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Moi, Toril

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AUFSÄTZE

What Can Literature Do?
Simone de Beauvoir as a Literary Theorist[1]

VON

Toril Moi

The past twenty years have seen a Beauvoir revival in feminist theory. Feminist philosophers, political scientists and historians of ideas have all made powerful contributions to our understanding of her philosophy, above all *The Second Sex*.[2] Literary studies have lagged somewhat behind.[3] Given that Beauvoir always defined herself as a writer rather than as a philosopher (Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, pp. 52-57), this is an unexpected state of affairs. Ursula Tidd's explanation is that Beauvoir's existentialism is theoretically incompatible with the poststructuralist trends that have dominated feminist criticism:

> Viewed as unsympathetic to ›écriture féminine‹ and to feminist differentialist critiques of language, Beauvoir's broadly realist and ›committed‹ approach to literature has been deemed less technically challenging than experimental women's writing exploring the feminine, read through the lens of feminist psychoanalytic theory. (»Etat présent«, p. 205)

In my view, Beauvoir's literary theory is far more interesting than the poststructuralist tradition has given her credit for.[4] I want to contribute

1 Zuerst erschienen in: PMLA, 124, 2009, no. 1, S. 189-198. Reprinted by permission of the Modern Language Association of America from 2009.

2 Inaugurating the new wave of Beauvoir studies around 1990 were Fallaize, *Novels*; Kruks; Le Dœuff; Lundgren-Gothlin; and Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, the second edition of which includes references to recent books on Beauvoir (p. 1-2).

3 Fallaize's pioneering study of Beauvoir's novels has not been followed by a steady stream of literary studies. An excellent overview of recent literary studies of Beauvoir can be found in Tidd, »État présent«, pp. 205-06. See also Tidd, *Simone de Beauvoir*.

4 For a different attempt to show the interest of Beauvoir's and Sartre's theory of language and writing, see Moi, »Meaning.«

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to the celebration of her centenary by returning to her understanding of the powers of writing. I shall do so by drawing attention to her contribution to a debate entitled »Que peut la littérature?« (»What can literature do?« or »What is the power of literature?«).[5] As far as I know, Beauvoir's lecture has neither been translated into English nor anthologized in French after its first publication.

Another reason why this specific text has remained so neglected is its unpretentiousness. Beauvoir's voice is clear and simple, her examples ordinary. Unless the reader brings to the text significant knowledge of philosophy and literary theory, she may never realize that Beauvoir here writes as a »formidably hidden« literary theorist, to paraphrase Michèle Le Dœuff.[6]

I shall place Beauvoir's essay in its historical context and bring out the major theoretical implications of her arguments. Because the essay is so little read, I will provide ample quotations to convey the flavor of the text. There is much more to say about Beauvoir's essay, but further explorations will have to wait for a different time and place.[7]

I. A Meeting Marking a Generational Shift

Que peut la littérature? was the question posed at a meeting organized in the great hall of the Mutualité Theater in Paris on December 9, 1964 by the communist student magazine *Clarté* (Francis and Gonthier, p. 77). Billed as a confrontation between the »new novel« (*nouveau roman*) and »committed literature« (*littérature engagée*), the meeting was the brainchild of Yves Buin (1938-), the editor of *Clarté*, who hoped to raise money for his financially ailing magazine (Beauvoir, *Tout compte*, pp. 170-71). Buin invited six writers, three on each side of the question. In the »formalist« corner, he placed two defenders of the new novel, Jean Ricardou

5 Unattributed translations are mine.

6 With reference to *The Second Sex* Le Dœuff writes that Beauvoir does philosophy in ways that makes it hard to discover what an original philosopher she is (*Hipparchia's Choice*, p. 139).

7 It would be interesting, for example, to discuss the contributions and the intellectual trajectories of the other participants in the debate, connect Beauvoir's 1964 essay to her other writings on literature, consider the relation between Beauvoir's and Sartre's writings on literature, explore the affinities between Beauvoir's understanding of language and literature and ordinary language philosophy and provide a theoretical analysis of the points of disagreement between Beauvoir and the poststructuralists.

