

Simone de Beauvoir and The Problem of The Other's Consciousness: Risk, Responsibility and Recognition

by

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

In an interview with Jessica Benjamin and Margaret Simons in 1979, Simone de Beauvoir identified the problem that had preoccupied her across her lifetime, that is, “her” problem, as the problem of the “the consciousness of the other”. In making this claim, she echoed words she had written almost fifty years earlier, when in 1927 as an undergraduate student, she wrote in her journal that what interested her was “almost always this opposition of self and other that I have felt since beginning to live”. In bookending her career in this manner, Beauvoir points her readers to consider her work as a sustained engagement with Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, for it is in this text that this problem takes shape. Hegel traces the journey of spirit from consciousness to Absolute Knowledge. In so doing he provides a description of how it is that the self comes to reside in the other and the other to reside in the self as the hostility that initially leads to the objectification of one by the other gives way to recognition. This study investigates the development of Beauvoir’s understanding of the problem of the other’s consciousness. Three times across her career Beauvoir would turn to Hegel’s text. Using these readings as guideposts, it traces her account of the relationship between self and other from her study of hostility in her early works, through to her discovery of the force of history and the interdependence of subjectivities in her moral period, to her exploration of the forms of reciprocity in her mature studies, finally through to her acknowledgement of mutual recognition via her reflections on writing in her late works. It examines the ways in which Beauvoir thinks with Hegel, picking up his project, contextualizing and criticizing it, thus giving it life.

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Dedication

For Emelia, Eyo, Emmanuel, Antonia and Naana
who taught me how to write and how to live this story.

. . . the life of the Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastations, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it. It wins its truth only when in utter dismemberment, it finds itself. It is this power, not as something positive, which close its eyes to the negative, as when we say of something that is nothing or is false, and then, having done with it, turn away and pass on to something else; on the contrary, Spirit is this power only by looking the negative in the face, and tarrying with it.
– Hegel, Preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*

. . . I decided to begin writing again: this, it seemed to me, was an act of faith and hope.
– Beauvoir, *The Prime of Life*

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviations for Works by Beauvoir

- LI *L'Invitée*
SCS *She Came To Stay* (1964)
SCS2 *She Came to Stay* (1990)
- SA *Le Sang des Autres*
BO *The Blood of Others*
- THM *Tous Les Hommes Sont Mortels*
AMM *All Men Are Mortal*
- PMA *Pour Une Morale de L'Ambiguïté*
EA *The Ethics of Ambiguity*
- PEC *Pyrrhus et Cinéas*
PAC *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*
- AJJ *Amérique, Jour de Jour*
ADD *America Day by Day*
- DS *Le Deuxième Sexe*
TSS1 *The Second Sex*, translated by H. M. Parshley.
TSS2 *The Second Sex*, translated by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier.
- MR *Mandarins: Un Roman*
M *The Mandarins*
- MFR *Mémoires De La Jeune Fille Rangée*
MDD *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*
- FA *La Force de L'Âge*
PL *The Prime of Life*
- LFC *La Force des Choses*
FC *The Force of Circumstances*
- MTD *Une Morte Très Douce*
VED *A Very Easy Death*

- V *La Vieillesse*
 OA *Old Age*
- TCF *Tout Compte Fait*
 ASD *All Said and Done*
- LBI *Les Belles Images*
 BI *Les Belles Images*
- FR *La Femme Rompue*
 WD *The Woman Destroyed*
- LE *Les Écrits de Simone de Beauvoir*
- LAS *Lettres à Sartre*
 LS *Letters to Sartre*
- DPS *Diaries of A Philosophy Student, Volume 1, 1926 – 27*
- CJ *Les Carnets de Jeunesse, 1927 – 1930*
- LA *Les Lettres à Nelson Algren*
 TLA *Letters to Nelson Algren*
- JG *Journal de Guerre*
 WTD *Wartime Diaries*
- PW *Philosophy Writings*
- LW *Useless Mouths and other Literary Writings*
- POW *Political Writings*

Abbreviations to Other Works Cited In This Text

- PS Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*
- PM Hegel's *Philosophy of Mind*
- PR Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*
- SL1 Hegel's *Science of Logic*. (Translated by W.H. Johnston & L.G. Struthers.)
- SL2 Hegel's *Science of Logic*. (Translated by George di Giovanni)

- NE Sartre's *Notebooks Towards An Ethics*
C Sartre's *Cahiers Pour Une Morale*
EN Sartre's *Être et Le Néant*
BN Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*

Chapter 1

Introduction: Beauvoir, Hegel and The Problem of The Other

1.1 Simone de Beauvoir and The Problem of the Other's Consciousness

“this problem . . . of the other’s consciousness, it was my problem.”¹

- Beauvoir

In an interview with Jessica Benjamin and Margaret Simons in 1979, Simone de Beauvoir identified the problem that had preoccupied her across her lifetime, that is, “her” problem, as the problem of the “the consciousness of the other.”² In making this claim, she echoed words she had written almost fifty years earlier, when in 1927 as a young undergraduate student, she wrote in her journal that what interested her was “almost always this opposition of self and other that I have felt since beginning to live.”³ Bookending her career with these references, Beauvoir provides her readers with a strategy for reading her works as she would have them read. Her focus would not be on the problem of the individual in relation to his freedom.⁴ Such ontological questions would define and underlie the

¹ Simons, 1999, 10.

² “So when you wrote in *L'Invitée* that Françoise says what really upsets her about Xavière is that she has to confront in her another consciousness, that is not an idea that particularly came (from) Sartre? S.B.: It was I who thought about that! It was absolutely not Sartre! J.B.: But that is an idea which it seems to me appears later in his work. S.B.: Oh! Maybe! (Laughter) In any case, this problem . . . of the other’s consciousness, it was my problem.” Simons, 1999, 10.

³ “Il faut que je mette au net mes idées philosophiques et peut-être que je commence ce récit que j’aimerais écrire. Tant d’idées qu’ont mûries mes meditations et précisées mes conversations. De mes dix-huit mois de pensée je devrais faire le recensement, reprendre et approfondir les problèmes qui m’ont sollicité, auxquels j’ai donné de trop hâtives solutions. Le thème est presque toujours cette opposition de moi et l’autre que j’ai sentie en commençant de vivre. Maintenant est venu le temps d’en faire une synthèse. Les influences étrangères sont écartées, et aussi le désir de tout recherché d’écriture. J’écrirai mon oeuvre dans mon propre style en cherchant seulement à bien exprimer ce que je sens.” CJ 367; DPS 279.

⁴ Throughout this text the masculine pronoun is employed. This may seem to be a surprising choice in the context of writing about one of the most influential feminist writers of all times. The choice is intentional. Beauvoir herself used the masculine pronoun in her work. In part this decision no doubt reflected the conventions of the time. However, it seems as well to capture something of her own philosophical commitments and political reflections. As she herself notes in *The Second Sex* the feminine remains the marked term. (TSS2 5, DS115) To change the pronoun thus is to change her meaning. When she speaks, for example of the self using masculine terms, she is both employing standard writing practice for her time, but she is also making a

projects taken up by Sartre. Rather, assuming and indeed, embracing the ambiguity that defines an individual life, and recognizing that the individual is always already amidst a world populated by other individuals, her questions would center on the problems of intersubjectivity and the possibility of recognition. Could the other ever be seen as the self? Could it be seen and understood as at one and the same time being self and other, subject and object, immanence and transcendence? And could the other simultaneously see the self in all its complexity not reducing it to either a pure subjectivity or a pure objectivity? What would be the conditions for the possibility of such recognition? And could mutual recognition of this sort move beyond being a theoretical possibility posited on the pages of philosophical essays and explored in novels to being a lived experience? Together these questions would frame her problem. Yet, more than twenty years after her death, no one has offered up a reading Beauvoir's oeuvre as she herself suggests. That is, no one yet has read her works as a sustained meditation on the problem of the other's consciousness.

Why this hesitancy to take Beauvoir up on this task? No doubt, in part it reflects the extent of the undertaking. Beauvoir did not produce a sustained discussion or study of this problem but rather weaved her reflections and analysis of this relationship into and throughout her works. Her various texts – her essays, novels, plays, journals, letters -- trace an ongoing conversation, on ongoing investigation of the subject matter. This proves frustrating for while she may introduce a problem in an essay, she goes on to explore the issue in greater detail, placing it in context in one of her novels and then in her autobiography discusses its grounding in the historical times in which she was writing. She advances an answer only to reject it, revise it and re-approach it in another medium. To trace the development of her ideas on this question thus proves to be a daunting task.

stronger point concerning the exclusion of women from the class of those who have their subjectivity recognized.

Moreover, the problem itself, poses challenges for Beauvoir scholars. For what is it to speak of the “problem of the other’s consciousness?” In so describing her project, she points towards her preoccupation with Hegel’s account of “the history of consciousness.” More specifically, given the historic context that frames these claims, Beauvoir’s very choice of words seems to be directing those who would study her works to turn their attention to Hegel and to his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. It is in this work that Hegel explores the question of the relationship between the self and other, considering whether “the subject-object distinction has become an unbridgeable gap”⁵ or if there remains open at the theoretical level (metaphysics) as well as within the realm of lived experience (phenomenology), the possibility for a self, a subject, to find itself, at home in the other. As Hegel in this work maps the moments in the development of consciousness in its attempt to find itself as self-consciousness in and through the other, in and through Spirit, as he uncovers the conditions for the possibility for discovering the “‘I’ that is ‘We’ and ‘We’ that is ‘I,’”⁶ Beauvoir traces this progression, explores this possibility, in and across her works. Both wonder, consider, and reconsider whether it is possible for each to be “for the other what the other is for it”⁷ that is, whether it is possible for each to recognize themselves as mutually recognizing one another.”⁸

To describe this line of inquiry as “a question” is misleading. The problem of the other’s consciousness is not a single problem but rather is a cluster of interconnected questions concerning the relationships between agents or consciousnesses. The problem is premised on resolving the problem of other minds. That is, it is first necessary to establish that others exist, before considerations can be made as to how they exist. As such, one dimension of the problem of the other’s consciousness entails discovering or uncovering the existence of separate beings in the world. But to answer questions about the existence of the other, it is necessary at one and the same time to

⁵ Williams, 1992,41.

⁶ PS § 177, 110.

⁷ PS § 186, 113.

⁸ PS § 184, 112.

raise similar questions about the self. As Taylor notes “what appears to be a relationship of otherness . . . always turns out to be an aspect of mediate self- relation.”⁹ To speak of the other, is always already to speak of the self. And this in turn reveals yet another element or aspect of the problem at hand. As Hegel makes clear, the self is always divided – divided not only from others in the world but also from the other that lies within itself. The divide between consciousnesses is replicated within each consciousness. Thus, to address the problem of the other’s consciousness, it is necessary also to address the problem of the divided consciousness, to confront the risks entailed in acknowledging the ambiguity of the other and perhaps, more importantly, of the self.

And it is to take up the epistemological challenges raised thereby. As noted by Douzinas and Jurist, recognition entails a theory of cognition, for its very pursuit, upends those accounts of knowledge that would focus on introspection and abstraction.¹⁰ It challenges those who would consider its possibility to rethink how it is that knowledge of others and of the self is acquired. If the other is a subject, the problem of the other’s consciousness necessitates consideration of the conditions for the possibility of turning, “knowledge into a process of cultural mutuality and exchange and self-knowledge into self-exploration and self-control through the understanding of the other.”¹¹ Further, it requires careful reflection upon the implications of this shift. To address the problem of the other’s consciousness is to consider how it is that the world and the self come to be known.

These metaphysical and epistemological premises frame considerations of the possibility and the potential for inter-subjectivity – that is, they provide the conditions for the possibility of addressing the socio-political dimensions of this problem. For it is not so much the problem of the other’s consciousness that Beauvoir centers her lifework upon as it is the problems of other

⁹ Taylor, 1987, xxii.

¹⁰ Douzinas, 2002; Jurist 2000.

¹¹ Douzinas, 2002, 384-385.

consciousnesses. The problem gives rise to considerations of what happens when two subjects encounter one another, each wanting to maintain its own mastery, its own subjectivity. How does one act knowing that others exist in the world, others who claim to have consciousnesses like one's own? How should one behave given that whatever choice one makes will affect the other in ways he or she cannot know and would not choose? Under such circumstances, to whom is one responsible? What are the necessary and sufficient conditions for responsibility? And, finally, there are questions concerning the possibility of recognition.

It is this cluster of questions to which Beauvoir gives the label "the problem of the other's consciousness." Depending on her lived experience and on historical events, her attention at times is more clearly directed towards the ontological issues that this problem incorporates, while at other times, her focus centers more notably upon its ethical dimensions. As her understanding of one of these issues changed, the reverberations are evident across her thinking. In her works issues unfold, as Sanford notes.¹² What is witnessed is the setting in motion of the argument, the workings of the dialectic that can be traced as it changes, as new questions arise from the framing of a problem or from its placement in a particular context. Her work evidences philosophical reasoning. She is always demonstrating philosophy at work. But to take up such a reading of her oeuvre is to challenge perceived notions of Beauvoir's project, notions that she herself works hard to advance.¹³

In reading Beauvoir's work as she herself suggests, several myths that continue to frame the reception of her work – myths that, at times during her career, she staunchly encourages -- are revealed. First, her description of the guiding interest in/of her work makes clear that it is a philosophical issue that is the focus of her concern. Beauvoir herself claims that while Sartre is the

¹² Sanford, 2008, 2.

¹³ See Moi 1994 for a detailed discussion of Beauvoir's attempt to undermine her own philosophical significance.

philosopher she is the writer.¹⁴ This description encourages depictions of her as a disciple of Sartre and undermines serious attention being paid to her unique philosophical contributions. Yet, if hers is “the problem of the other’s consciousness” – if that was her unique interest, it is clear that she too is a philosopher, not only a writer. In these statements she makes evident that the foundations of her investigations lie not only in Sartre’s works but also elsewhere in the history of philosophy. She locates her own interests within a broader historical perspective, within the tradition of Hegel and Husserl, Bergson and Kierkegaard, thus undermining attempts to link her work exclusively or primarily with that of Sartre.¹⁵ She has a distinct project – a distinctly social project focused on the exploration of the relationship between consciousnesses – that is neither dictated nor directed by Sartre whose interests were ontological and metaphysical. Viewing her work as taking up the problem of the other’s consciousness, that is, viewing it as part of the tradition of French Hegelianism, requires the abandonment of these ideals of Beauvoir, ideals, that, however false, nonetheless have proven difficult to dislodge, difficult to abandon.

It is easy to understand why this is the case. To read Beauvoir’s work as a sustained conversation on the problem of the other’s consciousness is, in many ways, to re-read her work, or perhaps better yet to read it for the first time. It is to place her writings within a different historical context, a different lineage and to see them anew. It is this task that this study takes up. Tracing her discussion of this problem from her student diaries to her final works, it aims to read Beauvoir’s novels, essays, studies and autobiographical work as a continuous engagement with the ideas set forth in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, a work that would already be in the air when she was a philosophy

¹⁴ Simons, 1999, 9.

¹⁵ It seems clear that in giving homage to Hegel, in noting his influence on her writing Beauvoir challenges attempts to read her work as either a reflection and reiteration of Sartre’s work or as providing the foundation for his thoughts. The question of influence that has dominated much of Beauvoir studies, most often to the detriment to considerations of the content and import of her ideas, will thus be set aside in this work. For a discussion of these issues see Daigle and Golomb, 2009; Fullbrook and Fullbrook, 2008; Fullbrook and Fullbrook, 1994; and Simons, 1999.

student, a work she would read for herself for the first time in 1940, and to which she would return on two subsequent occasions across her lifetime – finding therein the structure not only for theorizing but as well for studying the relationship between self and other against the backdrop of her descriptions of lived experience. Her reading of this work would provide her with a structure, with a methodology for framing what would prove to be a life-long phenomenological investigation into the possibility of recognition. It would challenge her to think and re-think the relationship between self and other as it arises in the context of her own life and as it is enacted on a broader historical stage.

1.2 Reading and Re-reading Hegel

“this opposition of self and other that I have felt since beginning to live.”¹⁶

- *Beauvoir*

This investigation is structured around Beauvoir’s own reading and re-reading Hegel’s *Phenomenology*. Three times across her lifetime Beauvoir picks up this text, in part or in whole. She first encounters Hegel’s ideas in her studies at Cours Désir in 1926. While this was the briefest of introductions, Hegel was to a great extent already in the air in 1927 when she begins her studies at the Sorbonne. While there is no evidence that Beauvoir read Hegel directly during her time as a philosophy student, it is clear from considerations of the times and of those writers and thinkers whom she read and studied with, that she was gaining an indirect understanding of some of the key concepts developed in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*.

