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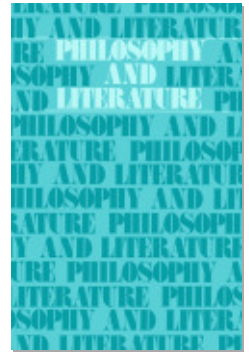
Sartre, Sexuality, and *The Second Sex*

Naomi Greene

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SARTRE, SEXUALITY, AND *THE SECOND SEX*

FEW WOULD DENY that Simone de Beauvoir's analysis of female sexuality plays a very important role in her book *The Second Sex*, widely regarded as one of the key works of modern feminist thought. At the same time, it is precisely her view of sexuality, and many of the conclusions it gives rise to concerning female behavior, which constitute some of the most problematical areas in this vast and complex work. Margaret Walters echoes the concerns of many feminists when she remarks that de Beauvoir "attacks the mystique of femininity—by accepting a masculine mystique. In the end, it is *she* who equates the human with the male sex, who idealizes male values, sees life from a masculine perspective."<sup>1</sup> So far, however, little attention has been paid to the ways in which de Beauvoir's view of female sexuality and behavior reveals the unmistakable influence of her life-long friend and companion, Jean-Paul Sartre.<sup>2</sup> It is not difficult to discern in some of Sartre's central metaphysical ideas—ideas which de Beauvoir uses to create the theoretical framework of *The Second Sex*—a world view which is deeply anti-sexual (perhaps even anti-life, but then life itself appears symbolized by sex) and anti-female.

Sartre's anti-sexual bias is more readily apparent in the metaphors of *Nausea* (1938), his philosophical novel, than in his strictly philosophical work, *Being and Nothingness* (1943).<sup>3</sup> *Nausea* is, in fact, alive with metaphors since it seeks to render accessible, even tangible, some of the fundamental abstractions of *Being and Nothingness*. The feeling of nausea itself, for example, is essentially a metaphor for man's basic experience of Being: the nausea comes when man realizes that all the distinctions and orders (in particular, language itself) he has imposed upon the world are arbitrary (there is, for example, no necessary connection between words and things) and the real nature of Being unfolds itself as a vegetal, ever-changing, viscous, engulfing matter. Deprived of a "reason" for being, man is "de trop," part of the world of matter, and his unjustified existence is contrasted both with lifeless

and unchanging forms, such as minerals and stones, and with the abstract realms of mathematics and music, realms governed by inexorable laws. Unlike these lifeless or abstract realms, the world of matter, of Being, is in perpetual movement and metamorphosis. And it is when Sartre discusses these infinite, arbitrary metamorphoses, the revelation of which provokes the nausea, that his imagery betrays a distaste for sexuality. In one famous passage, for example, we are told that when the nausea takes over, a man may well awaken in a "forest of murmuring cocks, rising red and white towards the sky like the chimneys of Jouxtebouville, with great balls half out of the earth, shaggy and bulbous like onions. And birds will fly around those cocks and peck them with their beaks and make them bleed. Sperm will flow slowly, gently, from these wounds, sperm mixed with blood, vitreous and lukewarm with small bubbles."<sup>4</sup>

This implied link between unpleasant sexuality and a basic fear of engulfing Being is made even clearer in one of his early philosophical tales, "The Room" (1939), in which madness, like nausea, seems to stand for what we will experience when we become aware of the nature of Being. But it can hardly be arbitrary or coincidental that the form taken by this madness is that of a pathological, sexual nature. And in still another early tale, "Intimacy," a wife actually enjoys the relationship she shares with her impotent, disturbed husband.

The distaste for sexuality suggested in Sartre's early works declares itself openly in the portrait of women found in his later fiction, indicating that the sexual metaphors of *Nausea*, far from being chosen at random, were inspired by deep and persistent feelings. In the trilogy *The Roads to Freedom* (1945-49), a historical fresco of France during the crucial years preceding World War II, women seem to incarnate all the attributes which disgust Sartre in matter or unjustified Being: they embody the viscous, passive, heavy world of the *en-soi* ("being-in-itself," or the immanent and passive self forced to accept an object-like state). These qualities are opposed to the positive values of decision, action, hardness and transcendence characterizing the *pour-soi* ("being-for-itself," or the self able to transcend itself and act upon the world). And, while it is true that none of the male characters really incarnates these positive qualities, most of the men depicted do recognize their existence and long to attain them. The women, on the other hand, doomed to immanence solely by virtue of their sex, never even glimpse the possibility of transcendence.