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(1932-) and Jean-Pierre Faye (1925-), and a representative of »uncommitted literature,« the young but influential writer and editor Yves Berger (1931-); in the »committed« corner, two existentialists, Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-80) and Beauvoir (1908-86), and the well-known communist militant and writer, Jorge Semprun (1923-).

Originally, Claude Simon, a heavy weight of the new novel, was also to have participated, but squabbles behind the scenes made him pull out and urge his fellow new novelists to pull out as well (Beauvoir, *Tout compte*, p. 171). As a result, the new novel was defended by the still relatively obscure Ricardou and Faye. Faye had just won the Renaudot Prize for a novel called *L'Ecluse* (*The Lock* or *The Sluice*), and Ricardou, already the author of one novel, *L'Observatoire de Cannes* (*The Cannes Observatory*), was rapidly making a name for himself as a major theorist of the new novel. As it happened, Ricardou and Faye were also both members of the editorial board of a journal called *Tel quel*.

Founded as a literary review in spring 1960 by Philippe Sollers, *Tel quel* first hitched its fortunes to the new novel. By the end of 1964, however, that alliance was becoming strained, and in 1965 *Tel quel* broke with the new novel and set out on its own semiotic and semiological adventures, in a shift that the sociologist Niilo Kauppi summarizes as the »transition from Sartre's hegemony to that of the human sciences« (*Making*, p. xv).[8] By the late 1960s, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan were all associated with *Tel quel*. Both directly, through Julia Kristeva, who joined the editorial board in 1970, and indirectly, *Tel quel* was a significant power behind the kind of French feminist theory that defined itself against Beauvoir's existentialism.[9]

Because it catches the protagonists just before the scales weighing French symbolic capital tipped in favor of the new generation, the meeting is of considerable historical interest. In December 1964 it was by no means clear that Ricardou and Faye represented the future of French intellectual life. On the contrary: Beauvoir and Sartre probably never enjoyed greater fame and recognition than at that moment. In the spring Sartre published *Les Mots* (*The Words*). In October he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, which he refused. In fact, the meeting took place the same week that the Nobel Prizes were awarded in Stockholm. As for Beauvoir, she published the third volume of her autobiography, *La*

8 For more information on *Tel quel*'s role in French intellectual life, see Kauppi, *French Intellectual Nobility* and Marx-Scouras.

9 See Rodgers for a revealing series of interviews with well-known French feminists from the 1970s and 1980s.

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Force des choses (*The Force of Circumstance*) in 1963. In October 1964 she followed this with a brief narrative called *Une mort très douce* (*A Very Easy Death*), the story of her mother's death, which many consider to be her finest text.

Sartre's and Beauvoir's fame made the meeting an enormous success: six thousand people and a German television crew turned up to learn what literature could do (Beauvoir, *Tout compte*, p. 171). Rereading the contributions today, I find Beauvoir's to be the most far-ranging. Sartre mostly limited himself to a critique of the idea that the task of literature is to reflect on literature. That theory casts the literary work as an »absolute reality« (*réalité absolue*) and turns the reader into an alienated creature, whose only task is to realize the pre-existing order of the text (pp. 112-13). Literature is not an absolute, self-enclosed reality, Sartre writes, but rather an appeal to the freedom of the reader, an invitation to collaborate in the creation of the work: the author writes the score (*partition*); the reader provides the concert performance (see p. 120).

There are many reasons to return to Beauvoir's contribution to *Que peut la littérature?* I shall show that she outlines a phenomenological understanding of literature based on the idea that speaking and writing are acts in the world, a theory that has interesting affinities with the aesthetics of Heidegger and of ordinary language philosophy. I shall also show that Beauvoir's literary theory focuses on speech acts, voice, and identification (three features bound to alienate the rising generation of poststructuralists). Today, we may be able to appreciate the strengths of her antiformalist defense of voice in literature, for example by relating it to the work of Stanley Cavell, for whom voice is also a defining feature of human existence.[10] Finally, I shall briefly show that Beauvoir's literary theory places her within a broad tradition of European modernism and that anyone interested in including women and numbers of minorities in the literary canon still has much to learn from her.