In 1940 she reads the work in its entirety for the first time along with Jean Wahl’s *La Malheur de la Conscience Dans La Philosophie de Hegel* in Bibliothèque Nationale as she finishes editing *She Came to Stay* and begins work on *The Blood of Others*. Reading this work at the start of what is characterized as her “moral period,” she finds a discussion of history and of ambiguity that leads her to consider the interdependence of self and other and to reflect upon the ethical

¹⁶ CJ 367; DPS 279.

responsibilities that this relationship entails, questions of particular importance during and after the Second World War in France.

Once again Beauvoir returns to this text in 1947 while writing *The Second Sex*, this time taking up the concept of mutual recognition developed therein. In both this study and in *The Mandarins* (1954), she writes what she considers to be her best account of the problem of the other's consciousness, offering up her best answers to the questions posed by the encounter between the self and the other, in her analysis of generosity and the erotic.¹⁷ But when her faith in love, friendship and community waivers, when she begins to question her own account of mutual recognition, she returns to the text once more.

In the early 1970s, she returns to the ideas presented in the *Phenomenology* one final time to rethink the idea of reciprocity. What results are two novels that unsettle the conditions for the possibility of recognition and a series of essays on writing given in Japan that offer a new conceptual framework from which to structure and, indeed, account for relationships in which each sees the other as he seems himself, that is, in which self-consciousnesses encounter each other in a self-self relationships. Her repeated encounters with this text thus create a timeline across which to trace her changing views on both structure and the possible resolution of her problem.¹⁸

This study examines how Beauvoir's reflections on the problem of the other's consciousness refracted through these repeated readings result in the development of her own account of the

¹⁷ Simons, 1990, 488.

¹⁸ Any attempt to write about Beauvoir's work in chronological order faces a challenge. She writes her life in her novels, in her journals and in her autobiographies. She writes and rewrites episodes going forward and backward – shifting form and focus. And the interpretations and the histories she offers up are often not easily or readily reconcilable. This clearly leaves her commentators with difficult choices to make. Indeed, it encourages the fragmentation of her work. It is much easier to look at just the novels, or the essays or the autobiographies or the diaries than it is to piece together the elements of each – to reveal and not necessarily to resolve the contradictions in her work.

dialectic and of mutual recognition.¹⁹ Tracing the development of her understanding of this problem from her early student diaries through to her final works, it examines the ways in which her growing awareness of the inescapability of history and of the inevitability of interdependence, leads her to reconsider her early belief that hostility frames all encounters between the self and the other and to investigate the possibility of mutual recognition. This investigation explores Beauvoir's unique interpretation of Hegel's work, an interpretation not reducible to that offered by Sartre, Kojève or Hyppolite, an interpretation that is dialectical and which allows for the unfolding of her ideas both within and across her works, encompassing her creative writing as well as her theoretical studies.

It is necessary to make clear that this is not a study of Beauvoir and Hegel. That is, it does not aim to investigate her work in light of his. As noted earlier, too often Beauvoir's ideas are regarded as appendages to the works of her male predecessors or contemporaries. This is evident in the papers that have been written that look at "Beauvoir and . . ." -- Beauvoir and Sartre, Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir and Husserl, Beauvoir and Heidegger, Beauvoir and Wright. Such readings of her work tend to underestimate her own, unique philosophical contributions. Too often such explorations elaborate at length on the work of the male writer and reduce Beauvoir's own investigations to little more than a footnote.²⁰ To bring out from the shadows her own thought, herein, the focus of attention is on Beauvoir's reading of Hegel's text and on the ways that in which that reading informed her understanding of the problem of the other's consciousness, rather than on her relationship to Hegel more generally.

And so it is to the texts themselves that this work addresses itself. If Beauvoir's work is to be re-read in the manner proposed, that is as a study of the other's consciousness, it requires a return to

¹⁹ Herein, I take issue with Deutscher's claim that Beauvoir simply restates the problem through her readings of her contemporaries and predecessors. See Deutscher, 2008, 16.

²⁰ Consider in this context Moser's *Freedom and Recognition in Simone de Beauvoir*, (2008) in which she devotes more pages to the discussion of Sartre's philosophy than to that of Beauvoir herself.

the texts to chart the unfolding of her understanding of this problem and of her proposed solutions. In taking up this project, the existing scholarship on Beauvoir in English is drawn upon to frame the discussion. The scope of this study is limited in this way due to the particular approach to Beauvoir taken in the French-speaking world. As noted by Tidd, the inherent masculinism of French academe and the predominance of psychoanalytic approaches to feminism have ensured that Beauvoir's philosophy garners little serious attention in that context.²¹ With few exceptions²², her work has been overlooked for what, on the surface, appear to be more radical, original and sophisticated theories or it has been characterized as the rather simplistic reflections of a Sartreuse. Hence it is to the scholarship in English that the present study turns for its groundings. But before turning to Beauvoir's texts, it is first necessary to consider the work that would preoccupy her therein. In the opening chapter, this investigation is initiated.

An account of the journey of spirit from sense-certainty towards absolute knowledge outlined in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* is traced in the opening sections of Chapter Two. Consideration is given to the various stages of the dialectic in order to provide a backdrop for this present study. This overview will provide a standpoint from which to situate this present study in relation to existing scholarship. Beauvoir was clear as to the importance of Hegel's influence on her work. However, the nature and extent of that influence has been a subject of debate. A survey of the interpretations of the relationship between the works of these two writers undertaken by the Moi, Gothlin, Bauer, Bergoffen and Moser is then undertaken in order to provide a framework on which to build this present interpretation.

Chapter Three of this study, "Risk", explores Beauvoir's early writings within the context of her indirect introduction to Hegel's ideas during her studies at Cours Désir and the Sorbonne. Already

²¹ Tidd, 1999, 3.

²² Challenging this perception and reception of Beauvoir's work in France has been Michelle le Doeuff (1991) and Claudine Monteil (2006; 2009).

in the 1920s and clearly by throughout the 1930s, Hegel was “en l’air.” In this context, the influence of Baruzi, Brunschvicg and Bergson on her reading of Hegel are explored and shown to shape her original belief in the opposition between self and other, a view evidenced in her journals from 1926 through 1927, as well as in her first published work, *She Came to Stay*.

Exploring Beauvoir’s writings from her ‘moral period,’ Chapter Four, “Responsibility”, opens with an examination of her first reading of Hegel’s *Phenomenology* in 1940. An encroaching awareness of history and of the need to reconcile freedom and facticity informs her subsequent works. Hers is not a wholesale adoption of his views. Her rejection of the “tranquilizing effect” offered by Hegel’s conception of Absolute Spirit and of his flight into the realm of the universal is examined as the foundation for the development of her conceptions of ambiguity and of situated freedom. More specifically, in the discussion of history, interdependence and violence, this chapter examines the development of her conception of responsibility as a forming/framing of the problem of the other’s consciousness in *The Blood of Others*, *All Men Are Mortal*, her essays published from 1944 to 1947, including *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* and *The Ethics of Ambiguity*.

Chapter Five of this study turns attention towards Beauvoir’s mature works and towards her attempt to resolve the problem of the other’s consciousness. “Reciprocity,” begins with an investigation of her return to Hegel’s *Phenomenology* in 1947, and considers the ways in which her writings from this time period offer up an alternative to the two accounts of Hegel’s dialectic prevalent at this time; namely, that offered by Kojève in his *Introduction to The Reading of Hegel: Lecture on the Phenomenology of Spirit* (1947) and by Hyppolite in his *Genesis and Structure of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit* (1946). Placing *The Second Sex* in relation to these texts, that is, providing it with a place in the Hegel Renaissance in France at this time, offers an opportunity to consider the ways in which Beauvoir’s study of women shadows the *Phenomenology* in both its structure and its form. Focusing on her accounts of the experiences of love, friendship and generosity

as enactments of this reading, a careful reading of *The Mandarins*, the work in which Beauvoir believed she best accounted for both the problem of the other's consciousness and of the possibility and potential for mutual recognition, is offered. In this later work, Beauvoir's use of and reference to literature provides a means for exploring her final return to the ideas explored in Hegel's *Phenomenology*.

In Beauvoir's late works, her works dating from 1958 – 1986 including her four-part autobiography, in her final work of fiction, *The Woman Destroyed*, and in her last extensive study, *Old Age*, Beauvoir turns once more to considerations of the problem of the other's consciousness. Her increasing interest in exploring the economic and social conditions that frame the problem challenges her faith that self and other can be reconciled in experiences of love, friendship and generosity, leading her to return once more to Hegel's text. Directly in her autobiographies and indirectly in her novels and studies dating from late 1950s through to the end of her life, she retraces the development of her account of this problem across her career and reconsiders the possibility of reciprocity not only in but also through her writing. The final chapter of this study, "Recognition," explores her reframing of the problem of the other's consciousness in and through these works and critically explores the solution she finds in her literature itself. That is, it considers whether the very acts of reading and writing provide for the possibility of the kind of recognition she found described in Hegel's work. Beauvoir would think with Hegel, picking up his dialectic and giving it life. And in the process she would discover its limitations and its possibility for resolving the problem of the other's consciousness. However, before turning to her reading and re-reading of Hegel, it is first necessary to turn to the text that would so engage her. It is necessary to turn to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

Chapter 2

Hegel and the *Phenomenology of Spirit*

2.1 Hegel

*“In Hegel I found a tranquillizing influence. Just as at the age of twenty, my heart bleeding because of my cousin Jacques, I read Homer ‘to set all humanity between myself and my private grief’, so now I endeavored to sink this present experience of mine in the ‘trend of world-development. All about me, embalmed in countless thousands of volumes, the past lay sleeping, and the present seemed to me like a past that was yet to come.”*²³

- *Beauvoir*

In claiming that hers was “the problem of the other’s consciousness,” Beauvoir clearly directs her readers to look to the pages of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, to his discussion of the relationship between self and other. Reading her work to see how she appropriates and extends his concepts and ideas developed, it is first necessary to turn to this text itself – to turn to his description of this problem and of his identification of its solution. However, this proves to be no easy task. In his works, Hegel addresses a unique set of social and political issues that frame and inform even his most abstract philosophical reflections. Further, Hegel’s commitment to systematizing, and to the concept of *Geist*, make evident the gap between his philosophical orientation and that approach which would come to prevail in the western philosophical tradition after him. His critique of Enlightenment values and principles, in contrast with the almost wholesale adoption of these approaches in 20th century philosophy, make it difficult to appreciate the complexity of his conceptions of consciousness, recognition and spirit. In particular, his critique of rationalism and individualism in and through the development of these concepts contrasts with contemporary endorsements of these value systems. Anti-foundationalism marks all contemporary philosophies, to a lesser or greater extent, confounding attempts to understand the central ideas in Hegel’s work.

The challenge of identifying, let alone interpreting, Hegel’s account of recognition are compounded when attempts are made by various school of thought to appropriate his work. The

²³ PL 458; FA 472.

desire to read Hegel's work within the framework of some kind of broader ideology is understandable. Hegel's writing is dense and difficult. Finding footholds in the history of philosophy from which to access his ideas thus has its appeal. However, such readings obscure his thought. Read within the parameters German Idealism or through the lens of Marxism, Hegel has little to say about the question of recognition. Read alongside the classics of German Idealism, Hegel's discussion of mutual recognition is subsumed under and within other categories of philosophical reflection. When considered as a response to Kant's ideal of the transcendent ego, for example, an unbridgeable chasm opens between subject and object, rendering it logically impossible to envision any form of reconciliation between the two. Hegel's writings thus serve as a sustained meditation not on inter-subjectivity but on subjectivity alone.²⁴ A similar conclusion is reached when his work is read within the Cartesian tradition. If Hegel is wedded to the model of subjectivity advanced by Descartes, that is, if he begins with a conception of self as a disembodied, self-same ego, he seems unable to avoid solipsism until the problem of other minds is conclusively resolved. Both of these approaches to reading the *Phenomenology*, as a result of presupposing the separation between subject and object and consequently, between self and the world, overlook or neglect Hegel's account of inter-subjectivity – of the self as reflexively constructed and dependent upon the other. Finally, readings of this work grounded in Marxist principles such as those offered up by Sartre and Kojève, abbreviate Hegel's discussion of recognition to his description of the master-slave dialectic. Read in this manner, there exists the possibility for inter-subjectivity. However, it is always only a possibility. Self and other are engaged in an ongoing "battle to the death." Hence, this reading of Hegel presupposes that between subject and object there cannot be love, friendship and generosity but only conflict and hostility.

An examination of the text itself makes evident that Hegel's account is at once more complex and more encouraging of variation and change, within and across time, than any of these approaches

²⁴ See Williams, 1992, 1-4.

or, perhaps more accurately, these appropriations of his work make evident. These readings ignore his interest in identifying and describing a range of venues in which recognition – whether unequal or equal, whether hostile or hospitable – is experienced and enacted. That is, they extract moments or stages from within the dialectic and treat them as if they embodied the whole of this history, of this phenomenology of consciousness. What is brought to light, when Hegel’s work is explored outside such ideological framework, is his preoccupation with developing a solution to the problem of the other’s consciousness at both the theoretical and practical level. His study of the problem of recognition can be traced across his works – beginning with his discussion of love and life in the Jena manuscripts²⁵ through the writing of the *Phenomenology* to his presentation of his system in the *Logic*. Yet, despite his interest in this problem, in no single text does he offer up a full account of inter-subjectivity. Instead, his analysis of this concept is fragmented, woven into his discussion of perception, his consideration of religion and his inquiry into the nature of idea. Why adopt this approach? It would be difficult to argue that this was an oversight on the part of Hegel, the last great systematizer in philosophy. An explanation perhaps can be developed from reflecting on not only the subject matter of his work but also his method of investigation.

Reading Hegel, it is necessary to consider the form in which he writes as carefully as his content for his account of the dialectic is to be discovered as much in and through his works, as it is to be discovered in his conclusions. Hegel is not imposing his account of the dialectic upon the history of consciousness in his writings, as is often considered to be the case, but rather he is bearing witness to its workings. It is not used in order to make evident the movement of consciousness toward recognition but rather the dialectic is evidenced or revealed through his description of this history. This is a phenomenology. That is, the dialectic was not his methodological presupposition but rather was his philosophical discovery. This is a subtle yet significant difference that will prove to be

²⁵ See in particular Hegel’s *The Difference Between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy*.

important with regard to his understanding of the problem of the other and subsequently for his consideration of the possibility of recognition.

What then can be said of Hegel's weaving of his account of inter-subjectivity into his epistemology, metaphysics, theology and politics? It seems clear that the manner in which he broaches his subject matter mirrors his claim that consciousness is always already embedded in relations with others – that it is always already embodied and situated, in the midst of experience. Enacting and not just describing his philosophy, he does not separate his account of the relation between self and other from discussions of ethics or of aesthetics or of epistemology. Instead, he intertwines the two subject matters demonstrating how each provides for the other. Discussions of self and other frame or provide the conditions for the possibility of the fields of inquiry he explores both the consequences and the outcomes of those investigations. As such, questions concerning the possibility of mutual recognition are not separable from considerations of the politics of the French Revolution²⁶ or the tragedy of Antigone.²⁷

Hegel's discussion of self-consciousness and of the relationship between self-consciousnesses would come to have a particular hold over Beauvoir's thinking and as such deserves careful explication. Therein she finds an argument, or perhaps more accurately, a description, that would frame her consideration of the problem of the other's consciousness, leading her to explore new venues and dimensions in which it is enacted, to consider possible resolutions and eventually to arrive at a conclusion. However, before turning to her reading of this passage, it is necessary to situate this section of the text within the context of the *Phenomenology* as a whole.

²⁶ PS § 594, 361. For more on Hegel and the French Revolution, see Comay, 2011.

²⁷ PS § 437, 261; PS § 457, 274-275. For more on Hegel's reading of *Antigone*, see Butler, 2000.

