conversations. Beauvoir frequently quotes and cites "the intellectuals of the May Fourth movement," particularly in her chapters on "Culture" and "The Family," and she has clearly studied their works in detail.[72] Beauvoir's most "Hegelian" statements about "progress" and evolution are connected directly to ideas of modernity and modernization expressed by Chinese revolutionaries; every one of the "orientalist tropes" Markowitz scolds in Beauvoir's text can be traced to that generation, especially to the feminists (male and female) who were an integral part of the movement, and of its (very significant) legacy to Mao and those around him.[73] What Beauvoir has to say about the backward or "static" nature of Chinese culture is actually quite mild compared to what Lu Xun, Hu Shi, Jin Tianhe, and He Jin had to say.[74] And while the term "feudalism," as shorthand for what must be left behind, now echoes quite oddly in our (Western) ears, it is not just orthodox Mao, but part of a discourse pursued by nearly all intellectuals in China before 1949. These writers didn't always agree about the extent to which China was still feudal, or about how best to address the problem, but they did agree that "feudalism," "familialism," and the long-traditional subjection of women were harmful, not just to women themselves, but to all of China.

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[72] She sent Nelson Algren a book by Lu Xun which she thought he would like: this was in keeping with the idea they shared of an international left-intellectual writing practice (see Altman, "Simone de Beauvoir as Literary Writer"). She also sent him some Chinese "trinkets," despite saying in *La longue marche* that if she really wanted to bring back "typical objects" as souvenirs, she'd choose a spittoon and a thermos bottle of tea (*La longue marche* 418, *The Long March* 431–32).

[73] For an account of Mao's early writing in favor of women's emancipation, see Delia Davin, "Gendered Mao: Mao, Maoism, and Women." "Notable also are ten passionate pieces written in response to the suicide of a young Changsha woman, Miss Zhao, who slit her own throat on her wedding day to escape marriage to the man to whom her parents had betrothed her" (197).

[74] Nor was it simply a case of elite males using feminist ideas as a means to their own liberation: young women themselves resisted the traditional ideology that had grounded such practices as footbinding and non-consensual marriage. See Rana Mitter, *A Bitter Revolution: China's Struggle with the Modern World*; Wang Zheng, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment: Oral and Textual Histories*; Harriet Evans, "The Impossibility of Gender in Narratives of China's Modernity"; and Lydia Liu, Rebecca Karl, and Dorothy Ko, eds., *The Birth of Chinese Feminism: Essential Texts in Transnational Theory*.

Would it not have been strange, patronizing—indeed, would it not have been *orientalizing*?—for a progressive anti-colonialist Westerner to refuse to listen to the vision her Chinese hosts offered of their own culture and their own future? If we look at her remarks on "la vieille Chine" (the old China) through the screen of multicultural "difference," we may see insensitivity; if we look at them through the lens of political economy, we will see that she is articulating a position in solidarity with views that, I submit, have every right to be understood as "Chinese."

It is certainly the case that Hu Shi, Lu Xun, Mao Dun, many others were influenced by study in and of "the West." And so indeed was the revolutionary generation, many of whom studied in France.[75] But to see the May Fourth movement (and its Maoist legacy) as one more symptom of cultural imperialism would be to deny agency and intellect to the Chinese who created it.

It would also ignore the fact that women's official position in China in the 1950s was well in advance of any European country at that date. One did not find de Gaulle or Eisenhower arguing that women held up half the sky, or if they had said that, they would have been referring to women's role as dutiful wives and citizen mothers.[76] Beauvoir's description of the Communist commitment to women, through new laws of marriage that went hand in hand with other attempts, such as land reform and collectivization, to break the system of private property, is validated by my reading of more recent feminist China scholars: their work echoes her claims that women's situation in China improved under Communism, and also corroborate her uncertainty about how fully these improvements would "take." It does seem fair to say that (old) materialist feminism, which saw an understanding of both gender and class (and of the link between them) as fundamental to attempts to overthrow an oppressive system, at that moment was closer to being put into practice in China than anywhere else on earth.[77]

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[75] See Paau Shiu-lam, "The Vogue of France Among Late Ch'ing Revolutionaries."

[76] The French communists hardly offered a viable alternative: in addition to discrediting themselves with respect to the Soviet "labor" camps, and later the Mahgreb, the PCF proved extremely conservative with respect to such issues as abortion and contraception.