II. Literature as a Way of Seeing the World

Beauvoir begins by defining literature as »une activité qui est exercée par des hommes, pour des hommes, en vue de leur dévoiler le monde, ce dévoilement étant une action« ›an activity carried out by human beings,

10 See Cavell's discussion of the differences between himself and Derrida in »Counter-Philosophy and the Pawn of Voice«.

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for human beings, with the aim of unveiling the world for them, and this unveiling is an action‹ (p. 73).

First, Beauvoir considers language to be a form of action. By beginning in this way, she virtually ensured that the ascendant poststructuralist would dismiss her as a dinosaur, given that their starting point was the radically different idea that language is a structure or a system. To develop a new, less dismissive account of her views, we need to realize that Beauvoir's understanding of language places her in the neighborhood inhabited by ordinary language philosophers such as Ludwig Wittgenstein, J. L. Austin, and Cavell, who all think of language as constituted by speech acts, or – if one prefers – by language *use*. (There is no evidence that Beauvoir ever read anything by these thinkers.)

The second striking feature in Beauvoir's definition of literature is her reference to the *dévoilement*, or »unveiling«, of the world. On this point, the influence of Heidegger's aesthetics is obvious, and not surprising, since Beauvoir and Sartre often acknowledged that German phenomenology was a crucial source of inspiration for existentialism.[11] Writing about Van Gogh's painting of a pair of peasant shoes, Heidegger notes: »Van Gogh's painting is the disclosure of what the equipment, the pair of peasant shoes, *is* in truth. This entity emerges into the unconcealedness of its being. The Greeks called the unconcealedness of beings *aletheia*« (p. 35). While Heidegger thinks that the work of art unveils the essence and truth of being, Beauvoir's view is less metaphysical, more pragmatic: writing unveils truths in the world. Both, however, belong squarely in the phenomenological tradition, in which to produce art is to see (reveal, unveil) the world; to Beauvoir this means revealing it from a highly specific, situated point of view and conveying that vision to others.

If literature unveils the truth, why aren't all kinds of documentary and scholarly writing (»information«), also literature? Speaking just before Beauvoir, Ricardou had claimed that information was dismissible. People who provide information, he declared, consider language as a means to an end, an end that is always outside language; they write to bear witness to a state of affairs, or to teach something (see p. 51). Genuine writers, on the other hand, consider language as a sensuous material; to them, the point of writing is language itself. With a vague reference to Barthes, Ricardou calls this a distinction between *écrivants* and *écrivains* or »scribblers« and »writers« (pp. 51-52). (By the time Barthes published *S/Z*, in

11 See for example, Beauvoir's account of their intellectual interests in the early 1930s in *La Force de l'âge*.

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1970, this had become a distinction between two types of text, *le scriptible* and *le lisible*, often translated as »the writerly« and »the readerly«, pp. 557-58).

Accusing Ricardou of dismissing »information« rather too quickly, Beauvoir points out that there can be excellent uses of, say, television and radio that could provide crucial information to many people (see pp. 74-75). Also, works of sociology, psychology, history, and other kinds of documentation are necessary for anyone wishing to understand the world. But if such works illuminate the world, what is then the difference between them and literature?

Working her way towards a definition of literature, Beauvoir begins by saying that the world is »une totalité détotalisée« ›a detotalized totality‹ (p. 76). On the one hand, the world is the sort of thing that exists for us all and that we can have accurate knowledge about (it is a totality). On the other hand, however, we will never be able actually to grasp the world as a totality because each one of us is in a unique situation: we grasp the world through our projects, and our projects at once surround (*enveloppe*, p. 81) and express the world as we experience it. The phrase »detotalized totality« emphasizes what the world is to us. (If she had said »untotalizable totality,« which she might well have done, the emphasis would have been on what we cannot do.) For Beauvoir, then, we experience the world as a constant becoming, an ongoing process that can never be grasped as an objective whole: it will always remain »detotalized« to us (see pp. 75-76).