2.2 The *Phenomenology*

*“The goal is Spirit’s insight into what knowing is. Impatience demands the impossible, to wit, the attainment of the end without the means. But the length of this path has to be endured, because, for one thing, each moment is necessary; and further, each moment has to be lingered over, because each is itself a complete individual shape.”*²⁸

- Hegel

Charles Taylor, describing the *Phenomenology* summarizes its project, noting how it,

Intends to start with our ordinary consciousness of things and to take us from there to the true perspective of *Geist*. The work is called a ‘phenomenology’ because it deals with the way things appear for consciousness, or with forms of consciousness. But ‘appearance’ here does not contrast with ‘reality’; what is most real, the absolute, is essentially self-appearance. Phenomenology is not a science of lesser things, which can be left behind, but one way of acceding to Absolute Knowledge, of making the absolute ‘apparent.’²⁹

Three aspects of this brief but insightful overview warrant emphasis. First, herein Taylor plots the trajectory that Hegel’s investigations of consciousness will follow, from simple consciousness – or perception – through to *Geist* or Absolute Knowledge. Hegel in this text traces this movement of the dialectic along four “strands” or “threads” of experience: consciousness, self-consciousness, reason and spirit. While assuming nothing concluded at any previous stage, while beginning in each “venue” once more with the most basic of experiences of consciousness,³⁰ each of the various strands intersect and intertwine, each building upon the other – both cancelling and preserving what came before, such that affirmation becomes inseparable from negation.³¹ Moreover, the movement within any one strand is mirrored in the movement at a similar stage in each of the other strands. Hence, the distinction made between sense-certainty, perception and understanding in the discussion of consciousness, parallels that made in the discussion of self-consciousness between stoicism,

²⁸ PS § 29, 17.

²⁹ Taylor, 1996, 128.

³⁰ Taylor, 1980, 139.

³¹ Ibid, 21.

skepticism and the unhappy consciousness. And the unfolding of both of these threads mirrors the trajectory taken by spirit as it works its way, more generally, through the stages of consciousness, self-consciousness and reason on its way towards Absolute Knowledge. The architecture of Hegel's argument, developed through the parallels that he constructs and unfolds time and time again, proves to be an ingenious strategy used to demonstrate both the distinct nature of each of these realms of experience and their overlapping and interdependence.

Taylor further acknowledges in this passage, Hegel's commitment to study the world as it appears. While Hegel's language is abstract, his ideas were always intended to be grounded in and to return to the world as it is experienced -- to the realm of lived experience. This provides an important corrective to the reading of this text. Hegel must be read as offering up a description of the movement of the dialect, not offering a prescription of how history can best be read. This is a second key point made evident in this description of the *Phenomenology*.

Finally, while the grounding of his ideas in the realm of experience leads Hegel to focus on particulars, it does not limit him in this regard. Particulars should not be taken as ends in themselves but rather should be regarded as providing the means or mediums through which the universal is made accessible. The particular draws forward toward the universal in and through the various stages of the dialectic just as consciousness draws forward towards Absolute Spirit across the text as a whole. There is a complex interplay for Hegel between these two realms of experience. As will be made evident, the enmeshing of the two reflects and is reflected in the intertwining of the relationship between self and other, between being-in-itself and being-for-others. Drawing attention to the unfolding of the dialectic, the focus on lived experience and the emphasis on the particular universal helps to situate or, perhaps better yet, helps to orient the reader to the *Phenomenology*.

Within the structure of the text, recognition is spoken of three times – in the account of self-consciousness, again in the discussion of reason and finally, in the account of Spirit. Each of these

moments mirrors and reframes subsequent moments. The movement in and from perception to sense certainty is replicated as the movement of consciousness to self-consciousness. Seeking refuge first in what is particular (being-in-itself) and then in what is universal (being-for-others), consciousness follows this motion across the moments in the dialectic. It is repeated at the level of Reason and then again at the level of Spirit.³² That is, the same pattern is replicated within each strand just as it is repeated across moments. Hence while in Self-Consciousness the self seeks to deny its universality, within Reason it is embraced at the expense of the particular until the two parts are reconciled and mutual recognition becomes possible at the level of Spirit.

It is to the discussion of recognition in relation to the development of self-consciousness that this present study must turn in particular. While for Hegel recognition is achieved in the manifestation of *Geist*, for Beauvoir discussions of such universals are precluded. The individual, she argues, “is free to define his own conditions.”³³ Having no essential qualities and being part of no necessary historical movement, he is not subject to the historic development of *Geist*. Hence, the conditions for the possibility of mutual recognition as outlined by Hegel, cannot be met within the logic of her argument. What Beauvoir seeks to do in and through her readings of the *Phenomenology* is to extract the history of consciousness from its metaphysical groundings and replant it within the framework of her version of existentialism. In so doing she focuses her attention on the section on self-consciousness. Therein Hegel outlines the movement of the dialectic as consciousness first encounters an other that is subject³⁴ and goes on to explore how this movement that is at first in the world comes to be centered in the self³⁵ and he anticipates within this framework the possibility of recognition.³⁶ Whether Hegel’s account can be unmoored from discussions of *Geist*, that is, whether it is achievable

³² For a further discussion of recognition at these levels of experience see Jurist 200.

³³ EA 15, PMA 21.

³⁴ PS § 167, 105.

³⁵ PS § 197, 119.

³⁶ PS § 177, 110; PS § 184, 112.

without the absolutes to which he subscribes, is a question that will be addressed in subsequent chapters in exploring Beauvoir's reading and re-reading of Hegel.

To help navigate this key section in the *Phenomenology*, it is helpful to employ the account of the three distinct moments, or stages in this history of recognition outlined by Williams. He traces the movement of spirit from absolute consciousness, that is from the belief in and search for "abstract parochial universality" (solipsism) through the opposition of particulars (conflict and hostility as evidenced in the master – slave dialectic), to the development of an emergent concrete universality (recognition).³⁷ At each new stage, previous moments in the unfolding dialectic are not negated but rather remain evident, lingering, framing the subsequent pursuits. They are not denied or subsumed but rather are sublimated. This dialectic, this pathway from consciousness through to mutual recognition, it will be argued throughout this present study, that Beauvoir retraces in and across her writings. Hence before turning to her works, consideration must be made of Hegel's description of these stages and to the catalysts that initiate the transitions between them.

2.3 First Moment: Consciousness

*"The knowledge or knowing which is at the start or is immediately our object cannot be anything else but immediate knowledge itself, a knowledge of the immediate or of what simply is. Our approach to the object must also be immediate or receptive; we must alter nothing in the object as it presents itself. In apprehending it, we must refrain from trying to comprehend it."*³⁸

- Hegel

Hegel maintains that consciousness initially is oriented solely towards objects.³⁹ It senses objects in the world and what it sees it regards as real and true. The self, when encountering the other, when encountering something that at first appears foreign, appropriates, subsumes, consumes or annihilates this object. There can be only one consciousness and as such all else that it encounters must be seen or transformed into an extension of the self. There is no other, as such, only the self and its object.

³⁷ Williams, 2003, 66-69.

³⁸ PS § 90, 60.

³⁹ PS § 166, 104.

The self, whose boundaries were momentarily challenged, reunites with itself and once more “I is I.”⁴⁰ Once more the self is pure being⁴¹ as consciousness presumes itself once more to be absolute and universal.⁴²

As pure receptivity, consciousness thus is capable of *sense certainty*. In experiencing the world, before words, before theories, before anything beyond the moment, there is a richness that, as consciousness moves through the other moments of the dialectic, it will never again experience. It knows the world and itself only as pure sensation. The fullness of the moment with all its particularities can only be sensed – sensed by a consciousness that alone in the world, sees, hears, feels and understands what it is that is being sensed. The self senses, that is, it immediately apprehends, objects in the world and knows them only as they are presented.⁴³ With no alternative standpoint from which to view or consider the world, it has a kind of certainty or assurance about the accuracy of its knowledge in the moment of perception.

While at first this seems to be the most true and certain knowledge possible, in fact it is, as Hegel notes, the “most abstract and poorest truth.”⁴⁴ For, while, consciousness grasps both the richness and the particularity of the moment, in the very next moment, the next second, it disappears. The experience cannot be judged true or false, it cannot be reflected on or considered. For at this stage there is only a stream of consciousness, as it were, an endless, unreflective series of sensations. Hence sense certainty is not the richest form of consciousness but the poorest as its lack of selectivity results in the experience being empty.⁴⁵ To be grasped, experience must be mediated.

⁴⁰ PS § 91, 58.

⁴¹ PS § 99, 61.

⁴² PS § 90, 58.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Hegel’s recognition herein of the need for selectivity and of the fleeting nature of the particular will be themes to which he will return throughout the *Phenomenology*.

Sense-certainty gives way to perception, however, as consciousness comes to recognize that there is more to the objects in the world than it directly experiences. As Hegel describes it in *The Phenomenology of Mind*,

“The content of sensory consciousness is in its own self-dialectical. The Content is supposed to be *the* individual; but by this very fact it is not an individual but every individual and just by *excluding* from itself the other, *the* individual content relates to another, shows that *it goes beyond itself*, that it is dependent on another, is mediated by it and has another within itself. The proximate truth of the *immediately individual* is therefore its *relatedness* to another. The determinations of this relation are what are called *determinations of reflection*, and the consciousness apprehending these determinations is *perception*.”⁴⁶

The move from sense certainty to perception is the move from immediacy and the universality of certainty to the recognition of positionality and the acknowledgement that there is more in and to the objects sensed than is known. There is something in and of the object that escapes the individual’s knowing it for certain. It is as such the first acknowledgement of both the other within and the other outside of the self, a moment key in the later development of recognition when this same pattern of understanding is repeated at the level of self-consciousness.

In perceiving the world there is more than just an immediate awareness of objects in the world. Concepts are now developed to describe the properties of objects. The moment is frozen, as it were, and can be reflected upon, it can be given meaning. However, when experience is described rather than lived, the richness of the moment disappears. When saying what it was that was once lived, only one dimension of the experience can be brought in focus, one dimension to the exclusion of all others.⁴⁷ Moreover, Hegel maintains that these descriptions encompass what is seen in common or would have been seen in common with other things. That is, objects take on a kind of universality

⁴⁶ Hegel, PM § 419, 149.

⁴⁷ PS §110, 66.

via language.⁴⁸ Hence in transforming experience into words, moving from sense certainty to perception, there is the loss of particularities in favour of shared and accessible commonalities.

Words fail to capture the experience in its totality no matter how carefully they are selected or how many are chosen. There is the experience itself and there is the perception of the thing and the two cannot be the same.⁴⁹ Hence it is at one and the same time other and not other.⁵⁰ It is not therefore a single unity but rather has an element belonging the realm of the sensuous and an element that is universal. An opposition thus marks perception,⁵¹ an opposition that can be identified but cannot be reconciled. This opens the possibility not only for considerations of the truth of the experience but also for deception. For there exists now the possibility that things are always otherwise than they are described.

In its turn, perception gives way to understanding.⁵² In perceiving the world, consciousness comes to recognize that things may be other than they are described. And with an increasing awareness, it comes to recognize, more broadly, that there is more to any experience, to any object encountered than what can be apprehended. With this recognition, it comes to experience objects at one and the same time as other and not other. That is, it comes to recognize an opposition that lies at that heart of encounters with objects.

At the stage of *understanding* via the development of the notion of Force,⁵³ Hegel discovers a means by which the opposition is reconciled. There is no opposition at all he argues but rather there is “purely for itself, a pure self identical essence that has no difference in it.”⁵⁴ That is, it attempts to see the object as ‘self-identical,’ thus reconciling the singular individuality of apprehension with the

⁴⁸ PS §117, 70-71.

⁴⁹ PS §124, 75.

⁵⁰ PS §135, 81; PS §162, 100.

⁵¹ PS §129, 77.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ PS §136, 81.

⁵⁴ PS §162, 100.

universality evident via perception. The object is subsumed by the self, it is the self and as such all opposition, all otherness, is negated. As Butler notes, “Force is that which impels an inner reality to gain determinate form, but it is also that which frustrates the absorption of that inner reality into determinate form. In other words, Force sustains a tension between that which appears and that which does not appear.”⁵⁵

2.4 From Consciousness to Self-Consciousness

“Consciousness, as self-consciousness, henceforth has a double object: one is the immediate object, that of sense certainty and perception, which however for self-consciousness has the character of a negative; and the second, viz. itself, which is the true essence and is present in the first instance only as opposed to the first object.”⁵⁶

- Hegel

It is at this point that the kind of natural or practical solipsism that marks this first stage of the dialectic gives way with time and repetition. Consciousness encounters that which it cannot supersede.⁵⁷ Moreover, recognizing the endless nature of desire, consciousness is led to the realization that there are those things in the world which are wholly other to itself. That is, it becomes aware of the objects that it posits as nothingnesses but which maintain or gain a kind of independence nonetheless.⁵⁸ The object is not an “object,” or perhaps more accurately, it is not only or solely an object. This conditions a shift in the self’s understanding of itself. If the other is object and subject, then the self too can have these two qualities. The self comes to see itself not as an absolute but as a particular. Moreover, it is a particular that encounters or, perhaps better yet, is countered by another particular. The independence and universality of the self is undermined and the self finds itself at risk. And in need of risking itself, of risking its very life in order to re-establish its mastery not just over its

⁵⁵ Butler, 1999, 26.

⁵⁶ PS § 167, 105

⁵⁷ PS § 175, 109.

⁵⁸ PS § 176, 110.

world but also over its own self. Divided within its self and from the objects it encounters, consciousness transforms into self-consciousness.

Moving beyond the realm of consciousness into the realm of self-consciousness, what has been negated is not left behind but rather becomes the subject matter of the next moment of the dialectic. As Douzinas notes, in the history of consciousness, “Each of its concentric stages, a force or institution and its underlying principle is ‘sublated,’ both negated and retained by its opponent.”⁵⁹ This means that the possibility of viewing the self as the only object in the world is never truly overcome but rather remains ever present. However, what arises with the development of self-consciousness is the existence of not one but of two objects: “one is the immediate object, that of sense-certainty and perception, which however for self-consciousness has the character of a negative; and the second, viz. Itself, which is the true essence and is present in the first instance only as opposed to the first object.”⁶⁰ Self-consciousness develops with the awareness of the self or of the “I,” as something that is different from, even radically opposed to the rest of the world or the “non-I.” To be self-conscious is to be a subject reflecting on oneself as an object.”⁶¹ It is to take the self as an object for consciousness.⁶² This development brings with it the possibility of self-transformation or self-creation. But it also brings with it the possibility of hostility. In order to see why this is the case, it is necessary to consider the means by which and through which self-consciousness develops.

Awareness of what it lacks gives rise to the desire in self-consciousness to obtain that which it is not. Self-consciousness wants to resolve the disparity it finds between itself and others in the world and seeks the means for accomplishing this goal. Needing to restore its identity, it first seeks to achieve this goal through the elimination of the other. But the object escapes it – its independence is

⁵⁹ Douzinas, 2002, 381.

⁶⁰ PS §167, 105.

⁶¹ Drury, 1991, 18.

⁶² PS §163, 101.

not so readily or easily refuted or refused or disregarded. That is, it is an “other” that is transcendent to consciousness, that cannot be reduced to, absorbed within or annihilated by, the self. It is not a reflection or extension of the self but is different and distinct from it, equally independent and self-contained.⁶³ This other eludes the self as it seeks to make it for-itself.⁶⁴ Hence, satisfaction of desire is denied.

Frustrated by its pursuit, by these attempts, yet unwilling to settle into dissatisfaction, the object of desire is converted. A new object is uncovered. Thus it is that desire is not static but rather in and through the unfolding of time and in and through its search for satisfaction and discovery of its opposite, it is transformed. Hence it is through the continual “sublimation of desire”⁶⁵ that the history of consciousness unfolds. Indeed, self-consciousness, Hegel tells us “is desire.”⁶⁶ The recognition of what it lacks, of its difference, defines its very being. As Butler notes, “desires signifies the reflexivity of consciousness, the necessity that it becomes other to itself in order to know itself.”⁶⁷ Desire, she concludes, “is always desire for something other which, in turn is always desire for a more expanded version of the subject.”⁶⁸

Desire, no longer aimed at an object in the world, now turns unto or onto itself. Desire becomes a desire for itself; it becomes a desire to be desired. Durhssen perhaps best captures Hegel’s point here, characterizing this as the desire of self-consciousness

... to impose his notion of himself upon another. To desire the desire of another is to exact recognition of what I am in my own eyes, so that my subjective certitude of my own value becomes

⁶³ PS §182, 112.

⁶⁴ Williams 1992, 172.

⁶⁵ Williams, 2003, 64.

⁶⁶ PS §167, 105.

⁶⁷ Butler, 1999, 7.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 34.

objective truth, that is to say, it is recognized by another and, at the limit, by all the others.⁶⁹

There is a new necessity that attaches itself to the securing of subjectivity, at this stage of the dialectic. There are new risks at hand. Each consciousness wants to make the other into its object. As such, each seeks the death of the other.⁷⁰ What ensues is a battle as desire meets desire, a battle for “their certainty of being for themselves to truth, both in the case of the other and in their own case.”⁷¹ Thus it is that the self enters into “a life and death struggle.”⁷² Seeking to re-establish its universality, to be recognized and affirmed as a self in its own eyes as much as in the eyes of the other, each consciousness enters into a struggle seeking the subservience of its opponent. In calling forth the need to risk everything, to risk even life itself in this pursuit, master and slave are established.