[77] See for instance Christina Gilmartin, "Gender in the Formation of a Communist Body Politic," Wang Zheng, *Finding Women in the State: A Socialist Feminist Revolution in the People's Republic of China, 1949–1964*, and Xin Huang, *The Gender Legacy of the Mao Era: Women's Life Stories in Contemporary China*. It is good to remember that, as these scholars show, Maoist feminism was feminism, and that it was created and maintained by feminists. The story of Beauvoir and Chen Xuezhao is another data point here.

Here, and throughout, I'm taking a different approach from that of Li-Hsiang Lisa Rosenlee, who writes in her book, *Confucianism and Feminism: A Philosophical Interpretation*:

> The term *Western feminist* here primarily is used to refer to an ideological orientation that frames Chinese women's liberation in accordance with Western intellectual tradition. In this way, a feminist and/or sinologist who is de facto Chinese or have Chinese ancestry could fall into the category of "Western Feminist" and a feminist who is de facto Westerner could fall outside of that category insofar as their ideological orientation is concerned. So that the empirical problem that so and so is a Westerner yet advocates such and such position or so and so is a Chinese yet advocates such and such position can be resolved.[78]

This is a coherent outlook, and I am in no position to challenge her view that once one has peeled away Western frames there will be an authentic Confucian Chineseness left to see, which once subject to "rectification" (immanent critique) can serve as a resource for present-day feminists. Rosenlee's argument that Western roots for philosophical virtue ethics (Aristotle, Kant, Nietzsche) are no less in need of such rectification is indisputable. That most if not all of the activism and gains for women that took place in early twentieth century China did happen to show the influence of a Western frame and an attack on tradition becomes a purely "empirical" issue, which Rosenlee as a philosopher can properly set aside. However, that activism, and the possibility of a changed future, is what primarily interested Beauvoir, and it is also what interests me.

Rosenlee's re-analysis does find the subordination of women deeply encoded in Confucian texts and practices. Whether or not "wai" and "nei" map exactly onto Western "public" and "private," women were barred from activity in the "wai" in ways that were harmful to them; Chinese women minded that and said so. Rosenlee's history is particularly interested in moments of women's resistance and agency that might be difficult for outsiders to recognize—narratives of "virtuous women" where women writers gave other women conservative advice they hadn't followed themselves. Resistance to widow remarriage is a particularly interesting case where, she says, Western scholars, working from a view of Chinese women as helpless victims, misunderstood where women's true interests lie. I am less persuaded by the argument (which Dorothy Ko also makes) that the history of footbinding does not show Chinese women's *erotic* subordination, that it was an area of women's agency because women were active participants and it had a social meaning (and, in the work of Ko, an artistic value).[79] Or rather, no, I *do* appreciate the agency involved: but I find Beauvoir's understanding of "complicity" a better way to theorize it.

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[78] Li-Hsiang Lisa Rosenlee, *Confucianism and Women: A Philosophical Interpretation,* 161n1.

Rosenlee does not refer to *La longue marche*, or to what Beauvoir has to say about China in *The Second Sex* and her autobiography. But she does say that she has found Beauvoir's "existentialists' deconstruction of traditional accounts of the 'essence' or 'nature' of a woman" foundationally helpful to her own project, in generating the problem of how "feminists [can] continue to use the category of 'woman' as a collective term to talk about gender oppression across cultural, racial, and class boundaries."[80] She returns to Beauvoir also at the very end of her book: "In the end, this project eventually is personal. Like de Beauvoir, who wrote *The Second Sex* in order to answer the personal question of what it means to be a woman, I am trying to answer to myself what it means to be a Chinese Confucian woman."[81]

One possible conclusion one might draw is that "Confucius" will be no less, and no more, philosophically useful than "Hegel" or Kant: in *both* cases, the question becomes "what we make of what he made of us." In both cases, the modern feminist (wherever she comes from, or lives) will have to engage in what Maria Lugones called "contortions," to a quite significant degree. So perhaps the "feminism" in feminist philosophy is what is discovered in the course of performing those contortions? Perhaps the contortions *are* the feminism?