Each situation is singular: »cette situation impliqu[e] notre passé, notre classe, notre condition, nos projets, enfin tout l'ensemble de ce qui fait notre individualité« ›the situation implies our past, our social class, our state, our projects, in short everything that makes up our individuality‹ (p. 76). In *The Second Sex* she writes that the body is also a situation.[12] In spite of our singularity, we are not isolated monads. While we are existentially separated from one another, we can communicate, because our projects relate to the same world and because each project always opens onto the projects of others (see pp. 76-78).

When Beauvoir speaks of representing reality, she does not mean that it is possible to grasp reality as if it were a thing:

12 For a full discussion of the body as a situation see Moi, *Sex, Gender*, particularly pp. 59-82.

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> La réalité n'est pas un être figé; c'est un devenir, c'est, je le répète, un tournoiement des expériences singulières qui s'enveloppent les unes les autres tout en restant séparées.
>
> Reality is not a fixed entity; it is a becoming; it is, I repeat, a spinning of singular experiences which intertwine and overlap while still remaining separate. (p. 80)

A writer therefore always represents his or her singular situation in relation to the world.

Given all this, the difference between literature and other kinds of writing is not what one might expect: Beauvoir does not claim that scholarly and documentary writing tries to grasp the world in its thinglike totality, whereas literature grasps it as a non totalizable process. Instead, she turns to the pioneering American anthropologist Oscar Lewis's *The Children of Sánchez: Autobiography of a Mexican Family*, published in France in 1963, a book which reproduces the voices of the members of a poor family in Mexico City to show »what it means to grow up in a one-room home in a slum tenement in the heart of a great Latin American city which is undergoing a process of rapid social and economic change« (Lewis, p. xi). Considering the techniques of this book to be highly novelistic (see p. 75), Beauvoir nevertheless feels that Lewis's compelling account of poor children in Mexico is not literature: »je les annexe à mon univers, mais je ne change pas d'univers« ›I annex them to my universe, but I don't change universe‹ (p. 82).

To discover what Beauvoir means by insisting that only literature makes a reader »change universe«, we need to bear in mind that Beauvoir considers separation and solitude to be the fundamental existential situation:

> Et c'est ça le miracle de la littérature et qui la distingue de l'information: c'est qu'une vérité autre devient mienne sans cesser d'être autre. J'abdique mon ›je‹ en faveur de celui qui parle; et pourtant je reste moi-même.
> C'est une confusion sans cesse ébauchée, sans cesse défaite et c'est la seule forme de communication qui soit capable de me donner l'incommunicable, qui soit capable de me donner le goût d'une autre vie. (pp. 82-83)
>
> That is the miracle of literature, which distinguishes it from information: that an other truth becomes mine without ceasing to be other. I renounce my own ›I‹ in favor of the speaker; and yet I remain myself.

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> It is an intermingling ceaselessly begun and ceaselessly undone, and it is the only kind of communication capable of giving me that which cannot be communicated, capable of giving me the taste of another life.

Literature overcomes existential separation and connects us to others. It does so by making me »taste« another life.

III. Identification: The Taste of Another Life

What does Beauvoir mean by »taste«?

> Je mourrai d'une mort qui est absolument unique pour moi, mais c'est la même chose pour chacun de vous. Il y a un goût unique de la vie de chacun, qu'en un sens personne d'autre ne peut connaître. Mais c'est la même chose pour chacun de nous. (pp. 78-79)
>
> I will die a death that is absolutely unique to me, but it's the same for each one of you. There is a unique taste to each life, which, in a way, nobody else can know. But it's the same for each one of us.