Depicted as heavy, clinging, and fleshy, virtually every female character appears to "suffocate" the man with whom she is involved. When the trilogy opens, Mathieu, a *lycée* professor of philosophy who is probably the central character of the novels, finds himself confronted by the pregnancy of Marcelle, his mistress of seven years. Both her pregnancy

and her sexuality—essentially her “femaleness”—repel him. Whenever he sees her, or even thinks of her, Mathieu experiences a sense of suffocation, of claustrophobia, expressed by recurring metaphors: he finds her body “blankly naked and defenseless,” her thighs “fleshy,” her tongue a “darting nakedness,” her mouth smelling like “cheap cigarettes.” Her very room (where they make love silently because of the proximity of her mother and where Mathieu has come to dread those “noiseless explosions”) closes in upon him, reinforcing his suffocation. As for the pregnancy, the fetus within her is a “blister,” a “little flabby object that clung to the world and sucked its sap.” Their homosexual friend, Daniel, seems to have been created both to demonstrate “bad faith” and to voice the most extreme sort of repugnance to women. Breathing itself is difficult for him in Marcelle’s room, and he views her growing stomach as “enemy flesh, lust fostering flesh, a vegetable larder.” Later, when, for reasons of his own, he marries Marcelle, he reflects to himself that “women’s bodies, like india rubber and boned meat, are rather flabby, ebullient and obtrusive.”

Nor need a woman be pregnant to inspire recoil. Mathieu’s student, Boris, finds that his desire for his beautiful but aging (in Sartre, women seem to age after twenty-two) mistress is always mixed with disgust. Her lips give him “the sense of a clammy, feverish nakedness set in the center of a plaster mask,” the shaven hairs of her armpits remind him of “heads of splinters thrust deep into the skin,” while her body is “silvery white, like the belly of a fish.” Significantly, while female bodies are usually described in terms like these which evoke disgust, terms which emphasize all that is fleshy, passive and inert, male bodies appear attractive, perhaps because they seem to incarnate the non-carnal world of hardness, action and transcendence so admired by Sartre. At one point, for example, a prostitute virtually rapes a young man because she finds him irresistible with his “narrow hips, his youthful, slim posterior.”

In all probability, Sartre’s recoil in the face of matter and unjustified being, represented so often by female sexuality and corporeality, is influenced by many factors in addition to what could be seen as a personal bias. Clearly, his attraction to an ordered universe, with comprehensible laws, and his concomitant fear of uncontrollable madness and disorder, is very much in the tradition of French rationalism. It is not difficult to discern, in fact, the Cartesian strain which runs throughout Sartre’s philosophical works: the contrast between the *pour-soi* (with its overtones of masculinity, order, hardness and reason) and the *en-soi* (associated with the world of matter, of nature, of flesh and female sexuality) are Sartre’s latter-day division between Cartesian mind and matter. Then, too, the dualism between reason and nature

seen in Descartes and Sartre can be viewed as a peculiarly Western phenomenon, transcending any individual philosopher, linked to the very spirit of capitalist enterprise which inspires man to conquer and subdue the world through reason and action. And, without doubt, no modern philosopher places as much faith in the value of action as does Sartre.

Action, in Sartrean terms, may represent a momentary triumph over the world of matter and nature. But the ultimate victory is not granted to man, for he is always subject to death, the ultimate and uncontrollable natural phenomenon which reduces all to the *en-soi* world of matter. One of the most interesting parts of *The Second Sex*, in fact, is devoted to an analysis of the ways in which nature, sex and death are interrelated in man's mind. De Beauvoir suggests that part of man's tremendous ambivalence about sex (and his female partner) arises from the fact that sexuality is both transcendence (one "possesses" the "other" who is thus reduced to an object) and subjugation (man becomes a servant of nature by furthering her demand that the species be propagated). But the demand that man continue the species carries with it the reminder of individual mortality. "Man glories in the phallus when he thinks of it as transcendence and activity, as a means for taking possession of the other; but he is ashamed of it when he sees it as merely passive flesh through which he is the plaything of the dark forces of Life."<sup>5</sup> Clearly, the pervasive presence of this shame in Sartre's work leaves no room for exaltation of any kind.