2.5 The Second Moment: The Master-Slave Dialectic

“the relation of the two self-conscious individuals is such that they prove themselves and each other through a life-and-death struggle. They must engage in this struggle, for they must raise their certainty of being for themselves to truth, both in the case of the other and in their own case.”⁷³

- **Hegel**

With the world now splintered, with the self now fragmented, what ensues in the remainder of the *Phenomenology* is the attempt to reconcile what heretofore has not been divided but which simultaneously has never been so united. For in the division of the world into self and other, into masters and slaves, the two sides are as much dependent upon each other as they are opposed, though their interdependence is shrouded by what appears, upon first reading, to be an overwhelming, unresolvable hostility between them.

⁶⁹ Durhssen, 1953, 335.

⁷⁰ PS §187, 113.

⁷¹ PS §187, 114.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ PS § 187, 113 -114.

Forced to recognize the existence of others in the world, others who wish to maintain self-certainty and dominance, the self is forced to recognize its own tenuous hold on its mastery. If the other is as eager to render him object, as he is to render the other to this status, the self is always already at risk.⁷⁴ Thus it must employ all means and strategies necessary to maintain its own status. There cannot be two selves in the world, not from within this worldview. Each seeks to cancel the other as a means of preserving its original certainty and identity.⁷⁵

So it is that the two enter into a battle to the death – a battle that will see only one sustain its subjectivity while the other will be objectified and relegated to the level of ‘thing’ or ‘slave.’ Terrified by this prospect the self is willing to risk anything, to risk everything. Indeed, it is willing to risk life itself. In this confrontation between selves striving to maintain their subjectivity and hence their supremacy over the world, Hegel argues one party will back down. One party will acknowledge the difference between risking life and risking the conditions for the possibility of life. In the moment of this recognition, and in the decision to preserve the conditions for the possibility of consciousness, the division between lord and bondsman, between master and slave is created.⁷⁶

It is important to note that this battle is won at the level of ontology long before it manifests itself in the social realm. Mastery and slavery first describes a mentality, or, perhaps more accurately a form of being. The master is deemed “free”⁷⁷ and “independent.”⁷⁸ He is recognized without recognizing others.⁷⁹ The slave, on the other hand, is determined or posited. These descriptive qualities when enacted take on normative association. The master comes to see and be seen as

⁷⁴ PS §186, 113.

⁷⁵ Williams, 2003, 71.

⁷⁶ PS §189, 115.

⁷⁷ PS §190, 115.

⁷⁸ PS §186, 113.

⁷⁹ PS §185, 113.

“essential”⁸⁰ and “pure”⁸¹ while the slave is “inessential”⁸² and “impure.”⁸³ It is only once this ontological distinction has been established and instilled that the slave can be objectified and subjugated in not just thought but in action. He becomes slave not just in theory but slave in the social and political realms.

Yet the paradox of this stage of consciousness is that if either one were to succeed, if one were to annihilate the other, the possibility for recognition would be eliminated. The desire of the subject to be acknowledged as free can only be provided by the other. For Hegel "Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness."⁸⁴ Alone in the world, it can be neither subject nor object. The self needs the other to confer its status.⁸⁵ Thus the battle to death is transformed into a battle for supremacy.

It is necessary to reiterate this point. It is not death that is the goal of this struggle. Death is the negation of consciousness⁸⁶ and thus the negation of the prospect for recognition. The battle must remain in play without ever coming to its stated end for, if either dies, so too does the possibility for recognition that initiated the conflict. Recall that for Hegel, “self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness.”⁸⁷ What is necessary is not death but subservience. What is necessary is that one of the two, fearing death and thus being unable to detach himself from his body, willingly subjects himself to the other. Rather than death, it is servitude that the master seeks

⁸⁰ PS §191, 116.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² PS §186, 113.

⁸³ PS §191, 116.

⁸⁴ PS §175, 110.

⁸⁵ PS §178, 111.

⁸⁶ PS §188, 114.

⁸⁷ PS §175, 110.

for the point of struggle is not to end life but to secure recognition and achieve, “inter-subjective legitimization of certainty.”⁸⁸

However, this desire too is confounded. For even after having created a world divided into subjects and objects, the master finds that his fulfillment is denied. An object can recognize nothing. As Hegel makes clear “Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that it so exists for another: that is, it exists only in being recognized.”⁸⁹ In relegating the slave to the level of object, the master has taken away the condition for the possibility of achieving his own goal. The slave cannot give recognition for recognition must be freely bestowed.

Recognition requires both parties to acknowledge their interdependence and to grant to the other what is wished for --- the status of a self. It cannot be forced or coerced for then it is no longer recognition but rather is obedience. The slave is not an independent consciousness but a dependent one.⁹⁰ Within the logic of the master-slave dialectic, recognition is only ever one-sided and unequal. While the master denies his immanence, the slave takes refuge therein. What results is not recognition at all. For if the slave is inessential, so too is any kind of recognition he may bestow.⁹¹ Hence, the affirmation the master seeks eludes him.

Moreover, as he does not work but only consumes, the master lacks the ability to escape this situation – to transform the world or to transform his self. Indeed, what the master does to the other, he does to himself.⁹² Rather than establishing the conditions for the possibility of independence, the master has in fact instituted the conditions that lead him to be dependent upon the slave for, interposing the other between himself and the world and thus coming to consume but not to produce, he becomes reliant upon the slave. He becomes the slave to a slave. As noted by Evans,

⁸⁸ Williams, 2003, 71.

⁸⁹ PS §178, 111.

⁹⁰ PS §192, 117.

⁹¹ Williams, 1992, 176.

⁹² PS §191, 116.

. . . the master gains the truth of sense certainty only through the recognition of himself in the consciousness of the slave. In this respect, the dialectic as a metaphor for inter-subjective relationships is not simply a relation between self and other: it is also a relation of self to self. The master and slave are part of the same consciousness. The other does not determine me in my being or “know” me as much as s/he permits me to “know” myself.⁹³

The master comes to see through the slave that while he may have won the battle, he has lost in the realm of history. It is the slave, not the master, who holds the possibility for transcending this moment of the dialectic. It is the slave who will propel history forward.

As mediator between the realm of nature and the master, the slave, while being considered an object, nonetheless is capable of producing. Thus he is capable of developing awareness of his dual nature. As Merleau-Ponty notes,

The slave through labour becomes capable of seeing him/her self as both object and subject at one and the same time. The slave has been truly afraid, has given up trying to conquer by the sword, and he is the only one with experience of death because he alone has known the love of life. The master wants to exist for no one but himself, but in fact he seeks recognition of his mastery from someone and so is weak in his strength. The slave consents to exist only for others, but nevertheless it is he who chooses to go on living on these terms, and he therefore has strength in his weakness . . . His life is more frankly rooted in the world than is the master's which is precisely why he knows better than the master what death means.⁹⁴

The slave acts in the world, and in so doing, through working, he negates the given and transforms the world. When he reflects on this ability, his capacity to be a subject is affirmed. That is, he recognizes in the moment of creation that he is at one and the same time both slave and master, both object and subject. He discovers that the distinction he has been drawing in the world, the distinction between self and other, is, in fact, a distinction that exists within him. He becomes conscious of what it is

⁹³ Evans, 2009, 103.

⁹⁴ Merleau-Ponty, 1964, 68-69.

truly.⁹⁵ This recognition is not without its effect. If he is able to transform objects in the world, he too can transform the object that he has himself become. Labour, while being a form of subjugation, at one and the same time provides the condition for the possibility of the slave's liberation.

It is important to note that the slave is not automatically liberated through his labour. Work alone is not enough. The slave must also conquer himself, to conquer his fear. It is fear that subjugates the slave to the master.⁹⁶ In the battle to the death, the slave, fearing death more than the loss of freedom, that is, fearing death more than the loss of desire, submits to the master. It is not the master's threats, nor the labour he undertakes on the master's behalf that transforms a subject into a slave. It is the slave that makes himself a slave for he embraces this role, and subjects himself to the master. For while the master-slave dialectic does not offer an equitable form of recognition, it is nonetheless an improvement over the raw desire and unbridled violence experienced at the stage of solipsism. Violence is institutionalized and thus restrained.⁹⁷ It is the liberation from fear that is the appeal of slavery. Once the slave defines himself as "inessential," "impure" and "object," when his ontological transformation from subject to object is complete, his servitude begins.

It is only the slave that makes himself a slave, and it is only the slave that can thus liberate himself. The slave is his own subjugator but this means he is also his own liberator. In having transformed the world despite his subjugation, the slave has attained the conditions for the possibility to liberate himself from his fear. However this liberation will not easily be achieved nor will its success be guaranteed. There remain further moments in the dialectic yet to be lived.

⁹⁵ PS §195, 118.

⁹⁶ PS §196, 118 - 119.

⁹⁷ Williams, 2003, 75.

2.6 Transition: From Self-Consciousness to Recognition

“Every subject plays his part as such specifically through exploits or projects that serve as a mode of transcendence; he achieves liberty only through a continual reaching out toward other liberties”⁹⁸

- *Beauvoir*

What is often overlooked, perhaps because of the compelling nature of the drama offered by the master-slave dialectic, or perhaps because of its ease, is that the conflict between lord and bondsman is only a moment in the dialectic, not the conclusion or the whole of the *Phenomenology*. Like all other moments in the history of consciousness, it contains the foundation for its own overcoming.⁹⁹ The relation of mastery and slavery is inherently unstable. Neither gains what he desires. The master is shown to be the true slave and the slave is revealed to have the potential for true mastery. Moreover, as the slave makes himself a slave, that is, as the slave defines himself rather than being defined, hostility need not dictate his relations with others. Herein lies the foundation for something more than hostility to develop between self-consciousnesses. Herein lies the foundation for mutual recognition.

But this transformation will occur neither quickly nor without hesitation. Stoicism, skepticism, and unhappy consciousness – the subsequent stages of the dialectic – are strategies that the slave develops as he tries to reconcile “the subjective feeling of freedom and the objective fact of slavery.”¹⁰⁰ Mirroring the transition from sense certainty and perception to understanding, in this section of the *Phenomenology* Hegel shows how self-consciousness negotiates its duality, how it moves as such from solipsism – from belief in the self as the only, and the necessary subject –

⁹⁸ TSS1 xl, DS1 30.

⁹⁹ This is a moment, but only a single moment in the whole of the dialectic, a fact often overlooked by commentators who read this passage – clearly the most examined passage of the *Phenomenology* – as though it were the whole of this text. To extract the discussion of the master slave dialectic from the context of the broader discussion of the development of self-consciousness in this manner, however, is to fail to understand Hegel’s project. It is to stall the dialectic at the stage of unequal recognition and never be able to consider the possibility of mutual recognition.

¹⁰⁰ Drury, 1991, 30.

towards some form of recognition of the complexity of itself and the other, towards the possibility of friendship, generosity and love.

Recall that through labour, the slave is forced to recognize the independence of objects. Yet, he knows himself, at the same time, to be a freedom. To reconcile these seemingly contradictory traits, self-consciousness at the moment of stoicism, turns itself inward to find a resolution. The stoic withdraws and redefines the world as simply the object of thought.¹⁰¹ He develops an inner life, an inner-world and in so doing develops the capacity to think. And it is here that he locates and enacts his freedom. Limited in action and in thought the slave's autonomy is granted full reign.

This retreat towards inner self-identity fails, however, for the slave is an embodied subject whose freedom must be externally expressed. Conceiving of himself as the “pure universality of thought”¹⁰² necessitates his denial of his lived experience, of his own objectivity. As Hegel describes it, while self-consciousness “takes itself . . . to be a single and separate, contingent and, in fact, animal life, and a lost self-consciousness, it also on the contrary, converts itself again into a consciousness that is universal and self-identical; for it is the negativity of all singularity and all difference.”¹⁰³ As he goes on to note, “at one time it recognizes that its freedom lies in rising above all the confusion and contingency of existence, and at another time equally admits to a relapse into occupying itself with what is unessential.”¹⁰⁴

Skepticism arises from this recognition that self-consciousness is divided.¹⁰⁵ The skeptic lives this conflict, unable to acknowledge itself both as unity and as difference, unable to find a resolution to the question of its own identity. Neither subject or object, neither master or slave, neither self or other, he oscillates back and forth between these alternatives, succumbing to what Hegel characterizes

¹⁰¹ Taylor, 1996, 159.

¹⁰² PS §199, 121.

¹⁰³ PS §205, 125.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ PS §206, 126.

as “unsettled thinking.”¹⁰⁶ More accurately, the skeptic is unable to decide on his nature. It is only when self-consciousness stops seeking such a solution, stops attempting to deny its own contradictory nature by reducing the whole to one of its parts, that skepticism is transcended.

2.7 The Third Moment: Recognition

“What still lies ahead for consciousness is the experience of what Spirit is – this absolute substance which is the unity of the different independent self-consciousnesses which, in their opposition, enjoy perfect freedom and independence: ‘I’ that is ‘We’ and ‘we’ that is ‘I.’ It is in self-consciousness, in the Notion of Spirit, that consciousness first finds its turning-point”¹⁰⁷
- Hegel

The unhappy consciousness results from the unity of pure thinking and individuality in a being that is aware of itself as such. Simultaneously mutable and immutable, alike and not alike, consciousness no longer aims to reduce itself to one of its parts but rather recognizes itself as “a dual-natured, merely contradictory being.”¹⁰⁸ That is, it recognizes itself as and in “ceaseless movement.”¹⁰⁹ Heretofore, as noted by Jurist, self-consciousness has attempted to grab “hold of one part of the self at the expense of the other.”¹¹⁰ But unhappy consciousness recognizes its own duality – that is, it acknowledges its being both being-for-itself and being-for-other. Herein lies the possibility of mutual recognition, in this acknowledgement, made by the unhappy consciousness of the interdependence of self and other, in the recognition of this duality not only in the world but also in the self, and in the granting of this same duality and the same possibilities it affords, to the other. As noted by O’Neill, there is an intra-subjective division and an inter-subjective exchange.¹¹¹

In this moment, as Siep describes it,

Two self-consciousnesses do not relate to each other like mere things that have an effect on each other, or like forces that interact with

¹⁰⁶ PS §216, 130.

¹⁰⁷ PS § 177, 110.

¹⁰⁸ PS §206, 126.

¹⁰⁹ PS §216, 130.

¹¹⁰ Jurist, 2000, 158.

¹¹¹ O’Neill, 1996, 2.

each other. The reciprocal relation between two self-consciousnesses transcends those, because for each the other is a moment in its own self relation . . . neither can alter itself without co-altering the other insofar as it stands in relation to it . . . Recognition, as a double-signifying act of two self-consciousnesses, is a relation in which the *relata* relate to themselves through the relation to the other, and relate to the other through their own self-relation. Thus the self's relation to itself is made possible by the corresponding relation to the other.¹¹²

There is the unfolding of the self through its distinction from and simultaneous identification with, the other. Recognition is thus premised on self-mediation through the other, through another, who both confirms and transforms self-understanding.¹¹³ This conditions a radical re-conception of the self and the other.

Taylor notes that, "Authentic subjectivity emerges through the activity of self-relation in which the subject externalizes or expresses itself in determinate thoughts and deeds, and then reconnects itself with otherness by re-appropriating difference as its own self-objectification."¹¹⁴ The other comes to reside within the subject, it is constitutive of its own being. Consciousness thus is not foreign, but rather 'consciousness of another of an object in general, is in fact necessarily self-consciousness reflected in itself. Consciousness of oneself in one's other.'¹¹⁵ Here is the realization of being-in-itself in another. That is, each subject becomes itself through relation to the other. The self "discovers itself only in and through the recognition of others,"¹¹⁶ and thus is "dependent ontologically or factually on something other: we are at the mercy of a foreign reality."¹¹⁷

Key, herein, is the realization that

Recognition, unlike desire, does not essentially involve a reduction of the other to the same. *Anerkennung* involves a search for

¹¹² Siep as quoted in Williams, 2003, 65.

¹¹³ Williams, 2003, 66.

¹¹⁴ Taylor, 1987, 19.

¹¹⁵ Taylor, 1996, 153.

¹¹⁶ Williams, 1992, 146.

¹¹⁷ Taylor, 1996, 149.

satisfaction in the un-coerced recognition of the other . . . this does not occur through the elimination of the other but through membership or partnership with the other.¹¹⁸

As Jurist notes, while “in desire the other is a threat insofar as he or she is experienced as an actual other, in recognition this is no longer the case.”¹¹⁹ The other is not annihilated or subsumed by the self as in solipsism, nor is it regarded as a hostile force against which the self must necessarily battle. Difference is not eliminated or overlooked, but rather, it is embraced as a necessary condition for recognition. For, it is only through the acknowledgement of true otherness, that the self can come to know itself.

