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*Political Writings* by Simone de Beauvoir (review)

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Balaev's objective for the text is to widen the current state of trauma studies and to allow for a wider range of possible approaches as well as an addition of texts that would fall under the rubric of trauma narrative. I believe that this is an important place to start such a dialogue. Obviously, there are parameters for what should be included from either a theoretical perspective or even what texts can be better understood by putting them under the microscope of posttraumatic theory, and what could be gleaned about societies that produce those texts, but those boundaries do need to be somewhat flexible. Balaev's text, then, is a cogent wake-up call for a field that has been meandering rather aimlessly when it should be growing in new and significant directions.

Henry James Morello, *Pennsylvania State University*

**Simone de Beauvoir.** *Political Writings*. Margaret A. Simons and Marybeth Timmerman, eds. Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: U of Illinois P, 2012. 408 pp.

*Political Writings* is the fifth book to appear in the Beauvoir Series, which aims to give Anglophone readers access to the breadth of Simone de Beauvoir's philosophical work. The selections in this volume were written over a forty-year timespan, and include philosophical and journalistic contributions to *Les Temps Modernes*. Some have been previously translated and commented upon; the final chapter, a script for a documentary film on old age in France, is almost completely unknown. Each has been carefully annotated and historically situated.

As Margaret Simons notes in her introduction, the experience of German occupation was what forced Beauvoir to recognize the importance of politics. In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, the discussion of violence was framed by moral dilemmas of that period, in which Beauvoir was more an observer than a participant. Here, Beauvoir's reflections on later political situations are more concrete, but (except for the essay on Sade), ambiguity is less frequently invoked.

If there is a unifying theme in this volume, it would be the problem of complicity with oppression, broached by *The Ethics of Ambiguity* and developed in *The Second Sex*. The essays from *Privilèges* address intellectual justifications for such complicity. But insofar as they focus on the (objectionable) political sympathies and impact of writers, whether literary authors like Sade and Montherlant or fellow philosophers like Merleau-Ponty, they also form a tacit literary ethics comparable to Sartre's "What is Literature?" Together with Beauvoir's interventions in literary debates of the 1960s (gathered in *"The Useless Mouths" and Other Literary Essays*), they develop her unique sense of what it would mean for literature to be "committed."

Here we find concrete examples of cultural forces such as “seriousness” and “aestheticism” that blinded people to their own capacity for freedom in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. However, as Sonia Kruks observes, these essays were also written during Sartre’s flirtation with Soviet socialism. Although Beauvoir herself never joined the Party, her sharp criticisms of humanism and individualism, especially the ideological appeal to “be true to oneself” regardless of social structures, seem jarring and uncharacteristic. However, it is as amusing to see her defend phenomenology against Merleau-Ponty (on Bergsonian grounds, no less) as it is perplexing to read her scathing criticism of Jaspers for his “pluralism.” Was she forgetful of ambiguity, as Kruks suggests? Or, given that each of these essays were intended to intervene at a specific moment, did she believe that assuming ambiguity meant taking sides in a time limited situation? Perhaps she feared that existentialism might be used to defend the individual freedom of the affluent at the expense of social changes enhancing the freedom of the oppressed.

Written after Merleau-Ponty’s famous rupture with Sartre over Korea, “Merleau-Ponty and Pseudo-Sartrism” essentially accuses the former of limiting Sartre’s thought to *Being and Nothingness*. This essay, whose twists and turns are helpfully summarized by Bill Wilkerson, is interesting primarily for its insight into what Beauvoir found most valuable in Sartre’s emerging corpus. By criticizing Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir effectively refuses to recognize certain aspects of *Being and Nothingness* as the gist of Sartre’s thought (despite the fact that Sartre himself claimed that his later work did not *supersede* the earlier). Beauvoir seems to read and admire Sartre insofar as he espouses ideas that she and Merleau-Ponty shared about the foundational status of intersubjectivity and its inherent corporeality. Sartre’s characterization of humankind as “detotalized totality” is another element that returns even in her late literary lectures.

The conceptual hinge between these works is “Must We Burn Sade?” First published in 1951-52, this essay responds to Blanchot and Klossowski, who saw in Sade a defense of human singularity that Beauvoir must have found both appealing and disturbing. Debra Bergoffen’s introduction focuses on Beauvoir’s identification with Sade’s passion for writing. Sade is an “internal critic” of sexual and class privilege, who takes pleasure in refusing to find a humanistic justification for these phenomena. But what he shares with all the right wing authors analyzed in this volume—including the version of Sartre presented by Merleau-Ponty!—is an abiding pessimism about human relations. Beauvoir is bothered less by Sade’s sexuality than by his willingness to conclude that domination is an inevitable feature of political institutions. Identifying more with his female villains than with most of the men he describes, however, Sade raises questions as to what it means for a woman to be complicit with sexual and class privilege or to deny the possibility of human mutuality.

These questions haunted Beauvoir’s reportage for *Les Temps Modernes* on the postwar dictatorships in Spain and Portugal, where she was overwhelmed

by the vast disparities in wealth between rich and poor, as well as her later defense of Algerian anti-colonial militant Djamila Boupacha in *Le Monde* and her occasional writings on the Holocaust, the reality and image of contemporary Israel, and the poor state of workers' rights in the French "welfare state." In publicly defending Boupacha, who was raped by the French army during interrogation, and in calling for the prosecution of owners whose negligence cost the lives of women factory workers, one can see Beauvoir's feminist consciousness becoming more concrete. Compared to the earlier essays, one can also see her increasing willingness to invoke legislation and jurisprudence, rather than violence, in defense of the oppressed.

The volume concludes with a screenplay for a little-known television documentary on the condition of elderly persons in France, one of Beauvoir's few collaborative projects. Since the majority of the elderly and their caretakers are female, it foregrounds the relations of power between the state and women in various social situations. When industrial societies imagine and experience old age as something like what Orlando Patterson calls "social death," the social presence of the aged makes death itself more fearful. This socially framed view of death contrasts with Heidegger's notion of death as timeless and shapeless in its urgency, and may shed light on its romanticization by right-wing literary authors.

By integrating well-known and obscure texts in Beauvoir's political development, this book will be helpful to scholars in political philosophy, French intellectual history, and the history of feminist thought.

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**Jeffrey T. Nealon.** *Post-Postmodernism: or, The Cultural Logic of Just-in-Time Capitalism.* Stanford: Stanford UP, 2012. 248 pp.

The title of Jeffrey Nealon's latest book, *Post-Postmodernism: or, The Cultural Logic of Just-in-Time Capitalism*, is provocative but potentially misleading. The work is not concerned with the kind of intricate period claims or taxonomic cataloguing that marked Fredric Jameson's canonical *Postmodernism*, as one might expect, nor with positioning itself as a filial extension of the latter. Nonetheless, the title is suggestive. Much of the analysis does, in fact, traffic in a dialectical methodology that Nealon, recognizing the Jamesonian influence, calls "overcoding" (22). More significantly, the title indicates the extent to which this text is invested in both the legacy of the eighties and nineties "era of big theory" and the possibilities for theory as it attempts to leverage its apparently tenuous position in the post-postmodern present (182). The work comprises two sections: the first focuses on "culture and economics"; the second, "theory going forward." These two headings neatly correspond to the three senses in which *postmodernism* is generally used—a mode of