It is to be supposed that de Beauvoir's analysis of these attitudes concerning sexuality would mean that her own work was free of similar ambivalences. Such, alas, is not the case. While all the ambivalences in her work may not be attributable to Sartre, so much of her argument is based on Sartrean concepts, so many of the very words and metaphors—particularly those describing female sexuality and existence—she chooses recall his, that it is impossible not to sense his influence throughout *The Second Sex*. After all, no one, least of all de Beauvoir herself, would deny that what could be considered the central concept of *The Second Sex*—the idea that woman is seen as the "other" both by individual men and by society as a whole—comes from the Sartrean dialectic enounced in *Being and Nothingness*. According to Sartre, the individual ego, in perpetual conflict with other egos or consciousnesses, seeks to assert itself precisely by subduing these other egos. In *The Second Sex* this essential process is described thus: "We find in consciousness itself a fundamental hostility toward every other consciousness; the subject can be posed only in being opposed—he sets himself up as the essential, as opposed to the other, the inessential, the object" (p. xvii). But, as in the Hegelian master/slave dialectic (where the master

*needs* the slave to remain a master), the individual consciousness cannot totally subjugate other egos and turn them into pure objects, for it needs opposition to retain a sense of its own power and being. Taking this process as a starting point, it was de Beauvoir's genius to observe, and take as a central thesis of *The Second Sex* that, in this dialectic, woman is ideally suited to play the role of the "other" since she has always been a "free slave." Woman is:

a conscious being, but naturally submissive. And therein lies the wondrous hope that man has often put in woman: he hopes to fulfill himself as a being by carnally possessing a being, but at the same time confirming his sense of freedom through the docility of a free person. . . . She is a conscious being and yet it seems possible to possess her in the flesh. Thanks to her, there is a way for escaping that implacable dialectic of master and slave which has its source in the reciprocity that exists between free beings. (pp. 131, 130)

Even if one takes issue with this basic Sartrean dialectic, it is impossible to question the important role it plays in *The Second Sex*, the richness and coherence (if sometimes the rigidity) it lends to de Beauvoir's analysis of the position of women. At the same time, however, this metaphysical or "existential" notion is at the base of many disturbing remarks and judgments concerning woman's sexuality, her "nature," and her behavior patterns. Moreover, although de Beauvoir is constantly at pains to show how existential (i.e., almost invariably, Sartrean) elements are reinforced by the social conditions shaping and confronting women, the importance she ascribes to existential factors means that they frequently overwhelm all else, leading her into a certain fatalism. Take, for example, the central notion of the primordial conflict of the two egos in which woman is turned into the "other," into an unchanging *en-soi*, reduced to immanence, to her body, to the image others have of her. From this "otherness" of women, de Beauvoir draws certain conclusions concerning female sexuality: essentially, she argues that woman's status as the "other" means that she is not a free being but, rather, a sexually passive "prey" limited to immanent or corporeal being. Not only does such a conclusion support the traditional view of sexuality which sees man as active and woman as passive but, further, it precludes the possibility of social change. Although throughout *The Second Sex* de Beauvoir repeatedly observes that woman's immanence is both an existential given and a situation reinforced by existing social norms (in this case, woman's "otherness" is reinforced by her social inability to go out into the world where, by doing and creating, she could "transcend" herself and become an evolving *pour-soi*), when it comes to her discussion of female sexuality she virtually dismisses all social factors. Limiting female sexuality to

its existential given (that of "otherness," of "prey"), she tells us that if woman tries to escape from her immanent, passive sexuality she will receive little or no pleasure. Further, woman can never be sexually dominant, but can only mimic dominance. Speaking of the "independent" woman, de Beauvoir remarks that:

If she is proud and demanding, woman meets the male as an adversary, and she is much less well armed than he is. In the first place, he has physical strength, and it is easy for him to impose his will; we have seen, also, that tension and activity suit his erotic nature, whereas when woman departs from passivity, she breaks the spell that brings on her enjoyment; if she mimics dominance in her postures and movements, she fails to reach the climax of pleasure: most women who cling to their pride become frigid. (p. 650)

But if woman cannot (and, implicitly, should not) transcend this basic existential given of passive sexuality—a given which must influence other behavior patterns—how is she to transcend all the factors condemning her to immanence in the social sphere? And, how can she—as de Beauvoir persistently urges her to do throughout *The Second Sex*—throw off the shackles blocking her way to transcendence?

It is not only Sartre's existential givens (which condemn woman to her existential status of the "other"), but also the world-view behind them, which seems to have influenced this disturbing view of female sexuality. The very language de Beauvoir uses to describe such sexuality—in particular, her frequent metaphors suggesting passivity, heaviness, stickiness, her description of female sexuality as a "bog" or a "trap"—echo Sartre. Instead of words expressing pity or compassion for the plight of women reduced to "prey," her terms suggest recoil and disgust. Throughout *The Second Sex*, female sexuality and corporeality seem to play the same role as unjustified Being in *Nausea* in that they are forever threatening to engulf and absorb man. Sexuality thus becomes the best metaphor for the disturbing world of living matter, if not its most threatening manifestation. One striking passage, full of Sartrean metaphors, describes the viscous nature of female sexuality thus:

Feminine sex 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 the carnivorous plant, the bog, in which insects and children are swallowed up. She is absorption, suction, humus, pitch and glue, a passive influx, insinuating and viscous: thus, at least, she vaguely feels herself to be. (p. 362)

No less than Sartre, de Beauvoir establishes a dichotomy between what she views as the repulsive world of living, changing matter (a world incarnated in female sexuality) and an unchanging realm of hardness. This dichotomy emerges quite clearly when de Beauvoir contrasts a young girl's developing sexuality (referred to as "unclean alchemies") with a world of "gold" or "diamond."

In the development of her breasts the girl experiences the ambiguity of the word *living*. She is neither gold nor diamond, but a strange form of matter, ever changing, indefinite, deep within which unclean alchemies are in the course of elaboration. She is accustomed to a head of hair quietly rippling like a silken skein; but this new growth in her armpits, and at her middle, transforms her into a kind of animal or alga. (p. 287)

This fear of matter and female sexuality probably constitutes the most striking aspect of a world view, common to Sartre and de Beauvoir, which rigidly divides the world into transcendence (the *pour-soi*) and immanence (the *en-soi*), mind and matter, action and passivity, and, ultimately, masculinity and femininity. And this puritanical, ascetic (and, some would argue, capitalist and Western) world view valorizes "masculine" values, placing, as it does, thought above feeling, doing above quietly existing, transcendence above "nature." Over and over, de Beauvoir echoes Sartre's dictum that man is nothing but his acts and, like him, she defines those acts almost exclusively in terms of the external world: "the reality of man is in the houses he builds, the forests he clears, the maladies he cures" (p. 592). In contrast with man, who creates himself through what he builds and does, woman *is* nothing because she *does* nothing. She becomes narcissistic because "not being able to fulfill herself through projects and objectives, [woman] is forced to find her reality in the immanence of her person. . . . She gives herself a supreme importance because no object of importance is accessible to her" (pp. 592-93). In contrast to the narcissistic, traditional woman who "wallows in immanence" and "attaches extreme importance to her animal nature," the liberated or "modern" woman accepts "masculine values: she prides herself on thinking, taking action, working, creating, on the same terms as men" (p. 676).