Thus, solipsism and hostility give way to the development out of reciprocal inter-subjective mediation,¹²⁰ of a social subject. Hegel relies on the notion of *Freigabe* – that is, on the notion of the release or absolution of the other in its otherness to elucidate the process by and through which the “I” that is “I,” that is, the I that seeks to be and to remain self-same, becomes an “I” that is a “we.”¹²¹ As noted by Williams, “consciousness exists concretely in interaction with others, with the world and finds its satisfaction in an other self-consciousness. Such interaction and interdependence means that consciousness is not always subject and never object.”¹²² Thus in allowing the other to be or to go free, the self is set free. There is a mutual releasement. In this moment, “the split between subject and object, between consciousness and unconsciousness, between certainty of self and truth, are

¹¹⁸ Williams, 1992, 155.

¹¹⁹ Jurist, 2000, 154.

¹²⁰ Williams, 1992, 156.

¹²¹ PS §177, 110.

¹²² Williams, 1992, 146. Thus for Hegel, there is no need to address the problem of other minds, the problem that preoccupied his Cartesian counterparts. He has no need to prove the existence of others for they are always already present. Moreover, so conceived, they are not to be regarded as threatening the self’s existence but rather, need be seen as giving the self its shape and contours, giving the self to itself, as it were.

reconciled or overcome.”¹²³ Herein resides the possibility for mutual recognition. Domination and mastery are renounced for the self finds intrinsic worth in its object,¹²⁴ for

Self-consciousness is in and for itself through the fact that *it exists in and for itself for an other*. That is, it exists only as recognized. The concept of this is unity in its doubling, the infinity realizing itself in self-consciousness, is a many-sided intersection of and correlation between multiple meanings. Consequently, these elements must on the one hand be precisely distinguished and kept separate, and, on the other hand, they must be taken and known in their *opposite* meaning, namely, in this very differentiation they are nevertheless *not different*. The double signification of the distinguished elements lies in the nature of self-consciousness to be infinite, or to be immediately the opposite of the determination in which it is posited. The exposition of this spiritual unity in its doubling will present the movement of recognition.¹²⁵

Within this new logic resides the possibility for relationships of love, friendship and generosity.

To better understand Hegel’s point herein, consider, for example, his claim that “love does not eliminate the other but affirms and preserves it.”¹²⁶ As Hegel himself notes, “The beloved is not opposed to us. He/she is one with our very being (*Wessen*): we see ourselves in him/her and nevertheless he/she is not we -- a miracle which we cannot comprehend.”¹²⁷ But this is not a “We” that denies what is separate. Without the other, without another, there cannot be love, nor can there be friendship nor generosity. These relationships are premised on the existence, on the continued existence, of the other. Hence there is simultaneously separation and unity, identity and difference.

Further, the kind of recognition which Hegel envisions herein is not, as noted by O’Neill, “simply the reversal of its constituent terms: it is the ethical internalization by both terms of the

¹²³ Taylor, 1996, 214.

¹²⁴ Williams, 1992, 182.

¹²⁵ PS § 141 as translated by Williams, 1997, 50.

¹²⁶ Williams, 1992, 211.

¹²⁷ From Hegel’s *Early Theological Writings*, 377 as cited by William, 1992, 182, translated by Westphal, 1998, 131.

relationship they bear to one another. In other words, reciprocity is the life of the collective in-and-for-us.”¹²⁸ There is not, as there has been at previous stages of the dialectic, either the denial of the other nor the inversion of roles. Hegel distinguishes here reciprocal recognition from mutual recognition and claims the latter to be what is achieved through the dialectic.

Just as recognition does not deny but rather affirms the other, so too does it affirm the previous moments in the dialectic. Consider again, Hegel’s account of love. As Williams notes for Hegel, love “does not exclude, but presupposes conflict. Love cannot be thought apart from conflict. Love is inseparable from conflict.”¹²⁹ Without the experience of conflict, there would be no recognition of the other within and, hence, no possibility to discover the self in the other. There would be no opportunity to learn of the potential for transformation. These moments in the dialectic, these experiences are the conditions for the possibility of love. They are necessary moments or stages through which the self must traverse if recognition is to be achieved. Denial of one or of all, rather than facilitating recognition, undermines its very possibility.

Taylor perhaps best captures the project of the *Phenomenology* describing it as “the dialectic of human longing and aspiration, and of their vicissitudes.”¹³⁰ This is the history of the overcoming, or, perhaps more accurately, the overturning of desire, as conquest and conflict give way to conciliation. While the object that is longed for and the means used to achieve it transform over time and across history, this is the story of the self’s longing – the longing to be itself and the discovery that it can only be at home in the self through the other. It is this story that Beauvoir takes up time and again, explores in new contexts, accepts, challenges and rewrites in and across her works, in and across her lifetime.

¹²⁸ O’Neill, 1996, 10.

¹²⁹ Williams, 1992, 185.

¹³⁰ Taylor, 1996, 148.

2.8 Beauvoir and Hegel: The Commentaries

“The further I went, the more I diverged from Hegel, without ever losing admiration for him.”¹³¹
- Beauvoir

Heckman notes that each generation reads the *Phenomenology* with its own agenda and thus that each generation discovers its own Hegel.¹³² It is the questions raised in this text, questions concerning the nature of consciousness, the relationship between the particular and the universal, and the role of history, to which Beauvoir returns time and again. In seeking her own answers to the issues he raises, Beauvoir “splices” her reading of his work with the ideas of Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre,¹³³ developing an increasingly nuanced and sophisticated account of the workings of the dialectic and of the possibility of reciprocity, enhanced by situating her reflections within lived experience and within history.

However while Beauvoir is clear that it is this context that she intended her work to be read, to date there is yet to be a study that takes up her description and investigates her work as a life-long investigation of the problem of the other’s consciousness. A survey of the scholarship on this aspect of Beauvoir’s philosophy reveals five trends in the interpretation of her discussion of the relationship between the self and the other:

- (1) there is a tendency to discuss the notion of recognition within the confines of a single work; most often *The Second Sex* – taking it out of the context of the historical development of her understanding of this problem and of its possible solution;¹³⁴
- (2) despite the generally agreed upon claim that Beauvoir purposefully disregards disciplinary distinctions, studies of her work carefully maintain disciplinary divides such that the problem

¹³¹ PL 469; FA 483.

¹³² Heckman, 1974, xvi.

¹³³ Bergoffen, 2009, 17.

¹³⁴ Gothlin, 1996; Bauer, 2001; and Evans, 2009.

of the other's consciousness is approached through her fiction¹³⁵ or her theoretical works¹³⁶ or her autobiographies;¹³⁷

(3) her insights into this problem most often are read in conjunction with or as a reflection on/of the works of other philosophers primarily as the extension or advancement of the ideas of Jean Paul Sartre,¹³⁸ Husserl,¹³⁹ Merleau-Ponty,¹⁴⁰ Heidegger,¹⁴¹ Hegel¹⁴² and/or Bergson;¹⁴³

(4) thus, there is a tendency to situate her discussion of the problem squarely within the context of the historical development of feminist theory¹⁴⁴ or of existentialism¹⁴⁵ and to find the relevance of her thought within those confines; and,

(5) if her work cannot be so situated, at points in her work where she is most innovative, scholars resort to what Moi characterizes as “the personality topos”¹⁴⁶ – that is, they seek out “biographical reasons (explanations) rather than seeing philosophical achievement.”¹⁴⁷

There are clear advantages to studying Beauvoir's writings within these parameters. Most importantly, these strategies have ensured that Beauvoir's work has been given a kind of visibility that the works of many of her peers – many other women philosophers of her time – never received. However, there are as well disadvantages to employing these approaches. The limitations of employing these strategies, singly or in combination, in investigations of the problem of the other's consciousness become apparent when surveying the existing scholarship.

¹³⁵ Fallaize, 1988; and Sholtz and Mussett, 2005.

¹³⁶ Bergoffen, 1997; and Bauer, 2001.

¹³⁷ Tidd, 1999; and Bainbrigge, 2005.

¹³⁸ Daigle and Golomb, 2009; Fullbrook and Fullbrook 2004; Vintges, 1996; and, Deutscher, 2008.

¹³⁹ Bergoffen, 1997.

¹⁴⁰ Heinämaa 2003; and Langer, 2003.

¹⁴¹ Bauer 2001; Gothlin 2008; and Bauer 2006.

¹⁴² Gothlin 1996; and Bauer 2001.

¹⁴³ Simons, 1999.

¹⁴⁴ Moi 1990; Moi 1994; and Moser 2008.

¹⁴⁵ Mahon 1997; and Kruks 1990.

¹⁴⁶ Moi, 1990, 21 -60.

¹⁴⁷ Bauer, 2001, 17.

The death of Beauvoir in 1996, gave rise to the publication of a plethora of new books were written on her life and her work, works that would focus on her unique philosophical contributions including her contributions to the discussion of the relationship between self and other. It would be the beginning of the renaissance in Beauvoir studies.

Eva Gothlin in her 1991 study, *Sex and Existence: Simone de Beauvoir's 'The Second Sex'* was the first scholar to devote an entire volume to the exploration of Beauvoir's account of the relationship between self and other. Gothlin undertakes a study of Beauvoir's critique of Hegel, in the context of a careful reading of *The Second Sex*, a reading that places the text in historical context, identifying the philosophical influences and historical events that shaped and structured the development of Beauvoir's ideas.¹⁴⁸ Rejecting the heretofore-received notion that Beauvoir is mapping Hegel's master-slave dialectic onto the relationship between men and women, Gothlin argues that Hegel serves as Beauvoir's "foil" in this analysis.¹⁴⁹ For Beauvoir woman is both the other and the Absolute Other within her society. While Hegel's model is able to account for the former it cannot account for the latter; that is, it cannot account for a non-dialectical othering. To explain why it is that woman cannot enter into the dialectic Gothlin argues that Beauvoir must turn to non-Hegelian principles – principles she locates in Marxism and in existential phenomenology.

While Gothlin investigates Beauvoir's ideas of freedom, ambiguity and recognition by juxtaposing them with those developed by Hegel and Sartre, Debra Bergoffen's 1997 work, *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Gendered Phenomenologies, Erotic Generosities*, situates Beauvoir's ideas within the phenomenological tradition, placing them in relation to the works of Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre. In so doing she gives voice to what she characterizes as the "muted" phenomenology of the flesh and the philosophy of the erotic that underscores Beauvoir's

¹⁴⁸ Gothlin, 1996, 67 -82.

¹⁴⁹ Bauer, 2001, 172.

less subdued analysis of the dialectic, of violence and of conflict.¹⁵⁰ Drawing attention to the often-overlooked philosophy of generosity that Beauvoir develops, Bergoffen speaks to her account of the erotic articulating how this shift in attention transforms readings of Beauvoir's account of subjectivity, recognition and inter-subjectivity.¹⁵¹ Dampening the emphasis in commentaries given to the project, to the search for transcendence and the need for struggle in accounts of the relationship between the self and the other, Bergoffen focuses on the concepts of the appeal, ambiguity, and responsibility in her writing, finding therein the groundwork for recognition, for forms of reciprocity to be achieved between consciousnesses. However, in the end she is left to address the perhaps difficult problem of how to harmonize the two voices that speak in and through Beauvoir's work.¹⁵² That is, she is left with the problem of how to reconcile autonomy with generosity.¹⁵³

Following Bergoffen's lead and seeking a means for Beauvoir to resolve the problem of the other's consciousness, Nancy Bauer offers up a series of key criticisms of Gothlin's interpretation of *The Second Sex* specifically, and of Beauvoir's broader project, more generally, in her 2001 work *Simone de Beauvoir, Philosophy and Feminism*. On Gothlin's reading of *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir is left unable to resolve a series of tensions in her work, tensions framed by her dual commitment to Hegel's account of the dialectic and the principles of existentialism. In particular, Beauvoir cannot develop a theory of recognition that does not necessitate struggle, conflict and violence and, indeed, she cannot offer women a means for escaping their position as the Absolute Other, nor provide an account of how man became master in a non-dialectical fashion.¹⁵⁴ Arguing that for Beauvoir the central moment in the *Phenomenology* is not the battle to the death but rather the moment in which

¹⁵⁰ Bergoffen, 1997, 4; Ibid, 221.

¹⁵¹ Ibid 104 – 110.

¹⁵² Ibid 164.

¹⁵³ Ibid 93.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid 191.

subjects risk entering into the dialectic, Bauer offers an alternative reading of *The Second Sex*.¹⁵⁵ Drawing on her account of ambiguity and of freedom in *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* (1944) and *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1947) she reorients the study of this later work exploring the dialectic from the perspective of the slave, emphasizing the vulnerability of the master and the ever present reversibility of roles always already at hand. In the process, Bauer brings into focus the manner in which Beauvoir transforms rather than adopts Hegel's understanding of the dialectic in light of her application of these principles to the study of gender in this work, and to her reflections on the problem of the other's consciousness more broadly, allowing for the possibility of mutual recognition.¹⁵⁶ Through the content of her study but equally through the model of her scholarship, Bauer thus importantly encourages the reading of Beauvoir's text(s) as works of philosophy, not books about philosophy or about philosophers, an approach that significantly redirects Beauvoir studies.

That this is the case is clear when examining Susanne Moser's 2008 study, *Freedom and Recognition in The Work of Simone de Beauvoir*. Taking up Moi's call to consider Beauvoir's life work as a sustained study of freedom,¹⁵⁷ Moser considers the tension that arises in and across Beauvoir's early works through to *The Second Sex* and *Old Age*, between the call of the project and the logic of love, friendship and generosity. How can individual freedom be reconciled with *Mitsein*? How is it that out of conflict and out of struggle that reciprocity and reconciliation can be achieved? It is these conflicts between autonomy and generosity, between transcendence and immanence, between the freedom and the desire for mutual recognition that become the focus of study. Pointing more towards the questions that are raised in Beauvoir's writing than the solutions that she offers, Moser traces Beauvoir's attempts to mediate between these differences, ultimately, between the

¹⁵⁵ Ibid 173.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid 182.

¹⁵⁷ Moi, 1999, viii.

philosophical positions of Hegel and Sartre,¹⁵⁸ beginning with *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* working her way through her major philosophical texts up to a brief consideration of *Old Age*.

While each of these commentaries adopts a different focal point and develops its own strategy for its study of Beauvoir's problem of the other's consciousness, clear patterns emerge. First and perhaps most glaringly, it is evident that the focus of attention has been almost exclusively on *The Second Sex*. While there are references to *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, *Must We Burn The Marquis de Sade?* and *Old Age* in these commentaries, these are clearly considered as anticipating or extending the views developed in what is held to be her central work. Moser perhaps best sums up the position adopted by these writers when she notes that "the systematic examination of the problem of the other in connection with the topic of recognition is only performed in her main work, *The Second Sex*, with an entirely new approach namely that of gender relations."¹⁵⁹ Moser and others take this view despite Beauvoir's own claim that this problem followed her throughout her work. The relationship between the self and the other is as much under investigation in her later works including in her autobiography, her lectures on literature and in her final works of fiction as in her early writings. Moreover, this focus ignores her assertion that it was in *The Mandarins* that she offered up her best solution to her problem.¹⁶⁰ Indeed, this brief survey reveals how little attention is given to her novels in this research. Scant references are made to *She Came to Stay* with its epigraph from Hegel's *Phenomenology* while the later novels are given no consideration at all. Similarly, her autobiographies are left unexplored in this context. This selective reading of Beauvoir's account of the problem of the other's consciousness and of its possible resolution under appreciates both

¹⁵⁸ Moser, 2008, 84.

¹⁵⁹ Moser, 2008, 113.

¹⁶⁰ Simons, 1990, 488.

Beauvoir's knowledge of Hegel's *Phenomenology*¹⁶¹ and the originality of her reading and extension of this work.¹⁶²

In tracing Beauvoir's readings of Hegel, in bearing witness to the unfolding of her account of the problem of the other's consciousness, this study follows the development of her theories of recognition, from doubt to realization in and through her work itself. It is to Beauvoir's student journals this investigation first turns, for therein is found her initial encounter with this problem.

¹⁶¹ See Bauer, 1999, 86; Deutscher, 2008, 13.

¹⁶² Gothlin argues that Beauvoir adheres to Kojève's interpretation of this text while Bauer maintains that it is Sartre's account to which she adheres. See Gothlin, 1996, 65 and Bauer, 1999, 82 – 85.