By relating the theme of existential separation to epistemology (to what we can't know about one another), Beauvoir reveals that her understanding of literature is based on a profound preoccupation with skepticism. Sense perceptions have always been a key issue for skepticism with respect to other minds. How do I know that you see green when I see green? Or that this tomato soup tastes the same to you as to me? Such questions convey precisely the experience of separation: our sense that there are things we simply cannot communicate to one another.

The point of literature, then, is to overcome separation. This happens through identification. Perfectly cognizant of recent critiques of the concept, Beauvoir develops a remarkably original notion of identification:

> De toute façon, moi, lecteur, ce qui m'importe c'est d'être fasciné par un monde singulier qui se recoupe avec le mien et pourtant qui est autre.
> Ceci pose la question de l'identification. Il y a une tendance, dans la littérature d'aujourd'hui, à refuser l'identification avec le personnage et plus radicalement, à refuser le personnage même.
> Mais je trouve aussi que cette discussion [est] oiseuse parce que, de toute façon, qu'il y ait personnage ou non, pour que la lecture prenne,

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> il faut que je m'identifie avec quelqu'un: avec l'auteur; il faut que j'entre dans son monde et que ce soit son monde qui devient le mien. (pp. 81-82)
>
> In any case, for me as a reader what matters is to be fascinated by a singular world that overlaps with mine and yet is other.
> This raises the question of identification. There is a tendency in literature today to reject identification with the character, and, more radically, to reject even the character.
> But I also find that this discussion [is] futile since, in any case, whether there is a character or not, for reading to ›take‹ I have to identify with someone: with the author; I have to enter into his world, and his world must become mine.

To identify with the author, then, is not to imagine or feel that one *is* the author or that one shares his or her characteristics. It is, for a moment, to occupy the same position (the same spatial coordinates, as it were) in relation to the world. To see the world as another human being sees it while at the same time remaining oneself: this is the »miracle« of literature.

Beauvoir's understanding of identification does not necessarily involve psychological identification with a specific character, nor does it lead to a preference for psychologically realistic, »rounded« characters in fiction. Kafka, Balzac, and Robbe-Grillet are all equally interesting, she writes; all three persuade her to live, if only for a moment, »au coeur d'un autre monde« ›at the heart of another world‹ (p. 82).

Literature arises when »un écrivain est capable de manifester et d'imposer une vérité; celle de son rapport au monde, celle de son monde« ›a writer is capable of making visible and impose a truth: the truth of his relation to the world, the truth of his world‹ (p. 83). Realism, therefore, is not a salient issue for Beauvoir. Since all a writer can do is to show us the world she or he sees, we are always in the writer's universe, regardless of genre and style. When Beauvoir reads *Le Père Goriot*, she knows perfectly well that she is walking around not in Paris as it was in the nineteenth century, but »dans l'univers de Balzac« ›in Balzac's universe‹ (p. 81).

For Beauvoir, the »miracle of literature« can only happen when the reader feels in the presence of a human voice: »Il n'y a pas de littérature s'il n'y a pas une voix, donc un langage qui porte la marque de quelqu'un« ›There is no literature if there is no voice, that is to say language that bears the mark of somebody‹ (p. 79). The emphasis on voice, incidentally, is a logical conclusion for a theorist who begins by considering literature as a

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speech act. It follows that literature is not synonymous with fiction. Novels, autobiographies, and essys can all be literature, as long as they have the necessary voice (see p. 84).

Voice also supersedes the »outmoded« (*périmée*) distinction between form and content: to find a way of telling a story, Beauvoir notes, is at once to find a rhythm and a subject matter (see pp. 84-85). In other words, the very way I tell a story *is* my story. I take this to mean not only that Beauvoir wishes to avoid formalism but that she wishes to avoid simplistic theories of an inner message wrapped in an external form. For Beauvoir, it is only in the hard struggle to find a way to say it that authors realizes what they have to say.