De Beauvoir's emphasis upon what she sees as the inherent value of action brings to mind many of the same moral issues raised in the past concerning Sartre. Doesn't the quality of the action count? the reasons one has for committing it? its consequences? Aside from a few passages dealing with the alienation produced by working in a capitalist system (an alienation affecting both men and women), de



Beauvoir does not address herself to these issues. Instead, much of *The Second Sex* examines how the world of masculine values has been closed to women and discusses the resulting "female" behavior patterns. Here, too, her argument raises many questionable points, revealing, once again, an uneasy tension between social factors and metaphysical givens. At the core of the tension this time lies that terribly thorny question: was woman locked out of man's world because of her "nature" or because of her "situation," to use the Sartrean terminology? As an existentialist who views man in "situation," who believes that man defines himself by what he does, de Beauvoir tries hard not to attribute everything to an inherent "nature" or "essence," yet its shadow clouds much of what she writes. Not only does she condemn woman to sexual passivity, but, elsewhere, she suggests that woman was denied access to the masculine Eden because of the child-bearing function Nature had assigned her. Woman may long for "transcendence," she may agree with "masculine aspirations" and desire to "shape the future" and "remodel the face of the earth," but "her misfortune is to have been biologically destined for the repetition of Life [i.e., procreation], when even in her own view Life does not carry within itself its reasons for being, reasons that are more important than the life itself" (p. 59). This firm belief that woman is different from man because of both her sexuality and her maternal function (both of which are often qualified as "animal") does not, however, cause de Beauvoir to take the fatal step and ask if woman's very way of being in the world, her "nature," is different from man's. Instead, divorcing both sexuality and maternity from other modes of behavior, she insists that characteristic female patterns are due to social factors which have closed the masculine world of acting and doing to women.

But the problems do not end with these theoretical difficulties: de Beauvoir's many descriptions of female behavior traits echo existing stereotypes and clichés, even reinforcing them through the dialectical tendency she shares with Sartre to polarize the world so sharply at every turn. Hence, in this either/or world no middle zone is possible between masculine "reason" and feminine "primitive superstitions" (the last category groups together areas as diverse as astrology, theosophy and religion). More importantly, as feminists have observed, de Beauvoir's pervasive pragmatic, rational, and anti-sexual world-view causes her to ignore or undervalue the positive side of many characteristics associated with women. For example, she repeatedly deplores the fact that woman is more "physical" or, as she says, more "animal" than man. Yet one could argue that in a technological world where man has lost touch with deep feelings and immediate reality, an attachment

to the “physical” and the “sensual” is of great value. And a similar case could be made for many of the other “female” characteristics criticized by de Beauvoir. Woman’s “lack of a sense of grandeur” and her reluctance to believe in “fixed truths” could be deemed positive qualities in a world where “truth,” reason, and grandeur (does one hear echoes of de Gaulle here?) have so often served cruel ideological ends.

It is no coincidence, I think, that many of the qualities de Beauvoir ascribes to women are precisely those often associated with poets. In this respect, de Beauvoir seems once again in accord with Sartre who, in *What is Literature?* (1947), justifies his philosophical aversion to poetry on the grounds that poetry, concerned with language itself rather than with “communication,” does not seek to “reveal” the world, and hence, in his view, to change it. Much of his wrath is directed against the Surrealists, whose outlook appears diametrically opposed to his own: exalting the immediate, the irrational, the marvelous, they care more about the individual than the group, more about metaphysics than history. Not surprisingly, de Beauvoir derides woman for a similar approach to the world. She laments the fact that woman’s inability to grasp the world through “technical skill, sound logic, and articulated knowledge” makes her feel, like “the child and the savage, that she is surrounded by dangerous mysteries” and causes her to seek refuge in a “harmony” which, in de Beauvoir’s eyes, is passive and “stationary.” And her fundamental disdain for female sensitivity is summed up when she observes that woman has a double allegiance—to the “carnal world and the world of poetry.”

The ideological prejudices underlying de Beauvoir’s dismissal of the “world of poetry” permeate her entire approach to literature and especially to women writers. Judging literature in terms of social commitment (the same terms set forth by Sartre in *What is Literature?*), she insists that the writer’s fundamental task is to “contest” the universe, to “found the world anew on a human liberty.” And this, like other attempts at transcendence, falls to the lot of men. Women writers may “speak directly to the senses,” they may “present experience still warm” or “be attentive to the hidden substance of things,” but they are marked by a fundamental weakness:

Women writers do not contest the human situation, because they have hardly begun to be able to assume it fully. This explains why their works for the most part lack metaphysical resonances and also anger; they do not take the world incidentally, they do not ask it questions, they do not expose its contradictions: they take it as it is too seriously. (p. 669)