Chapter 3

Risk

3.1 The Early Works

*“Courage, be everything to yourself. Seek your truth; construct your life, a beautiful life; be strong and passionately cherish yourself to console yourself for being so alone in the midst of all those who love you. Again this necessity to be strong!”*¹⁶³

- Beauvoir

The publication of Beauvoir’s student diaries in 2006 necessitated a reappraisal, a re-reading of her entire oeuvre for in those diaries dating from 1926 - 1930, Beauvoir sets out the agenda that she would follow throughout her career. More specifically, therein she identifies the issues concerning the self and the other that she would address again and again in her novels and essays, as well as outlines the methodology she would employ in attempting to resolve those issues.

Considering her own life as well as her philosophical interests, she undertakes to

Clearly spell out my philosophical ideas, and maybe I will begin the narrative that I would like to write. So many ideas that have matured with my meditations and become more precise through my conversations. I should take stock of my eighteen months of thought, reassess and go more deeply into problems that enticed me, to which I gave overly hasty solutions. The theme is almost always this opposition of self and other that I have felt since beginning to live. Now has come this time to make a synthesis of it. Foreign influences are remote, and also the desire for affectation in writing. I will write my work in my own style seeking only to express well what I feel.¹⁶⁴

Perhaps there is no more succinct statement of Beauvoir’s lifelong philosophical project, her agenda, than that offered up in this passage. First, she grounds her philosophy in the realm of lived

¹⁶³ DPS 299, CJ 390.

¹⁶⁴ DPS 279. “Il faut que je mette au net mes idées philosophiques et peut-être que je commence ce récit que j’aimerais écrire. Tant d’idées qu’ont mûries mes meditations et précisées mes conversations. De mes dix-huit mois de pensée je devrais faire le recensement, reprendre et approfondir les problèmes qui m’ont sollicité, auxquels j’ai donné de trop hâtives solutions. Le thème est presque toujours cette opposition de moi et l’autre que j’ai sentie en commençant de vivre. Maintenant est venu le temps d’en faire une synthèse. Les influences étrangères sont écartées, et aussi le désir de tout recherché d’écriture. J’écrirai mon oeuvre dans mon propre style en cherchant seulement à bien exprimer ce que je sens.” (CJ 367)

experience. Second, she is clear that the problem that preoccupies her is that involving the relationship between self and other. Third, she recognizes the importance of conflict in this relationship. And fourth, she acknowledges the need to recognize the “synthesis” of self and other.

This entry, dating from July 10 1927, comes toward the end of these journals dating from her days as a student at the Sorbonne. A careful reading of these works offers the opportunity to see how she arrived at this conclusion. More specifically, it allows for consideration of the influences that shaped her thinking, of the development of her method for taking up this project, and of her early study of love that would come to shape her “theme” and frame her first extended study of a possible synthesis in her first novel *She Came To Stay*. As noted by Tidd, the diaries, when read in this light, reveal that Beauvoir’s early interest in the ontological and ethical issues relating to gender, subjectivity, and recognition.¹⁶⁵ And, they reveal her earliest preoccupation with the problem of the other in relation to friends and lovers.¹⁶⁶ However, before looking at the content of these reflections, it is necessary first to consider the style in which they are written, for in considering novel use of a diary, in order to record her reflections, there is much to be learned about her understanding of this problem and of the issues it entails.

3.2 A Matter of Influence

“I cannot say I was influenced by anyone in particular ... or perhaps I was influenced by everyone.”¹⁶⁷

- Beauvoir

Beauvoir states that “one receives influences if one is ready to welcome them”¹⁶⁸ In these diaries, there are references to philosophers¹⁶⁹, novelists¹⁷⁰, poets,¹⁷¹ visual artists¹⁷², friends and teachers all

¹⁶⁵ Tidd, 2008, 203.

¹⁶⁶ See Tidd 2008, 203 and Hengehold, 2006, 181-182.

¹⁶⁷ Simons, 1999, 12. (Interview with Beauvoir from 1979.)

¹⁶⁸ Simons, 1999, 10. (Interview with Beauvoir from 1979)

¹⁶⁹ For example, she reflects on the works of Spinoza (DPS 198, CJ 213); Schopenhauer, (DPS 251 – 254, CJ 339 – 341); and, Nietzsche (DPS 227, CJ 308).

of whom play a role in shaping the development of Beauvoir's project, that is, all of whom figure in shaping her understanding of philosophy – its subject matter and its method for investigation. From Proust to Schopenhauer, from Wilde to Alain-Fournier, those referenced in her diaries directly and indirectly inform her understanding and shape the structure of her investigation of the problem of the other's consciousness. In particular, these early journals reveal that Beauvoir had a greater understanding of German philosophy earlier in her career than has heretofore been acknowledged.

Beauvoir's introduction to the problem of the other's consciousness – to discussions of the opposition of self and other, would have come in 1924 while studying advanced philosophy at Institut Adeline-Désir or Cours Désir. The year was remarkable for it was the first year that girls were allowed to take advanced philosophy and Latin in school. As a result of the economic hardships suffered by bourgeois families during WWI, the traditional assumption that girls would marry was undermined, for the funds were simply no longer available to put towards dowries. In light of these social and economic changes, girls were given more course options in order to allow them to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to acquire careers.

Thus it was that Beauvoir was amongst the very first girls in France allowed to take Philosophy at an advanced level. Taught by L'Abbé Trésal, Beauvoir was given an introduction to the key problems in philosophy using Father Charles's *Manuel de Philosophie*.¹⁷³ Included in this

¹⁷⁰See, for example, Beauvoir's discussions of Rivière (DPS 155 -157, CJ 161 - 168, DPS 198, CJ 213); Alain-Fournier (DPS 66 CJ 61; DPS 77 CJ 74; DPS 191 CJ 207); Baudelaire (DPS 189, CJ 203); and, Wilde (DPS 150-154, CJ 158 – 160).

¹⁷¹ For example, she discusses the poetry of Claudel (DPS 73 -75, CJ 70 – 73; DPS 160, CJ 168; DPS 227, CJ 309- 310; DPS 246-247, CJ 330 -331) and Rilke (DPS 236-239; CJ 324 – 326).

¹⁷² Beauvoir considers the works of Rembrandt (DPS 177, CJ 189) Cocteau (DPS 81 -82, CJ 79 - 87; DPS 101-102, CJ 1102 - 104; DPS 154, CJ 162 – 163) and Cezanne (DPS 158, CJ166; DPS 232, CJ 314).

¹⁷³ As Beauvoir recalls, "Regarding each problem, Reverend Father Lahr made rapid inventory of human errors and taught us the truth according to Saint Thomas Aquinas." MDD 157, MJFR 219.

textbook was an introduction to Hegel's account of self and other via a reference to the master-slave dialectic.¹⁷⁴ In his brief overview, Lahr attributes to Hegel the view that

Everything starts from the self which creates itself in positing itself. And in that very instant creates the non-self. The self posits itself, that is the thesis, but at the same time it opposes the non-self. This is the antithesis and in that very way he identifies with it, this is the synthesis.¹⁷⁵

It would not be until 1940 that she would turn to reading the complete text of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* on her own and begin to challenge this interpretation of Hegel's work. During the interim, her understanding of Hegel's ideas would develop indirectly. Many of the novelists and poets most frequently referenced in these texts were those who were associated with Hegel's philosophy. The poet Jules Laforgue and the novelist Louis Aragon as well as the philosopher Alain (Emile-Auguste Chartier) were all clearly influenced by Hegel's writing, by his philosophy of history in particular. Moreover, Alain-Fournier, the author of *Le Grands Meulnes* and Jacques Rivière who wrote *Aimée*, Beauvoir's two favourite novelists at this time, were both attracted to German philosophy, in particular, to the discussions of idealism and subjectivity therein. Rivière, for example, in his correspondence with Alain-Fournier writes of his desire to undertake a thesis on Hegel's aesthetics.¹⁷⁶ Her understanding of the ideas explored in context in these works and of German philosophy, more generally, would develop as she continued her education at the Sorbonne and came in contact with two influential professors with opposing views on phenomenology in general, and Hegel's philosophy in particular.

¹⁷⁴For a further discussion of Beauvoir's early philosophical training see Simons and Peters, in PE, 15 - 16.

¹⁷⁵ As quoted by Simons, in DPS 43.

¹⁷⁶ Simons 1999, 12; Naughton, 1964; and Altman, 2007.

While Hegel was not officially included in the curriculum at the Sorbonne,¹⁷⁷ much of Beauvoir's knowledge of German phenomenology may have developed from her studies with her Jean Baruzi.¹⁷⁸ Beauvoir's mentor while she attended the Sorbonne, Baruzi had studied Leibniz and James under the direction of Henri Bergson¹⁷⁹, and in the process developed an interest in German philosophy. As early as 1926, references to Husserl can be found in his work, allowing questions to be raised concerning the extent of Beauvoir's knowledge of phenomenology prior to her reading of Husserl's work in 1931.¹⁸⁰

The significance of her studies with Baruzi cannot be overlooked. If Beauvoir was familiar with the method, though not necessarily the scholarship, on phenomenology, it would explain her commitment to the development of a philosophy that was in and of the world. That is, it would help to explain both her knowledge of this methodology and her willingness to put it into practice. It would explain both her approach and her confidence as a student in challenging the ideas and assumptions of her professors. To make this point clear, one need only turn to consideration of the influence of Léon Brunschvicg on the development of Beauvoir's thought.

While Baruzi was encouraging of Beauvoir's studies, he would not serve as her thesis supervisor. Her dissertation on Leibniz would be under the supervision of Leon Brunschvicg. This is an important connection for it suggests that her introduction to the problem of the other's consciousness pre-dates what has hitherto been regarded as the originating point. In the 1920s and 1930s, Brunschvicg was the leading philosopher in France. His adherence to neo-Kantianism, to rationalism, and his focus on the realm of the abstract, led him to regard as irrelevant the realm of

¹⁷⁷There was a general hostility towards Hegel, particularly towards his philosophy of history running through the Sorbonne during this time period fuelled by the staunch adherence to neo-Kantianism that prevailed in academe at this time. For more on the reception of Hegel during Beauvoir's student days, see Altman 2007 and Roth 1988.

¹⁷⁸ DPS 230 -31, CJ 312; DPS 241 -42, CJ 322; DPS 246, CJ 331; DPS 274, CJ 361; DPS 287. MDD 262, MJFR 259; MDD 305, MJFR 306; MDD 340, MJFR 339.

¹⁷⁹ Simons, 1999, 40.

¹⁸⁰ PL 201, FA 208.

experience. Furthermore, his commitments to these principles led him to reject outright Hegel's concept of *Geist* or Spirit. Indeed, the year that Beauvoir completed her dissertation, Brunschvicg published his most important study, *La progresse de La Conscience d'Occidentale* (1927) that included a critique of Hegel that focused on his metaphysics and his conception of reason.¹⁸¹ While there are no direct references to this text in Beauvoir's journals, given her demonstrated knowledge of his ideas¹⁸² it is clear that she would have been familiar with this text. This again suggests that her knowledge of Hegelianism, even if limited, pre-dated 1940.

Beauvoir was highly critical of Brunschvicg's philosophy for being too abstract to be of relevance. Indeed in her 1927 diary she notes that he is for her "zero."¹⁸³ What can be traced developing here in Beauvoir's early studies, is an understanding of philosophy in and of the world. With her rejection of Brunschvicg's abstraction and her knowledge – however superficial -- of alternative approaches to her chosen field of study, she would redefine philosophy for herself.

That Beauvoir in these diaries already is coming to develop her own understanding of philosophy – of the kind of philosophy that she would study and practice – is clear. The account of philosophy both developed in and demonstrated through these writings clearly reflects her basic orientation towards phenomenology. However, it is as well reminiscent of the commitment to immediate experience advocated by Henri Bergson in his *Essai sur Les Données Immediate de La Conscience*.

¹⁸¹ As noted by Baugh, Brunschvicg took aim, in particular at what regarded as Hegel's pan-logicism, his Romanticism particularly in relation to his conception of the concrete universal to his notion of Reason. See Baugh's discussion of Brunschvicg's influence on French interpretations of Hegel in *French Hegel: From Surrealism to Postmodernism* (2003, 12 – 14).

¹⁸² See for example MDD 230, MJFR 228; MDD 234, MJFR 232; MDD 266, MJFR 264; MDD 310, MJFR 311. It is interesting to note in tracing her reference to Brunschvicg that her attitude toward his philosophy changes over time. Often overlooked in commentaries on her early influences is her early admiration of his form of neo-Kantianism.

¹⁸³ DPS 231, CJ 312.

Simons' investigations of the philosophical import of Beauvoir's student diaries points towards what had been the unacknowledged influence of Bergson on Beauvoir's thought.¹⁸⁴ Reflecting on Beauvoir's entries, Simons identifies how the notions of time, memory, of the "givenness" of the world and of becoming in Bergson find their place in Beauvoir's account of the self.¹⁸⁵ While clearly these aspects of Bergson's thought shaped Beauvoir's work, two key elements of his philosophy that shaped Beauvoir's account of the problem of the other's consciousness in particular; namely, his account of the two selves and his focus on lived experience, warrant further investigation.

In her diaries, Beauvoir quotes at length from Bergson's *Essai*. What particularly "thrilled her" in these works was his account of the self it offered. Bergson writes that

. . . there are two different 'selves,' one of which is, as it were, the external projection of the other, its spatial and, so to speak, social representation. We reach the former by deep reflection, which leads us to grasp our inner states as living beings, constantly in the process of forming, as states not amenable to measure, which penetrate one another and of which the succession in duration has nothing in common with a juxtaposition in homogeneous space. But the moments at which we again thus grasp ourselves are rare, and that is why we are rarely free. Most of the time we live outside ourselves, hardly perceiving anything of ourselves (*notre moi*) but our own colourless ghost, a shadow that pure duration projects into homogenous space. Hence our existence unfold in space rather than in time; we live for the external world rather than for ourselves; we speak rather than think; we 'are acted' rather than act. To act freely is to recover possession of self and to get back into pure duration.¹⁸⁶

It was this duality identified by Bergson that Beauvoir recognized that she "so often observed between the being that I am within myself and the being seen from outside, not deformed, seen exactly by me, having become an observer, between the true being considered from the exterior or the

¹⁸⁴ While key influence on Beauvoir's philosophy as witnessed to in the diaries, reference to his works is remarkably absent from her essays, text and autobiographies.

¹⁸⁵ Simons, 1999, 194.

¹⁸⁶ DPS 60 as transcribed from Bergson, 1927, VI, 125; trans. F.L. Pogson, 231-232, CJ 59.

interior.”¹⁸⁷ As she notes, “The first is; the second lives.”¹⁸⁸ More specifically, there is, for Bergson, a social self which we are seen to be for and by others and there is a “real” self composed of what Gunn has described as “a qualitative multiplicity of conscious states flowing, interpenetrating, melting into one another, and forming an organic whole, a living unity or personality.”¹⁸⁹ In other words, there is an external self that is seen as being and an inner self -- a “deeper, passionate self” which is always in the state of becoming.

It must be clear, that Bergson is not here stating that there are two selves – but, rather, that these are two ways of envisaging the self.¹⁹⁰ Indeed, endorsing this view Beauvoir notes that these two ways of considering the self ultimately must not be kept apart but must be considered together for

. . . to be complete, it is not like Ponti appears to believe, to juxtapose two diverse tendencies; it is to live according to each as completely as if it were alone. He tells me that I am strangely double. There isn’t any duplicity either. There is only one unique essence expressing itself completely in each of its attributes. One must love and judge.¹⁹¹

That is, what is divided conceptually is never lived separately.

The importance of this model of the self in structuring Beauvoir’s understanding of the problem of the other’s consciousness while having gone unrecognized to date, cannot be underestimated. It provides her with a standpoint from which to see the self as simultaneously divided within itself yet united. Echoes of this view are heard throughout Beauvoir’s fiction and nonfiction from *She Came To Stay* through to her last major work, *Old Age*. Consider how, in this later project, she notes that while in the first half of her study of the elderly

¹⁸⁷ DPS 67, CJ 59.

¹⁸⁸ DPS 80, CJ 77.

¹⁸⁹ Gunn, 2004, <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/5717> (J Alexander Gunn Bergson and His Philosophy)

¹⁹⁰ DPS 80, CJ 77.

¹⁹¹ DPS 295 – 296, CJ 386.

We have looked at the aged man as an object, an object from the scientific, historic, and social point of view: we have described him from the outside. But it is also a subject, one who has an intimate, inward knowledge of his state and who reacts to it. Let us try to understand how he experiences his old age – how he actually lives it. The difficulty is that one can adopt neither a nominalist nor a conceptual view of age. It is just something that happens to people who become old and this plurality of experiences cannot possibly be confirmed in a concept or even in a notion. But at least we can compare them with one another; we can try to isolate the constraints and to find the reasons for the differences.¹⁹²

In this passage the same two perspectives on the self are identified and it is argued that they need to be considered as interconnected, reflecting Bergson's lasting influence on Beauvoir understanding of her own theme, the theme of the self and the other.