To my mind, unless one wants to commit the absurdity of calling the May Fourth generation "self-orientalists," or something (self-hating Orientals?), it becomes urgent once again to speak of intellectual hybridity, and of the fact that, as Shana Brown has put it, "modernity was created in different places … all maps are anachronistic."[82] Again, this is Paul Gilroy's point, and Sam Bardaouil's, about the importance of understanding modernism and modernity as produced through two-way (really multi-way) intellectual exchanges between the colonized and the metropole, and James Clifford's point (following Leiris) about ethnic "authenticity" as an invented object. This seems particularly applicable to the interchanges of the 1950s: its Bandung humanist version could be seen, for instance, in Frantz Fanon's denunciation of "folklore" in *Les damnés de la terre*, or in Michel Leiris's essay, "L'ethnographe devant le colonialisme," where, as we saw, he speaks precisely of the ethical and political imperative to stand in solidarity with the colonized subject of today, the "évolué," rather than confining non-Western cultures to a zoo or museum in order for Westerners to appreciate and study them in their "authentic" but stagnant state. Beauvoir's commitment to that dynamic is equally clear in *La longue marche*:

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[79] Dorothy Ko, *Cinderella's Sisters: A Revisionist History of Footbinding* and *Every Step a Lotus: Shoes for Bound Feet.*

[80] Rosenlee 150, 151.

[81] Ibid., 159.

[82] Shana Brown, Lecture, University of Hawaii, July 2014.

> The fact that pre-Columbian art is not perpetuated in New York City ateliers never wrung a tear from me, nor will I shed one when Peking has forgotten Sung cloisonné and Ming brocade.[83]…
>
> The visitor who comes to find out about China trains most of his attentions upon the unusual and unique aspects of her culture; but the Chinese themselves are infinitely more interested in developing the general knowledge they must have if they are to stand on a par with all other nations.[84]

And this connects to her attack on the right-wingers in France and Hong Kong who deplore the disappearance of what is picturesque and mysterious about "the old China": it is westerners, who know nothing about the real China, who want to preserve it as a kind of mirage or utopia.

> Is then China doomed willy-nilly to ape the West? The truth is that they are drawing from it heavily.… Many civilized Western souls bemoan this; convinced of their definitive superiority, the idea of China remaining "different" tickles their fancy. China is, they wail, going to "become banal." They are very vague indeed about Chinese thought and art, their ignorance of the language and literature is total; but it's this mysteriousness that appeals to them, it looks something like infinity; they love to dream

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[83] "Je n'ai jamais déploré que New York ne perpétuât pas les arts précolombiens; je n'aurai pas de regrets quand Pékin oubliera le cloisonné Song ou les broderies Ming" (*La longue marche* 344–45, *The Long March* 355). This was not a new thought for Beauvoir, nor was it China-specific. See *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947* (262–83) for a similar view of Taos Pueblo, where she witnessed Native Americans performing traditional dances for the entertainment of tourists. Her visit to Portugal right after the war had led to a similar condemnation, in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguité*, of the dictator Salazar's assiduous preservation of handicrafts and vernacular architecture at the expense of funding human welfare, despite the extreme poverty in which most Portuguese were then living (*Pour une morale de l'ambiguité* 134–36, *Ethics of Ambiguity* 92–94).

[84] "Le visiteur qui s'initie à la Chine s'intéresse surtout aux formes singulières de sa culture; mais les Chinois eux-mêmes sont essentiellement soucieux de développer le savoir universel qui leur est nécessaire pour s'égaler sur tous les plans aux autres nations" (*La longue marche* 349, *The Long March* 360).

> that in this otherwise banal world there is still a special somewhere yet full of unfathomable marvels. The Chinese, though, do not dream their culture, they live it; they sense its limitations; they also know those limitations may be surmounted; they are refusing to stay put in that supposed wonderland to which the perhaps innocent but none the less essentially contemptuous admiration of certain Westerners would assign them.[85]