Although de Beauvoir, like Sartre, demands both political and metaphysical revolt of a writer, the above quote suggests that she is drawn to writers, like the Russians, in whom metaphysical issues predominate. This preference, in addition to her own philosophical bias (and perhaps a certain French insularity), leads de Beauvoir into some fairly surprising judgments concerning major English women authors. While admitting that a very few female writers, specifically Jane Austen, George Eliot, and the Brontës, have not been content to accept society in a passive way, she goes on to say that they

have had to expend so much energy negatively in order to free themselves from outward restraints that they arrive somewhat out of breath at the stage from which masculine writers of great scope take their departure. We do not find in them, for example, the irony, the ease of a Stendhal, nor his calm sincerity. Nor have they had the richness of experience of a Dostoevsky, a Tolstoy: this explains why the splendid *Middlemarch* is still not the equal of *War and Peace*; why *Wuthering Heights*, in spite of its grandeur, does not have the sweep of *The Brothers Karamazov*. (pp. 667-68)

It is not my intention, of course, to argue these points in detail here: each reader must decide for him/herself whether Jane Austen lacks Stendhal's "irony" or "calm sincerity," whether *Middlemarch* is or is not the "equal" or *War and Peace*. What should be remarked, however, is that this passage reveals a de Beauvoir virtually impervious to the important social and political issues raised by the English female novelists under discussion. No mention, for example, is made of the fact that George Eliot's novels mirror—in a highly conscious way—the transformations wrought in English society by the coming of the industrial revolution, nor that one of her novels, *Felix Holt: The Radical*, is explicitly devoted to politics. And, while George Eliot is certainly the most social and political of the three novelists mentioned by de Beauvoir, one could hardly deny that the works of a writer as "psychologically" oriented as Jane Austen also constitute a biting chronicle of society. No less than Balzac, Jane Austen depicts a world ruled by class distinctions and mercenary considerations, a world where most marriages (fortunately not those of her heroines) are determined not by love, but by dowries.

Most important, all these women novelists must be considered political in at least one essential way: with varying degrees of explicitness, perhaps even of consciousness, they all portray the plight of women, particularly the plight of women of heightened sensibility and intelligence who, barred from the world of men, must confine their very considerable

energies to the drawing room and the search for a husband. At the deepest level, then, these novels constitute a “protest” (to use Sartre’s and de Beauvoir’s term), a demand for human liberty, and a rebellion against existing conditions, as vital as that found in any male author.

The perceptive, sensitive and often independently-minded women described by these English novelists tower way above most of their counterparts in contemporary fiction, not excluding de Beauvoir’s own novels. Even a glance at some of her female characters confirms many of the disturbing ambivalences discernible in *The Second Sex*. Moreover, her female characters, and their various relationships, bring Sartre’s fiction to mind. This is particularly true of *The Mandarins* (1954), her long, quasi-autobiographical novel which continues, in a sense, the historical canvas of Sartre’s *The Roads to Freedom*, portraying, as it does, the conflicts of personalities, ideas and political loyalties among a group of intellectuals in post-war Paris.

While virtually all the men in this novel are passionately concerned with politics and literature, the three major female characters are curiously untouched by the political fervor seething about them. Instead, as in a romantic novel, each is consumed by sentimental affairs, aware of the outer world only insofar as it touches their men. Each of the three, in fact, appears to illustrate, somewhat schematically, one of the several possible female behavior patterns described in *The Second Sex*: Paule is the “woman in love” (in the novel she is literally driven mad by unreciprocated passion), Nadine is the masochistic, insecure adolescent ready to accept the political beliefs of her current love, and Anne is, at least theoretically, the “independent woman.”