IV. Modernism and Feminism

Literature has a fundamental relation to the experience of existential separation and solitude:

> Si la littérature cherche à dépasser la séparation au point où elle semble le plus indépassable, elle doit parler de l'angoisse, de la solitude, de la mort, parce que ce sont justement des situations qui nous enferment le plus radicalement dans notre singularité. (p. 91)
>
> If literature seeks to overcome separation at the point where this seems the most impossible thing to do, it has to speak of anguish, solitude, and death, since those are precisely situations that imprison us the most radically in our singularity.

Beauvoir here gives voice to a quintessentially modernist experience of the world. In this lecture, she appears to differ from more pessimistic modernists in her conviction that as long as we manage to speak, as long as we manage to put something into words, then surely someone will understand us:

> Le langage nous réintègre à la communauté humaine; un malheur qui trouve des mots pour se dire n'est plus une radicale exclusion, il devient moins intolérable.
>
> Language reintegrates us into human community; unhappiness that finds the words to express itself is no longer a radical exclusion: it becomes less intolerable. (pp. 91-92)

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Unlike a philosopher like Cavell, then, Beauvoir does not appear to worry about situations in which I might utter words that completely fail to reach others, words that convince others that I am incomprehensible, a mad babbler. Austin also doubts that we can »secure uptake« (p. 139) – that is, ensure that our words will *be taken* by others in the way we want them to be taken. (To determine wether Beauvoir underestimated the risk of remaining unheard, it would be necessary to re-examine all her writings on literature, and her novels as well.) Her fundamental vision nevertheless remains unaltered: literature is necessary for it makes us feel less alone in facing the finitude of existence.

Finally, Beauvoir's understanding of literature and why we read it is exceptionally productive for feminists and others who believe that literature – and the canon too – must include voices of women, members of minorities and other excluded groups. In *The Second Sex*, particularly in Part II, subtitled »Lived Experience«, Beauvoir draws on an unusually high number of novels, autobiographies and letters by women. No writer is quoted more than Colette, but Virginia Woolf's voice is also strongly present.[13] The literary material adds energy, vitality, and validity to *The Second Sex*, and knowledge too.

It would take a separate paper fully to analyze Beauvoir's use of literature in *The Second Sex*. To catch a glimpse of what the text loses when the literary voices disappear, however, it is sufficient to commpare H. M. Parshley's translation of *The Second Sex* with the French orginal. As is now well known, Parshley cut about 15 per cent of Beauvoir's original text. To achieve this, he consistently eliminated quotations from other writers, men as well as women. (Women's texts, and women's names were, however, more severely cut.) Elizabeth Fallaize has shown that the chapter »The Married Woman« was particularly hard hit by Parshley's scissors, to the point that reading it in English and in French results in completely different experiences (»Le destin«).[14]

Here is just one example, selected mostly because it is brief, not because it is the most significant or striking. For the sake of brevity, I shall

13 I owe this information to my graduate student, Kathleen Antonioli, who is writing a dissertation on Colette.

14 I also draw attention to this disappearance of women's voices in my own essay on the translation (»While We Wait«, pp. 40-44). In collaboration with Jonathan Cape, in the United Kingdom, Random House (Knopf) has commissioned Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier to do a new translation of Beauvoir's text. Publication is expected in 2009, to mark the book's sixtieth anniversary. See the interview with the new translator in *Bookforum*. Simon's pioniering article on the Parshley translation also remains relevant.