As she said at the outset, she went to China not in search of some romantic mysterious East, not in search of the "Other," but in pursuit (and support) of political solutions. And she exposes the bad faith of those who, she says, would keep the Chinese peasant poor in the interest of the picturesque, those for example who miss the "Singsong Girls" of the now demolished brothels, which in 1920 held thousands of young women who had been kidnapped or sold by their indigent families;[86] those who are nostalgic even for the dirt and squalor that have been (at least in theory) banished from Peking, which is now "aseptically spic and span,"[87] in contrast to Naples, Lisbon, Barcelona, even Chicago and New York.[88] But "certain aesthetes, enamored of old China, miss the flies, the ragged people: 'No more beggars! why, this isn't Peking anymore,' one connoisseur exclaimed to me, reproach in his tone."[89] The direction of Beauvoir's criticism here strikes me as *anti*-Orientalist; that term had not been invented, but perhaps Sartre came close to it when he praised Cartier-Bresson's photographs of China as "neither lotus nor Loti."[90] I find Beauvoir's version persuasive, and potentially far-reaching.

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[85] "La Chine est-elle donc condamnée bon gré mal gré à copier l'Occident? Le fait est qu'elle s'en inspire considérablement. Elle s'est transformée socialement et économiquement grâce aux sciences et aux techniques occidentales: pour s'exprimer dans sa nouveauté elle est obligée d'emprunter aux pays qui sont en avance sur elle. Beaucoup de civilisés occidentaux s'en désolent; convaincus de leur définitive supériorité, il leur plairait que la Chine demeurât 'différente.' Elle va 'se banaliser,' déplorent-ils. Ils ignorent tout de sa langue et de sa littérature, presque tout de sa pensée et de son art: mais précisément ce mystère prend à leurs yeux l'apparence de l'infini; ils aiment à rêver que quelque part au monde se perpétuent d'insondables merveilles. Les Chinois ne rêvent pas leur culture: ils la vivent; ils en éprouvent les limites; mais aussi ils savent que celles-ci peuvent être dépassées; ils refusent de se laisser enfermer dans le domaine que prétend leur assigner l'admiration ignorante et, en vérité, méprisante de certains Occidentaux" (*La longue marche* 352, *The Long March* 363, translation modified).

[86] For example, in an early chapter, "The Discovery of Peking," she describes the quarter of "opium dens and brothels that exist no more": "As for the brothels, they numbered 277 in 1920, contained 3,130 girls divided into four classes according to their youth and beauty; they were bought while still very young from needy families, or they were simply kidnapped … in return for gratuities, newspapers publicized them openly … as if advertising a brand of laundry soap. Recounting their adventures, tourists of the period were cheerfully wont to extol the charm and gracious manners of those to whom they referred as 'Singsong girls'" (*The Long March* 41–2). [C'est là que se trouvaient naguère les lieux de plaisir et de débauche … des fumeries d'opium, des bordels qui n'existent plus.… Quant aux bordels, en 1920 on en comptait 377, comprenant 3,130 pensionnaires, réparties en quatre classes selon leur jeunesse et leur beauté; on les achetait toutes jeunes à des familles indigentes, ou même on les kidnappait.… [L]es journaux leur faisaient une publicité ouverte … comme s'il se fût agi d'une marque de lessive. Les touristes de l'époque se plaisent à vanter, dans leur récits de voyage, le charme et les manières décentes de celles qu'on appelait les "Sing-song girls" (*La longue marche* 38–9).]

What holds together all the "fellow-traveling" literature, then and now, is the simple belief that there *are* viable political alternatives to capitalism, and that there is a viable role for literature and the arts to play that is not limited to shoring up the economic and social interests of the bourgeoisie. From that perspective, the book's most poignant moment occurs on the reviewing stand at the First of October parade: the delegation has been standing for four hours, barely noticing the passage of time, as thousands of dancers pay their respects to the Chinese leaders and celebrate the Revolution.

> The parade continues. All the while watching it, we cast side-long glances at each other: Poles, Frenchmen, Italians, we were all bred on irony, taught to keep our emotions on a leash, and our sophistication includes the keenest unwillingness to be made a fool of; each of us wonders to himself whether he is all alone in feeling moved by the earnest joyousness of this crowd on the march. It is a relief to hear Infeld murmur: "When you see that, you don't much want to be a cynic any more."[91]

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[87] "[R]igoureusement aseptisé" (*La longue marche* 40, *The Long March* 42).