Bergson provided Beauvoir with an account of intra-alterity that, when conjoined with an account of intersubjectivity that she would later develop out of her reading of Hegel, would allow for her to explain how it is that the other comes to reside as much within the self as in the world. Consider, the example above in this context. That the world sees the elderly man as "the other" is clear. How he comes to see himself in this regard requires a more complicated account of consciousness, an account which Hegel assumes in his discussion of the self-other but which Bergson can be seen as articulating and filling out. The external self, as he describes it, allows the view of the old man as old, to take on not just an exterior reality but for it to move inside and become part of his self-conception. It allows as such the self to be divided from within and from itself as much as it is divided from the other and from the world¹⁹³

Perhaps more significant to the study of Beauvoir's work from the perspective of the development of her account of recognition, a point heretofore overlooked, is Beauvoir's adoption of

¹⁹² OA 313, V 299.

¹⁹³ Kail notes that Beauvoir's unique contribution to the discussion of the problem of the other's consciousness lies in her account of how the two processes of othering occur not sequentially but rather simultaneously. (Kail, 2009, 158) This attribution is perhaps better owed to Bergson than to Beauvoir.

Bergson's focus on lived experience as the foundation for philosophical reflection and his account of the self. Following Bergson, Beauvoir rejects philosophy that remains in a vacuum¹⁹⁴, that is, philosophy that is a form of abstraction. Rather, even this early in her career, she states her commitment to developing, to practicing, a philosophy that is "attentive to life"¹⁹⁵ – that is, a philosophy that is not a game¹⁹⁶ but rather one that must be from life.¹⁹⁷ The problems that others live in their minds, "I live them with my arms and my legs,"¹⁹⁸ she states. To be able to write of herself, as a living self, in this two-sided fashion, she would turn to her journal, and therein reinvent its very form to be able to capture her developing philosophy.

3.3 The Diaries

*"This is what I am going to do: in this notebook I will recount my experiences that I accept as varied and even absurd; this will be in terms of my weaknesses. Then I will attempt a work of thought in which everything will result in a strong, detached and disdainful judgment. There will be no dilettantism or splitting in two."*¹⁹⁹

- Beauvoir

The unique nature of Beauvoir's diary is easily overlooked. Reading through the pages, it seems both in style and in content typical of the kind of journal that any young woman in her late teens might write, typical for any young woman writing in the late 20th century or early 21st century. But this journal begins in 1926, when understandings of both the function and the purpose of a diary were very different.

While there is a long tradition of women in France keeping journals, the form and uses to which Beauvoir put her volumes were unique. The earliest diaries found in France date back to the 16th century. The diary was then considered a tool to be used by Catholics and Christians to examine

¹⁹⁴ DPS 65, CJ 56.

¹⁹⁵ Klaw in DPS 202.

¹⁹⁶ DPS 288, CJ 378.

¹⁹⁷ DPS 296, CJ 387.

¹⁹⁸ DPS 293, CJ 384.

¹⁹⁹ DPS 257, CJ 342 – 343.

and correct behavior. The idea that such writings would be personal reflections or that they would in some ways be private would have been foreign to their authors. They were written with the knowledge that they would be shared with the parsonage/priests/religious leaders/ -- that they would be made public and used to direct the behavior of the author as well as others who might learn by example.

As Klaw notes in her introduction to Beauvoir's student journals, by the 18th century secular diaries were kept but they were considered primarily mnemonic devices.²⁰⁰ They more closely resembled modern social calendars than private journals, for they listed and recorded the activities of their authors. This tradition continued through into the 19th century when diarist, particularly the woman diarist, was expected to use their journals to account for their use of time.

From the mid 1800s up until the mid 20th century, the old tradition of employing diaries as a didactic medium was revived. Considered, in particular, to be a means to be employed for the moral and spiritual education of women, young girls were expected to keep journals in which they would recount their actions and thoughts that they would then present to their mothers for the purpose of correction. Indeed, in *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, Beauvoir recalls keeping such diaries, recalls having her mother read their contents.²⁰¹ Yet she would a few years later, dramatically reconceive the purpose and the subject matter of the diary. But it is only when considering history of diaries in France, that the novelty of Beauvoir's early student diaries becomes evident.²⁰²

Beauvoir conceives of her diary as a private space in which she can contemplate issues of concern to her, to try on or try out new ideas and new identities, and express not only self-reprimand

²⁰⁰ Klaw in DPS 22.

²⁰¹ MDD 74, MFR 102. Note that none of these notebooks survive today.

²⁰² For a detailed history of the journal in France see Françoise Simonet-Tenant's *Le Journal Intime: Genre Littéraire et Écriture Ordinaire* (2001).

but self-love.²⁰³ And she does so not fearing recrimination. Clearly, this is modern journal in which she writes to herself, of herself not for the purpose of correction but revelation.

Simons notes that Beauvoir had no diary to imitate to help give form or structure to her own private writings. Few women's diaries were published at the time²⁰⁴ and journals written by men would have been censored by her mother.²⁰⁵ It is unclear then the inspiration for her taking up her diary and employing it in this fashion. Perhaps it was the influence of Montaigne's writings.²⁰⁶ Or perhaps it was the consequence of her growing sense of individual freedom. Whatever the cause, the importance of the style of writing she adopts herein is key to understanding what she would come to call the problem of the other's consciousness.

What has gone overlooked but what must now be evident is that Beauvoir, in writing of her own life in this manner, does not merely contemplate but enacts Bergson's two selves. She simultaneously views herself from the internal perspective as she writes, and from the external perspective as she takes herself as her own subject matter. She is at one and the same time subject and object. Moreover, she realizes that "our two selves" are "Distinct but fraternal."²⁰⁷ She cannot write of one without always already enacting the other. That is she cannot solely write of herself from an internal perspective for in committing the words to the page she is already transforming herself into an object, allowing herself to reflect back upon her own actions as if they were the actions of another. That is, as if they were external to her. Nor can she write of herself solely from an external perspective for in writing she must take up the pen and give voice to the self she is describing,

²⁰³ This is a reference to Rivière cited by Beauvoir in DPS 289, CJ 379.

²⁰⁴ As noted by Klaw in her introduction to *Diaries of a Philosophy Student*, the exceptions would have been the diaries of Albertine de Saussure; Lucile Desmounds, Marie Bashkirtseff, and Eugene de Guérin but it is unlikely that Beauvoir would have had access to these works.

²⁰⁵ Klaw in DPS, 22.

²⁰⁶ Beauvoir's familiarity with Montaigne's writings is clear from her references to his work throughout her oeuvre including in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, "What is Existentialism?" and *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*. While Beauvoir lacks the sophistication of Montaigne, clearly there is something of his *essais* in her reflection on the minutia of her own life experience as the foundation for her philosophical reflections.

²⁰⁷ DPS 120, CJ 12.

creating for her self a narrative. Thus, not only is she revealing her two selves in this diary, she is as well, through the very act of writing, showing their interrelation.²⁰⁸ Taking up Bergson's ideas in this manner, Beauvoir enacts in her writing, what Deleuze would theorize forty years later, the union of heterogeneity and continuity.²⁰⁹

It is important as well to note that in her diary entries Beauvoir adopts the notion of philosophy found in Bergson as well as in the German phenomenologists. For them, philosophy was not concerned with presuppositions and assumptions about experience. Rather, it focused on things in themselves, the experience itself for, as noted by Heinämaa, without that "understanding (of) how meanings are constituted in experience, (s)he cannot base (her) his studies on the realities that are claimed, supposed or known to be behind experience."²¹⁰ That is, in a manner reminiscent of the young Hegelians, particularly Fichte, Beauvoir substitutes an "anthropological humanism" for Hegel's speculative dialectic.²¹¹ To do so required her to challenge both how philosophy was written and what was to be regarded as its appropriate subject matter.

Thus, for Beauvoir, the problem of the other's consciousness was not just a conceptual issue to be addressed in abstract terms, but, rather, it was a problem that was lived. Throughout the text she raises the problem of recognition clearly within the framework of her own experience. More specifically, herein her study of the problem of the other's consciousness takes root in her discussions of love.

²⁰⁸ This use of Bergson's two selves in writing is evident as well in Beauvoir's later works, particularly in her autobiographies. See Chapter Six of this study.

²⁰⁹ Deleuze, 1966.

²¹⁰ Heinämaa, 1997, 25.

²¹¹ The question of whether the content of Hegel's dialectic can be extracted from within a metaphysics grounded on and in the Spirit, is an issue to which it is necessary to return to later in this work for it underscores many of Beauvoir's criticisms of her own attempts to resolve the problem of the other's consciousness.

3.4 On Love

“*But after all, what is loving?*”²¹²

- *Beauvoir*

In these early journals, Beauvoir turns to her experience of love to ground her reflections on the relation between self and other. Many of Beauvoir’s readers have been disenchanted, disappointed upon reading in her student journals of her infatuation with her cousin, Jacques, her willingness – almost – to abandon her own ideas and her work to love – of her impatience with her friend, Zaza, and her use of her sister, Poupette.²¹³ How could this be the person who would criticize the woman in love in *The Second Sex*? How could this be the founder of the second wave in feminism?

These criticisms seem in many ways uncharitable. Taken in context, perhaps it is best to ask how it could not be Beauvoir. When Beauvoir wrote in *The Second Sex* of women’s willingness to allow themselves to be overtaken by love²¹⁴, she did not write from pure reflection – that is, in adherence to abstract principles and ideas. She knew of what she spoke in terms of her own lived experience. Theory for her helped to elucidate life, it did not define it or replace it. Nowhere is this more evident than in her discussion of love in these journals. She finds herself in these pages struggling with love – struggling to understand its limits and restrictions. And she finds herself enjoying the moments of attention, the sense of belonging and purpose that she experiences when with Jacques or her friends. She feels the pull of romantic love. Those critical of Beauvoir’s account of love in this work need to recall that she writes these passages not as a thirty-nine year old successful author and public intellectual but as an eighteen year old philosophy student.

²¹² DPS 298, CJ 390.

²¹³ Helene de Beauvoir.

²¹⁴ TSSI 642 – 670, DSII 477 – 507. Note that throughout this text references are made to both the Parshley translation (TSS1) and to the Borde and Malovany-Chevallier translation (TSS2) of *The Second Sex*. The choice of translation employed is based on which best reflects the original text and meaning in the work.

The timing of the writing of these journals makes for important points of comparison. In 1929 while Virginia Woolf was writing *A Room of One's Own*, Beauvoir was living in just such a room.²¹⁵ While studying for the *agrégation*, she rooms at her grandmother's house and for the first time has the freedom to come and go as she wishes, has the freedom to read what she likes, and to write what she thinks. For the first time, she knows something of independence. Keeping this in mind, if, at times she seems frivolous, it is perhaps understandable. And while she is no doubt infatuated with Jacques, while she is no doubt tempted to be the woman that her mother wants her to be – to marry Jacques and settle down²¹⁶ – it does not mean that she does not bring to her experience of love, at least on the page, a kind of criticality and seriousness. Already in these writings, Beauvoir takes as her subject matter for philosophical reflection “lived experience.” This focus of attention would sharpen over time informing and developing in and through her novels, essays and studies.

Of particular interest in these journals is her recognition of the dual nature of love. She desires to unite with the other – whether it is in friendship, passionate love or in service (generosity). As she notes, “To love is to identify with the object that one loves; it is to want oneself in the other.”²¹⁷ That is, it is to be founded upon “absolute reciprocity and the identity of consciousness.”²¹⁸ Indeed she notes how “Once I love, I probably desire to be loved. And to found a true love, this reciprocity is necessary.”²¹⁹ And it is the source of comfort, continuity and connection.

²¹⁵ PL 11 -12, FA 16.

²¹⁶ Interestingly, Beauvoir does not address these issues in *Memoirs of A Dutiful Daughter*. Discussions of love – her philosophical interest in the issue as well as her lived experience are limited. She does not reveal the depth of her affect, indeed, her infatuation with Jacques but rather couches it as nothing more than a schoolgirl crush. Nor, interestingly does she include any reference to the religious issues that she reflects on in this work.

²¹⁷ DPS 261, CJ 347.

²¹⁸ DPS 185, CJ 198. Beauvoir gives no direct source for this quotation that she had transcribed into her diary. Clearly this is reference to Hegel's notion of freedom – to his claim that for self-conscious to be free necessitates that he grant to the other his freedom as well. Klaw in her notes to this passage suggests that this may be a reference to Hegel's account of freedom in *Philosophy of Mind*, translated by William Wallace, 431, 532.

²¹⁹ DPS 266, CJ 352.

She realizes that love is more complicated than this, however. “I speak mystically of love; I know its price. But I know also that it does not put an end to my solitude. Besides, it is not made for that.”²²⁰ In this passage she realizes the limitations, indeed, the dangers of love, dangers which she sees as involving

. . . the abandonment of all of oneself that is a simple cowardice because a being is never an end, because evidently duty is all the same above love, and because duty forbids the alienation of one’s liberty.” . . . Nor would I like a being who would always be superior to his love, because it would be proof that his passion is not great enough if it never overwhelms him.²²¹

She worries that she will “be subsumed by others in/through love” or alternatively that she will come to subsume them, as she willingly confesses she loves “others only inasmuch as they are me.”²²² Love, she worries, is simply a disguise for egoism – a faint attempt to shroud the desire to dominate with the language of romance and care.

What holds true for romantic love is true as well of friendship and service to others. Love in these guises can lead to harmony or it can lead to conflict. She notes this of her own relationships with Zaza and Poupette. She loves them yet she recognizes her desire to dominate them. And she realizes the threat they pose to her. “One abdicates the self attempting to serve others.”²²³ However, the more one serves the other “the more the other comes to seem incapable of acting for himself.”²²⁴ She acknowledges, as such, that there is fine line that exists between care and conflict, between power and passion, between love and labour. “(W)hat then is love? Not much; not much; I come back to this

²²⁰ DPS 256, CJ 342.

²²¹ DPS 77, CJ 73.

²²² DPS 285, CJ 374.

²²³ As cited by Simons, 1999, 223.

²²⁴ Ibid.

idea. Sensitivity, imagination, fatigue, and this effort to depend on another; the taste for the mystery of the other and the need to admire; wonderment,”²²⁵ she concludes.

In thus describing her experiences of love, Beauvoir is led to an important conclusion. She notes that as a result of this intermingling of selves – of affection, thought and desire – the lines that distinguish self from other blur. Reliance results in the other coming to reside not only within the world but also within the self such that she is at one and the same time, self and other. This point is made clear when, in describing memory, she notes that

I would like to understand how I can isolate myself thus from my dearest memories and my closest desires – I often experienced that already: some mild afternoon, some moving conversation, I attribute them to another ... They issue from fiction. I cannot immerse myself in them: they are not my memories.²²⁶

It is significant that in this passage Beauvoir not only recognizes that the other lies not only within the world but within the self, but that Beauvoir as well characterizes the self in terms of a fiction, more specifically, as the product of self-creation.

Rejecting the Cartesian conception of the self, Beauvoir abandons the idea that the self is to be found, discovered or uncovered. Relying on the many eyes of others, on the images of the self that they reflect, the self is created by the other, and then re-created by the individual yet again. Beauvoir claims, “I will construct my life. I will take myself as an end.”²²⁷ Further, she goes on to note that it is “only by free decision and thanks to the play of circumstances that the true self is revealed.”²²⁸ The self or self-consciousness thus is always in the process of self-creation.²²⁹ There is no self but only the becoming of the self in relation to others, and to the past. In works written from her ‘moral period’

²²⁵ DPS 249, CJ 333.

²²⁶ DPS 207, CJ 11.

²²⁷ DPS 24, CJ 62.

²²⁸ DPS 195, CJ 35.

²²⁹ This theme is picked up and expanded on by Beauvoir in her last writings, particularly in her autobiographical works. See Chapter Six of this study for a discussion of her later development of the idea of becoming as self-creation.

onward, one of Beauvoir's primary goals would be to outline what kind of self should be create in this process – turning from considerations of ontology to reflections on ethics.