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quote the text in Parhsley's translation and then contrast it with an accurate translation of Beauvoir's original. Parshley writes:

> It is not without some regret that she shuts behind her the doors of her new home; when she was a girl, the whole countryside was her homeland; the forests were hers. Now she is confined to a restricted space: Nature is reduced to the dimensions of a potted geranium; walls cut off the horizon. But she is going to set about overcoming these limitations. (p. 450)

This is what Beauvoir actually wrote:

> It is not without some regret that she shuts behind her the doors of her new home; when she was a girl, the whole earth [*terre*] was her homeland; the forests were hers. Now she is confined to a restricted space; nature is reduced to the dimensions of a potted geranium; walls cut off the horizon. One of Virginia Woolf's heroines [in *The Waves*] murmurs[15]:
> ›Whether it is summer, whether it is winter, I no longer know by the moor grass, and the heath flower; only by the steam on the window-pane, or the frost on the window-pane.[16] […] I, who used to walk through beech woods noting the jay's feather turning blue as it falls, past the shepherd and the tramp […],go from room to room with a duster.‹ (Woolf p. 172)[17]
> But she will work to deny [*s'appliquer à nier*] this limitation.[18]

Beauvoir's voice falls silent to leave room for Woolf's; Woolf's language introduces a touch of poetry, as well as finely wrought observations of nature and of the confinement of the interior space.

Without the quotation, the text reads like a general claim, made on Beauvoir's authority alone. As such it is clearly flawed: nobody would agree that all women experience the beginning of married life in this way. But this is not Beauvoir's point. When the quotation is in place, it becomes clear that she treats the passage as exemplary, in the sense that she

15 Beauvoir signals that she is quoting from *The Waves* by placing a footnote here.

16 Here Beauvoir skips, without signaling that she does so, the following sentence: »When the lark peels high his ring of sound and it falls through the air like an apple pairing, I stoop; I feed my baby.«

17 Woolf 172; Beauvoir does signal the omission in the last sentence. She left out a subclause: »who stared at the woman squatted beside a tilted cart in a ditch«.

18 For the French original, see *Le Deuxième Sexe*, vol. 2: pp. 261-2.

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takes it to be the expression of a genuine experience of the world.[19] The multitude of literary voices in *The Second Sex* are there to show both that different situations give rise to different experiences and that different women may react differently to the same situation. Beauvoir is not setting forth general truths but rather attempting to convey another woman's way of seeing the world and analyze the implications of that way of seeing. In this respect, Beauvoir's method in *The Second Sex* is more closely related to literary criticism and psychoanalytical case studies than to sociology and other social sciences.

The range and variety of Beauvoir's examples are stunning. In French, this passage is followed by ten pages full of quotations from other writers: not just Woolf but also Gaston Bachelard, Madeleine Bourdhouxe, Francis Ponge, James Agee, Colette Audry, Colette, Marcel Jouheandeau, Jacques Chardonne, André Gide, and Violette Leduc are invoked and often quoted at substantial length. In English, these ten pages have been reduced by twothirds. All the quotations are gone, except for a few brief references to Bachelard. Beauvoir's pleasure in other's texts, her belief that we need to pay attention to the vision of the world conveyed in literature, has become invisible.

In the translation, her text reads like a series of dry, general, and often unconvincing claims: »[The maniacal housewife] becomes bitter and disagreeable and hostile to all that lives: the end is sometimes murder,« Parshley writes, thus making it look as if Beauvoir thinks houseproud women are likely to kill to prevent people from dirtying their floors (p. 452). In reality, »the end is sometimes murder« is not a sentence written by Beauvoir but Parshley's attempt to summarize Beauvoir's explicit reference to the famous case of the Papin sisters (see vol. 2, p. 269), two maids who killed the women who employed them. In 1947 Jean Genet made them the subjects of his first play, *Les Bonnes* (*The Maids*).

Beauvoir's 1964 lecture on literature explains why she always considered literature a source of knowledge of women's situation in a sexist world. By writing, women convey the unique taste of their own lives. By reading their work, Beauvoir can, for a moment, see the world as they see it without losing her own identity. In this way, other women's texts become crucial sources of insight for the philosopher writing *The Second Sex* and valuable aesthetic experiences in their own right. It is difficult to imagine a better defense of why women's voices must be included in the literary canon.

19 For the difference between taking experience to be exemplary and taking it to be representative, see my discussion in *Sex, Gender and the Body*, pp. 227-33.

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