[88] "The travel agencies' slogans which in the West define the picturesque section of the city, narrow and evil-smelling little streets, does not apply here," and she contrasts Naples, Lisbon, Barcelona, Chicago and the Bowery: here there are no bums (*The Long March* 42–3). [Le slogan qui définit en Occident les pittoresques quartiers pauvres—"rues étroites et nauséabondes"—n'est pas de mise ici: on n'y respire pas une mauvaise odeur. Ces rues ne sont pas seulement incomparables avec les venelles de Naples, de Lisbonne, ou de Barcelone; on n'y voit pas comme dans les allées de Chicago voler de vieux journaux ou fumer les poubelles; on n'y rencontre pas ces "hommes oubliés" qui traînent sur la Bowery de New York (*La longue marche* 40, *The Long March* 42).]

[89] "Certains esthètes, amoureux de l'ancienne Chine, regrettent les mouches, les haillons: 'Plus de mendiants! mais ce n'est plus Pékin!' m'a dit l'un d'eux avec blâme" (*La longue marche* 49, *The Long March* 52).

[90] "[S]ans lotus ni Loti" (Sartre, *D'une Chine à l'autre*, 8). The photographs were taken in 1948 and 1949.

[91] "Le défilé se poursuit. Tout en le regardant, nous nous observons les uns les autres: Polonais, Français, Italiens, nous avons tous l'ironie facile et la volonté arrêtée de n'être pas dupes; chacun se demande s'il est seul à se sentir touché par la sérieuse gaieté de cette

Leiris's version in *Fibrilles* is more poetic: "And if, for once, we gave up our cynicism?"

4 Last Thoughts: Dateline Beijing

In 2017, Chinese scholar Min Dongchao, while noting that "traveling theory" still tends to move from West to East, called on feminists to move beyond Said's original paradigm and pay attention to the "many other invisible discursive trajectories that link the development of gender theories and movements in the world that have so far been ignored."[92] Uncovering a few such complex trajectories has been my project, and like Beauvoir's own it is not (I hope) a purely academic one. We might think further about how Beauvoir's on-the-ground feminist activism in France in the 1970s and 1980s, and everything the French MLF owes her for that work, was informed by what she learned in and about China. As with her other travels, we might see her less as "bringing theory," and more as seeking it. ("Not only has [Kahina] read your books, but now it is you who read hers"?) Of course she would not have said "theory": that is not her word, but ours. In *La force des choses* she said China had given her "schemata" and "keys" (des schémas, des clés); when she sent Kate Millett's delegation off to hear what Iranian feminists had to say, she spoke more simply of *informations*. But how does this look from the other side?

In the fall of 2016, I travelled to Beijing to present an earlier version of this chapter at a conference of historians. Afterwards, several members of the audience expressed surprise: they had expected from my title ("Beauvoir in China") that I would speak about Chinese translations and reception of *The Second Sex*; that Beauvoir herself had traveled to China in the 1950s, none of the Chinese historians knew. It seemed unlikely to me that Beauvoir's own work had had any significant impact on China. Certainly she did not actively seek to do so. As she describes it, the flow went in the other direction, and it was *French* readers she had sought to influence with *La longue marche*, to mobilize European support for China in the context of anti-colonialist struggle. But like Beauvoir, I went home and went to the library, and it turned out there was more to know.

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foule en marche. Nous sommes soulagés d'entendre Infeld murmurer: 'Quand on voit ça, on n'a plus envie d'être cynique'" (*La longue marche* 414–15, *The Long March* 428).

[92] Min Dongchao, *Translation and Travelling Theory: Feminist Theory and Praxis in China*, 4. Min's book helpfully connects flows of theory to recent flows of capital in service of economic "development."

The current feminist scene in China is too dynamic and complex to characterize briefly,[93] and (also like Beauvoir) I am limited to what I can read in English. So what follows is more a sketch than a full account. But from what I can tell, Beauvoir did have an influence; her reception was rather paradoxical; and again, the dimension of time has been key.

In 1955, Beauvoir reported, few Chinese had read her work (or Sartre's): they were invited as prominent intellectuals whose international cultural capital made their public support valuable.[94] Later the regime's denunciation of "bourgeois feminism" as a "poisonous Western weed" blocked any uptake of her work. But after Mao's death, when the backlash against the Cultural Revolution increased receptiveness to "joining the international track" (in connection with Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms), Beauvoir does seem to have received attention from intellectuals and students.