Of the three, Anne is by far the most disturbing, since she is supposedly “independent” and, in addition, clearly modelled on de Beauvoir herself. Not only is she the only character to narrate much of the story in the first person, but her romance with an American writer seems to be a transposition of de Beauvoir’s love affair with Nelson Algren, to whom, in fact, *The Mandarins* is dedicated. Sartre himself appears to be a composite of two men in the novel—Anne’s husband, Robert, a greatly respected writer, and Henri, playwright and editor of a political journal bearing a strong resemblance to Sartre’s *Les Temps modernes*. No counterpart of Anne exists in *The Roads to Freedom* but as *The Mandarins* progresses one wonders what, if anything, has been gained. Intelligent and introspective, Anne has nonetheless married a man much older than herself whom she casts in the role of mentor and father. And, although a psychiatrist, she takes little interest in a career which she abandons for months on end to meet her lover in America. In contrast to the detailed descriptions of the professional and political matters facing the men, Anne’s work is dismissed by vague references

to her clients, most of whom appear to be women with emotional problems.

Worst of all, much of her own narration (and of *The Mandarins* itself) describes her love affair, blow by blow, in terms worthy of romantic stories destined for a female public. Take, for example, her words when she realizes she has lost the American's love:

I cut myself off short; he was looking at me with a slightly worried look. He was afraid of words; so was I. I had seen too many women try to calm the regrets of their flesh with words: I had known too many who had dismally succeeded in leading back to their beds a man benumbed with words. It's a horrible thing, a woman who labors to lead a man's hands to her body by appealing to his mind.<sup>6</sup>

And, when Anne thinks of Paule being "cured" of the love she feels for Henri, a love which has driven her temporarily insane, she utters one of the most disturbing comments about romantic love in the entire book: "What exactly are they going to cure her of? And afterward, who will she be? Oh, after all, it wasn't difficult to foresee. She'd be like myself, like millions of others: a woman waiting to die, no longer knowing why she's living" (p. 447). If this be liberation . . . .

Distressing as the female characters in *The Mandarins* may be, one could argue that de Beauvoir is merely creating some of the "female" behavior patterns described in *The Second Sex*, or that she is simply recording modes of behavior encountered in real life. But if she is attempting to faithfully create various "patterns," why is it that she, like Sartre, seems virtually obsessed by one particular image—that of the "aging" woman clinging to a lover who has become indifferent to her? As for the second hypothesis, it is difficult to believe that in the literary and philosophical milieu of de Beauvoir and Sartre, there were no independent women, no women really interested in politics and literature. It seems far more likely that de Beauvoir's disturbing female characters, like the ambivalencies in *The Second Sex*, stem from deeper sources, not least of which is a philosophical/psychological outlook profoundly influenced by Sartre.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,  
SANTA BARBARA

1. Margaret Walters, "The Rights and Wrongs of Women: Wollstonecraft, Martineau, de Beauvoir," in *The Rights and Wrongs of Women*, ed. Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley (London and New York: Penguin, 1976), p. 356.

2. Even a recent book by Axel Madsen, *Hearts and Minds: The Common Journey of Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre* (New York: William Morrow, 1977), devoted to the friendship of Sartre and de Beauvoir, is essentially biographical and casually dismisses Sartre's influence on *The Second Sex* by calling it a "felicitous application of the existentialist method" (p. 293).
3. The sexual bias in Sartre's philosophy has long been apparent. In *Irrational Man* (New York: Anchor, 1962), William Barrett, observing Sartre's masculine and feminine images, writes that "Sartre's is fundamentally a masculine psychology; it misunderstands and disparages the psychology of woman" (p. 258). But, as Margery Collins and Christine Pierce point out in "Holes and Slime: Sexism in Sartre's Psychoanalysis," *The Philosophical Forum* 5 (1973-74), Barrett himself remains locked in a traditional view of women. Even these authors, however, who trace the persistent sexism in Sartre's work, do not seem to realize how it has affected de Beauvoir. Quite the contrary: referring to Sartre's sexism they remark that "one suspects that the vigilance of Simone de Beauvoir might have prevented such a disaster" (p. 112).
4. Jean-Paul Sartre, *La nausée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), p. 223. This quote, rendered somewhat differently, is found on p. 59 of the English edition, *Nausea*, trans. Lloyd Alexander (New York: New Directions, 1964).
5. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (New York: Bantam, 1952), p. 151. Parenthetical page references to *The Second Sex* are to this edition.
6. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Mandarins*, trans. Leonard M. Friedman (Cleveland and New York: World Publishing Co., 1956), p. 560. The following quote is also taken from this edition.