The irony is this. Beauvoir herself had valued her Chinese experience because it helped clarify and develop the marxist-materialist side of her analysis. But in the 1980s Chinese feminists found her ideas helpful in *detaching* the women's movement from Maoist marxism, which they identified with the (now discredited) regime that had led to Cultural Revolution turmoil, and also in detaching their feminism from the activities of the All-China Women's Federation, which had functioned as an arm of the State. Beauvoir was embraced (especially by Li Xiaojiang, a highly influential writer and founder of the academic discipline of women's studies in China), as a theorist of woman's *difference*, as having drawn attention to the particular condition and experience of women, in ways that had been silenced by Maoist doctrines like "what men can do, women can do." In an article analysing successive translations of *The Second Sex* (in both Mainland China and Taiwan), Nicki Liu Haiping explains,

> For Li Xiaojiang, a pioneer of Chinese feminism, Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* was attractive, not for its theme of "second sex," but for its theme of woman. For her, there was nothing earth-shattering about the observation of women's inferiority. However, for "woman" to appear in a book title in the early 1980s in China was refreshing.... [It] came at a time when

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[93] For two very interesting, and very different, accounts, see Leta Hong Fincher, *Betraying Big Brother: The Feminist Awakening in China* and Xin Huang, *The Gender Legacy of the Mao Era: Women's Life Stories in Contemporary China.*

[94] Chen Xuezhao had read *The Second Sex*—an ex-boyfriend who had stayed in France had sent it to her—but her comment in her autobiography is limited to wondering why he had done so.

> Chinese women were looking for something to support their struggle to break away from the grip of class theory.[95]

Dai Jinhua, another pioneering Chinese feminist, who found *The Second Sex* life-changing when she came across it in 1979, noted in retrospect (2001):

> From a historical point of view, it is not hard to see that the appearance of Simone de Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe* and feminist theory in China was in fact situated in multiple mismatches with societal reality.… A serious dislocation herein was that Chinese feminists of the 1980s used the term "female gender/second sex" to highlight the existence of gender difference rather than to reveal the absurdity of gender fundamentalism. They used it to break away from women's anonymous status under the principle that "men and women are the same."[96]

Many theorists, including Min Dongchao (taking off from Said), have emphasized the productive value of misreading.[97] But Li's emphasis on difference in Beauvoir's account of women's experience is not really a misreading; or at least, it is no *more* of a misreading than those in the US who read Beauvoir as a liberal "equality feminist" indifferent to the specifics of women's embodiment. Beauvoir scholars increasingly discuss the complexity of her phenomenological picture of women's embodied experience.[98] And indeed, early in the introduction to *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir did say, "It is clear that no woman can claim without bad faith to be situated beyond her sex,"[99] although as Toril Moi noticed, the first English translation simply left that sentence out.

However, the earliest *Chinese* translation of *The Second Sex* (done in Taiwan, imported to the Mainland) was incomplete in the other direction: it omitted the entirety of volume one, and included only the second volume, "Women's

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[95] Nicki Liu Haiping, "Manipulating Simone de Beauvoir: A Case Study of the Chinese Translations of *The Second Sex*," 89.

[96] Dai Jinhua, "Traces of Time: Simone de Beauvoir in China," 184, 185.

[97] See also Tani Barlow's complex discussion of feminism as "catachresis," in *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism*, and Xiaomei Chen, *Occidentalism*. Li's uptake of Beauvoir as a difference feminist is ironic, but perhaps no more so than than the way US feminists have embraced Mao's slogan, "women hold up half the sky," "the iron girl" ideal many Chinese women found oppressive rather than "empowering."

[98] See for instance Sara Heinämaa, *Toward a Phenomenology of Sexual Difference*. See also Toril Moi, *What is a Woman?* for a discussion of how poorly Beauvoir's view maps onto 1980s essentialism/contructionism debates in the US.

[99] "Il est clair qu'aucune femme ne peut prétendre sans mauvaise foi se situer par-delà son sexe" (*DS* 1:13). See Toril Moi, "While We Wait."

Lived Experience."[100] Could this help explain why Chinese feminists emphasized her account of female embodied subjectivity, rather than the philosophical critique she lays out in the introduction to volume one, which has been emphasized (indeed perhaps overemphasized) in Anglophone philosophical work?

It is the mark of a complex and fecund work of theory to sustain different interpretations. Still, there are limits, and Beauvoir would certainly not have agreed with what Li *made* of her account of sexual difference.[101] Li describes women's difference as essentially rooted in biology, especially in maternity; she argues that men and women evolved separately, and that "nature" thus requires different but complementary roles; she called on women to emphasize their femininity, and to take advantage of the new availability of female subjectivity through consumer culture. This has led Tani Barlow to characterize Li as a "market feminist"; Min Dongchao describes Li's corrective focus on the creation of feminine subjectivity more gently as part of a "cultural turn," a turn away from politics. More recently, Song Shaopeng has outlined ways Li's work dovetails with neo-liberalism.[102]

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[100] See Haiping for details and close analysis. See also two short pieces from the 2008 anthology, *(Re)découvrir l'œuvre de Simone de Beauvoir*: Sophie Zhang, "Beauvoir et la Chine" and Xin Miao, "Simone de Beauvoir et *Le deuxième sexe* en Chine." The earliest Chinese translations were based on Parshley's English version, and so was the first "complete" one, by Tao Tiezhu in 1998. Sophie Zhang spoke with his widow, who told her that Tao (not unlike Parshley) had died of exhaustion ("meurt d'épuisement") soon after it appeared. ("Un camarade homme, dévoué à la cause des femmes! Nous lui rendons hommage" says Zhang [337]). The first Chinese translation directly from French, by Kelu Zhang, was published in Shanghai in 2011.

[101] The refusal of biological determinism, and rejection of femininity, seem basic to her theory; I am extrapolating also from her negative reaction to the "difference feminisms" of Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous.

Stepping back from the paradox of Li's reading, I notice another: US feminists virtuously goading one another to ritually denounce Beauvoir's "orientalism" at more or less the same time as Chinese feminists are deploying her work in ways they find productive.

[102] See Li Xiaojiang, "Economic Reform and the Awakening of Chinese Women's Consciousness," originally published in Chinese in 1988; Barlow, *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism*, 255–301; Li Xiaojiang, "With What Discourse Do We Reflect on Chinese Women." This last article, published in 1999, lays out very clearly and cogently why various Western feminist terms and ideas (such as "equality," "the personal is political," and "liberation") cannot easily be used in Chinese feminism, because of their Maoist history and resonances. See also Sharon Wesoky, "Bringing the Jia Back into Guojia: Engendering Chinese Intellectual Politics." Sharon Wesoky has kindly shared her student's translation of Song Shaopeng, "Capitalism, Socialism, and Women," which appeared in Chinese on the website *Open Times*.

In retrospect, Chinese feminists (including Li herself) seem to have seen the limitations of this approach. As Dai Jinhua continues:

> In the midst of the prelude to a profound social transformation at a different time in a different place, people could not predict where this process of saying farewell to the Cultural Revolution era, burying the socialist system and ending the rule of totalitarianism was going to lead China.… People could not predict that burying the socialist system did not necessarily mean burying and seeing off totalitarian rule forever. They could even less predict that this new process of capitalization pushed forward by a "communist party" was going to come at the inevitable expense of women's collective interest.[103]

To paraphrase Beauvoir, it is an error to view feminist theory as though things were *stopped*.[104]

I said in my introduction, speaking of Beauvoir's reception in France and the US, that some scholars and activists praised Beauvoir as a feminist of equality, others as a feminist of difference, while others have damned her for being precisely one or the other of those things. Something similar appears to be true in China; or at least, she remains, internationally, a ground on which these questions are asked. Might this oscillation possibly suggest that there is a third way? or that when the pendulum swings too far in either direction, she can help to swing it back? Or, in any case, that without providing recipes—for anything—she reminds us to continue asking these questions, which we will have to answer for ourselves?

Min Dongchao's book proposes an "alternative traveling theory" that will work harder at fully understanding reception contexts, both spatially and temporally: uptake of a theory in a different place and/or time implies that it fills a need *there*, and *then*; but the need it fills at the point of reception may be quite different from the need it was created to fill. "Most literature on traveling theory deals with the discursive issue," she points out, but "[t]heories, especially feminist theory, do not just travel to and in academic circles; they also travel to larger social movements."[105] On this view, that an account can become "dated" is a mark of its value, of the degree to which it is engaged with what is urgently real, with facts as well as myths.

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[103] "Traces of Time," 184. Neo-liberalism in China has led to losses both for poor women (who have been deprived of the basic livelihood and safety net provided under communism) and for educated women, who face discrimination in the job market and the consequences of sexualization in the private sphere.

[104] Interestingly, while both Dai in (2001) and Min (in 2014) end their analyses by lamenting the absence of *socialist* feminism from the current Chinese scene—an absence such theorists as Song Shaopeng are currently addressing—they do not see, or do not emphasize, the socialist dimensions of Beauvoir's own writing, any than most French or American readers have done.

Of course engaging with "facts" as they unfold in real time runs the risk of getting things terribly wrong, either because of one's own blind spots or simply because things change. But I hope even readers who do not feel any special urgency about "being fair to Beauvoir" will nonetheless see some value in the risks she took: the risk of listening to and trusting her sources, and the risk of hope.

What would happen if we read "dated" feminist works in that same spirit, not with "the hermeneutics of disapproval,"[106] but with an eye to possible alliances and collaborations? what "chosen projects" might we then discover that we and they actually share? What if we focused less on the adequacy of various "frameworks" and more on what could be seen by looking *inside* the frame? What if the "datedness" of older works became, not a reason to dismiss them, but a spur to learn (and teach) more history?

Min's own chapter on Beauvoir adds yet another twist. After detailing the importance of Beauvoir's work to general Chinese developments in the late 1980s, and to her own developing understanding of feminism, she tells us something else: conversations with Chinese feminists have confirmed her suspicion that that the influence of *The Second Sex* did not include many people actually *reading* it. (As I said at the outset, that has been equally true in the US.)

This would not, by the way, have bothered Beauvoir. Her support for the 1970s generation of feminists, both in France and the US, was wholehearted and enthusiastic. But when John Gerassi asked her in 1976 about the fact that "Many people, especially in America, consider it [*The Second Sex*] the beginning of the contemporary feminist movement," she countered, "I don't think so," pointing out that most 1970s activists were too young to have read the book when it appeared. "They may have become feminists for the reasons I explain in *The Second Sex*; but they discovered those reasons in their life experiences, not in my book."[107]

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[105] Min Dongchao, 6, 4.

[106] The phrase is Susan Fraiman's.

[107] John Gerassi, "*The Second Sex*: Twenty-five Years Later (Interview with Simone de Beauvoir)," 79. She was even blunter in 1983 when Liliane Lazar asked whether she thought *La vieillesse* had changed French attitudes to old age. She replied, "Non, je ne pense pas du tout. Je ne pense pas qu'un livre puisse vraiment changer les choses." (Not at all. I don't think a book can really change things.) "Conversation avec Simone de Beauvoir," 11.

And yet, books do matter.

In the spring of 2015, a group of young women were arrested in Beijing for protesting sexual harassment; after an international campaign of support, they were released. One member of their group, Xiao Meili, wrote an Op-Ed piece for the *New York Times* in which she credited Beauvoir by name.

> When I was growing up in the 1990s in Sichuan Province, I found many cultural traditions and practices puzzling. At home, I addressed my mother's parents as "waipo" and "waigong," or "outside grandma" and "outside grandpa," because I was told that my father's family mattered more. In school, my teachers held higher academic expectations for boys than they did for girls because they believed boys were smarter than girls. .... Many universities openly excluded girls from majors such as marine engineering and geological exploration.... I constantly saw want ads that either excluded women or specified that women applicants needed to be tall and attractive...
>
> Many took this entrenched discrimination for granted, but I didn't. As a sophomore in college, I became interested in feminism and began reading Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* and other famous feminist works. Like a nearsighted person with new glasses, I began to see clearly, and many of the things that puzzled me growing up were explained by feminism....[108]

It would be difficult to disentangle what is "Chinese" and what is "Western" in Xiao Meili's account, either in the discrimination she describes or in the feminist impulse to re-vision and resistance. Perhaps disentangling that is not really the best use of anyone's energy. And if, for once, we gave up our cynicism?

Of course "we" wouldn't say that "now."

If not now, when?

Meryl Altman
December 31, 2019

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[108] Xiao Meili, "China's Feminist Awakening," Op-Ed, *New York Times*, May 13 2015.

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