3.5 Self and Others

*“Since beginning to live . . .”*²³⁰

- *Beauvoir*

In her 1927 diary Beauvoir writes,

I must clearly spell out my philosophical ideas, and maybe I will begin the narrative that I would like to write. So many ideas that have matured with my meditations and become more precise through my conversations. I should take stock of my eighteen months of thought, reassess and go more deeply into problems that enticed me, to which I gave overly hasty solutions. The theme is almost always this opposition of self and other that I have felt since beginning to live. Now has come this time to make a synthesis of it. Foreign influences are remote, and also the desire for affectation in writing. I will write my work in my own style seeking only to express well what I feel.²³¹

Beauvoir begins this passage noting that relations between self and other are grounded in opposition. She notes that there is at the heart of all relationships this desire to dominate the other.²³² And, she speaks of this desire even with regard to those she cared for – with respect to Jacques, Zaza and Poupette. That is, she acknowledges that, even in those relationships most important to us, there is always conflict. But conflict is not the only element defining our relations with others. There is opposition but also there is the possibility of a synthesis of self and other. But in order to capture

²³⁰ DPS 279, CJ 367.

²³¹ DPS 279 with my own modifications to the translation. “Il faut que je mette au net mes idée philosophiques et peut-être que je commence ce récit que j’aimerais écrire. Tant d’idées qu’ont mûries mes meditations et précisées mes conversations. De mes dix-huit mois de pensée je devrais faire le recensement, reprendre et approfondir les problèmes qui m’ont sollicitée, auxquels j’ai donné de trop hâtives solutions. Le theme est Presque toujours cette opposition de moi et l’autre qu j’ai sentie en commençant de vivre. Maintenant est venu le temps d’en faire une synthèse. Les influences étrangères sont écartées, et ausisi le désir de toute recherché d’écriture. J’écrirai mon oeuvre dans mon proper sytle en cherchant seulement à bien exprimer ce que je sens.” CJ 367.

²³² Simons, 1999, 220 – 221.

these two moments on the page, she would turn from her personal reflections to develop a new form of writing in order to find a medium adequate for recounting and enacting this synthesis.

As has been seen, even in her earliest writings, Beauvoir not only undertakes to revise the form and function of the diary, she as well rethinks how philosophy is written. She makes clear that she will write neither fiction nor non-fiction but will develop a hybrid. More specifically, she states that she will “Write ‘essays (*essais*) on life’ that would not be novelistic, but rather philosophical, by linking together both passion and reason vaguely with a fiction,”²³³ with the goal of seeking “to find the truth, not to express or to describe the search for truth.”²³⁴ The influence of Bergson is evidenced herein again. Reflecting on his writing, she notes that since

. . . one cannot say everything, it is imperative that the written sentences, the signposts, force readers to fill up the pages as they themselves have been filled up. When one composes a scene (I am thinking of Balzac), one sees it first inwardly and then one translates one’s vision on paper. The translation must be such that the reading recomposes the vision exactly as the author conceived the author.²³⁵

It is in fiction that she finds the beginnings of an ontology that would allow for her to explain the complicated and often contradictory lived experience of her relationships. That is, it is here in the fiction that she would find the foundation for her resolution to the problem of self and other, though it remained unrecognized and unwritten for the next 50 years of her life. Already in these early works, reflections on the problem of the other’s consciousness led her to considerations of writing and of reading.

While Beauvoir was yet to develop the philosophical sophistication and knowledge to ground her ideas, she nonetheless in these early writings intimates what will be her conclusion to this

²³³ DPS 215, CJ 54-55.

²³⁴ DPS 258, CJ 344.

²³⁵ DPS 87, CJ 87.

problem. In these entries, she grounds her faith in reading and writing. Reflecting on Bergson's discussion of literature she notes how

Words, in books, that strike you and that are retained from the first reading on. One does not understand them, but one knows that they are rich with possibility and indeed, for a long while after sometimes, when we take a run at the mood (*état d'âme*) that the author was in and that he condensed in a short sentence, this short sentence appears immense and a great sympathy (in the etymological sense) unites you to its author. I conclude from this that when one writes, one must not seek to be understood right away; the first tendency is to want to say everything; but as Cocteau says, what is interesting is what one reads between the lines.²³⁶

Fiction that is successful "leaves blank pages" that the reader uses to reconstruct the vision of the author, thus reversing the author's act of creation/communication.²³⁷ In one and the same moment, for both the author and for the reader, the two sides of the self are brought together. The reader is object but also subject both reading and writing in the same act. The author is subject for she actively constructs the words on the page yet, simultaneously in committing her experience onto the page she transforms herself into an object.²³⁸

Discussing reading and writing, Beauvoir provides an account of empathy that explains the kind of emotion that facilitates love and friendship. As Beauvoir goes on to note, to have empathy for another is to "love them and rejoice in their differences from me, but without desiring to be such as they are."²³⁹ It entails the recognition of another consciousness as both self and other. Beauvoir is cognizant of the fact that experiences of love and friendship grounded in our ability to empathize, overcome the gap between self and the other, while recognizing that such relations are double-edged.

²³⁶ DPS 87, CJ 86.

²³⁷ DPS 87, CJ 88.

²³⁸ Remarkably this account of writing is endorsed anew in Beauvoir's last works, with a recognition that, as Proust had recognized, "literature is the true site of intersubjectivity." See "My Experience as a Writer" in LW 296 translated from "Mon expérience d'écrivain" in LE 456.

²³⁹ See Simons, 1999, 221.

And she recognizes here in her earliest works, that much can be learned from the experience of literature in attempts to understand this relationship.

This kind of hybrid of philosophy and fiction, Merleau-Ponty labels the “metaphysical novel.”²⁴⁰ Such writing is premised on the recognition that

The tasks of literature and philosophy can no longer be separated. When one is concerned with giving voice to the experience of the world and showing how consciousness escapes into the world, one can no longer credit oneself with attaining a perfect transparence of expression. Philosophical expression assumes the same ambiguities as literary expression, if the world is such that it cannot be expressed except in stories, and as it were, pointed at.²⁴¹

As Simons describes it, the metaphysical novel “is able to disclose the reality of human experience in its opacity, ambiguity and temporality, which is not possible in an abstract essay.”²⁴²

Literature is a site where life and thought merge for Beauvoir. Novels allow the reader to encounter the ambiguities, contradictions and difficulties of lived experience without attempt to resolve or settle the disagreements. It provided an opportunity to reflect on lived experience, revealing/disclosing/unveiling what is universal therein, not via explication but rather through elucidation.

This new kind of fiction provides Beauvoir with a means for writing lived experience. In “Mon expérience d’écrivain” she writes how

If I want to render the lived aspect of an experience, with its ambiguity and contradictions, with this inexpressible side requiring the creation of a literary work which must close again on silence, then of course, I write in a completely different way. I take care to emphasize these ambiguities, nuances and contradictions which are the very reason for my book, which lead me to compose not an essay but a literary work which must close again on silence. To try to render this ‘lived sense of being-in-the-world of which Sartre spoke,

²⁴⁰ Merleau-Ponty, 1964.

²⁴¹ Merleau-Ponty, 1964, 28.

²⁴² Simons in PE, 8.

I have resorted, on the whole, to two different forms; first, the novel, then autobiography.²⁴³

She uses a particular story or a particular character in that story, to reveal what is universal. As such, for her the novel was more real than any sociological study could ever be.

In turning towards the novel, in being a writer, Beauvoir was turning towards the philosophy of life -- towards life not towards the development of systems. The novel allowed her to grasp and grapple with the realities of our lives. To use D.H. Lawrence's terms, the novel allowed her to describe "man alive,"²⁴⁴ to capture "the whole" complete with its "incongruous parts."²⁴⁵ In literature, the ambiguities of life could be revealed as the reader was provided not with explanations but rather elucidations. Indeed, this link between philosophy and fiction in which "lived experience could be described and phenomenological descriptions given"²⁴⁶ would become one of the hallmarks of French phenomenology. Beauvoir's contribution to its development and to its enactment has, however, often been underestimated or overlooked, as her contribution more generally to the development of French philosophy.

3.6 Philosophy and Literature

*"the great philosophers are Descartes, Hegel, etc. Sartre, in my opinion, will be among them. But not I."*²⁴⁷

- *Beauvoir*

Beauvoir herself encouraged the downplaying of her philosophical contributions claiming that she was not a philosopher but a writer.²⁴⁸ And scholars readily followed suit. It is often forgotten that Beauvoir came in second in the national exam in philosophy for École Supérieure in 1928, placing just behind Simone Weil and in front of Merleau-Ponty, and the following year was granted second in

²⁴³ LW 233, LE 442.

²⁴⁴ Lawrence, 1993, 2147.

²⁴⁵ Lawrence, 1993, 2148.

²⁴⁶ Lundgren-Gothlin, 1996, 133.

²⁴⁷ Simons, 1999, 11.

²⁴⁸ Simons, 1999, 10.

her aggregation in a controversial decision that gave Sartre first place²⁴⁹. That Beauvoir encouraged, at best, such forgetfulness and at worst, the denigration of her academic accomplishments is perplexing. Was Beauvoir simply being modest? Was this an example of her playing the role of a Sartreuse? Was she bowing to the social conventions of her time?

A common response to Beauvoir's claim to be a writer and not a philosopher is to consider this to be a lie that Beauvoir told in order to allow herself the necessary freedom to think and write as she wished.²⁵⁰ Those who advocate this interpretation of Beauvoir's self-description emphasize the context in which she wrote. As a woman writer, Beauvoir would be granted greater social acceptance than as a woman philosopher. A woman writer in the 1930s and 40s, would not have been considered an anomaly. She would find a place within a tradition that included other great French women of letters including George Sand²⁵¹ and Madame de Stael.²⁵²

Given this precedence, commentators including Fullbrook and Fullbrook have suggested that Beauvoir's claim to be a writer rather than a philosopher was a strategic decision on her part.²⁵³ To be considered a woman writer in France would allow her greater freedom to work and to publish than she would be granted if she characterized herself otherwise. Indeed, even her fiction was carefully scrutinized. The introductory chapters of *She Came to Stay* were not published for the depiction of female masturbation found therein was deemed to be too explicit.²⁵⁴

If she were to be challenged as a woman writer, as a woman philosopher, she would be all the more suspect. Who would take her seriously? Beauvoir was only the sixth woman in French history to

²⁴⁹ Bair, 1990, 145 – 146.

²⁵⁰ Moi, 1994; Bair 1990. For a more detailed discussion of this issue see Gothlin, 2001, 42.

²⁵¹ Beauvoir admired George Sand for not only pursuing political issues, in particular the liberation of women and improving the living conditions of the working class, but who as well Beauvoir with a model of someone who attempted to achieve philosophical and political goals through literature. See Francis and Gontier, 1987, 33d.

²⁵² See Moi, 1994, 272.

²⁵³ See Fullbrook and Fullbrook, 1998.

²⁵⁴ These chapters can be found in PW 31, LE 275.

receive her aggregation in philosophy. Her predecessors in the field are unknown in the history of philosophy. There is, of course, Madame Mercier, Beauvoir's own teacher, who was an important influence on Beauvoir's choice of pursuing a career in philosophy. But Madame Mercier taught philosophy in a girls' lycée²⁵⁵. Rather than being ignored as a philosopher, Beauvoir characterized herself as a writer in order to secure a path to publication.

While there is certainly much merit in considering the social context in which Beauvoir lived in order to explain not only what she wrote, but how she wrote²⁵⁶, to focus solely on this explanation would be to overlook her philosophical commitments. For her to disallow herself to be a philosopher out of fear of retribution or of being ostracized is inconsistent with her head-on confrontation with many other conventions of her time. Her decision to study philosophy in the 1920s, her unconventional relationship with Sartre in the 1930s, and her discussion of the role of women in 1949, all make evident the need to recognize that there were other motives informing this claim. Moreover, in her diaries she herself notes that it is her goal to "make a philosopher" out of herself.²⁵⁷

To gain a better understanding of Beauvoir's claim to be a writer not a philosopher, it is necessary to look at her account of philosophy. In other words, it is necessary to regard Beauvoir's claim to not be a philosopher as a critique of a particular philosophical tradition. Beauvoir notes that

A philosopher is someone like Spinoza, Hegel or like Sartre: someone who builds a great system, and not simply someone who loves philosophy, or can teach it, who can understand it, and who can use it in says, etc., but it is someone who truly constructs a philosophy.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁵ Indeed Beauvoir herself would be the first woman allowed to teach in a boys' lycée. She was appointed to Henri IV in 1939.

²⁵⁶ That is, the means and the methods she employed.

²⁵⁷ DPS 289, CJ 379.

²⁵⁸ Simons, 1999, 11.

Such system building she describes as “a concerted delirium” that required philosophers to give their “insights the value of universal keys.”²⁵⁹ She has no interest in building such systems. She rejects that model of philosophy that focused on abstract discussion of esoteric topics of interest only to other philosophers. She makes clear that she is not going to create any kind of philosophical system. It is not that such systemizing had no role or place in academe. Indeed, Beauvoir admires those she classifies as philosophers in this case. However while there is a place and role for such philosophizing, she notes it need not be the whole of the intellectual tradition. She will opt for a different project. She will “use philosophy.”²⁶⁰

For Beauvoir, philosophy should be neither abstruse nor arcane. To philosophize was to embed oneself in the world, in its contexts and confusions, not for the purpose of the explanation or the vilification of precepts or concepts but rather for the elucidation of the complexities and challenges of lived experience. Perhaps nowhere did she better achieve this goal, than in her first novel, *She Came to Stay*.

3.7 *She Came to Stay*

“Every consciousness seeks the death of the other”²⁶¹

- Hegel

None of Beauvoir’s novels has received as much attention and careful study as her first published fiction, *She Came to Stay*.²⁶² In part due to the controversy surrounding the intellectual relationship between Sartre and Beauvoir, and in part a result of the surprising conclusion, this novel has garnered significant attention from those interested in Beauvoir’s work from both a historical and philosophical perspective.

²⁵⁹ As cited by Simons, in DPS 5. (FA 254)

²⁶⁰ Simons, 1999, 11.

²⁶¹ This epigraph from *She Came to Stay* comes from Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*. (PS, §187, 113).

²⁶² See for example, Fallaize, 1988, 25 – 43; Fullbrook and Fullbrook, 1994, 98-111; Holveck, 67 – 90; Shepherd, 2004, 77 – 100.

Literature, according to Beauvoir, 'is born when something in life goes slightly adrift.'²⁶³ Perhaps this is true of none of her novels more than *She Came to Stay*. Based upon Beauvoir's own relationship with Sartre and Olga Kosakiewicz, this work can be read as her first foray in writing the kind of philosophical novel she had envisioned in her student diaries. More specifically, it is an exploration of the logic of self and other in the context of friendship and love, an introduction, as such, to what will become "her" problem.

The novel centers on its main character, Françoise, a successful playwright and promising novelist, who, at the beginning of the novel, befriends Xavière, a young girl from Rouen. Agreeing to be her patron and friend, she provides Xavière the opportunity to remain in Paris instead of returning home to her family and a future with few opportunities. What ensues is a study of both a figurative and literal battle to the death between these two women, these two consciousnesses, as they become caught up in a love triangle with Françoise's long time partner Pierre.²⁶⁴

From the opening pages of the novel, Françoise is portrayed as a solipsist – that is as a singular consciousness, as the singular consciousness in her world. She notes how

Her presence snatched things from their consciousnesses . . . gave them their colour, their smell . . . She alone evoked the significance of these abandoned places, of these slumbering things. She was there and they belonged to her. The world belonged to her.²⁶⁵

²⁶³ PL 365, FA 374.

²⁶⁴ Problems with translation plague the English version of this text. In the key scene in the novel, Françoise sees Xavière as another "conscience." As noted by Simons (2004, 5) this term has been translated literally from French overlooking that the word conscience can be translated as either "conscience" or "consciousness." As such, her problem is translated as an individual issue when it was deemed by Beauvoir to be a social problem. Herein the Hegelian underpinnings of this work and other works in which this confusion has been made, has been re-established. In the context of the present discussion of *She Came To Stay*, Beauvoir's original and intended meaning is restored to this text.

²⁶⁵ SCS 1, LI 10. An alternative translation is offered in the 199 Norton edition of this text. Herein, this passage reads. "Her presence revived things from their inanimateness; she gave them their colour, their smell . . . she

Françoise experiences the world as coming into being with herself. “I feel like the things that do not exist for me, simply do not exist at all,” she tells Gerbert.²⁶⁶ This is true for not only objects but, as well, for people. She looks at the faces of the men and women and notes that, “if I turned away from them, they would disintegrate at once into a deserted landscape.”²⁶⁷ Having taken a young friend “in hand,”²⁶⁸ be it Gerbert, or Ines, or Canzetti, or Xavière, they then belong to her. Nothing ever gave Françoise such intense joy as this kind of possession.²⁶⁹ This possession, or perhaps, better yet, this domination, is all-encompassing. She possesses them completely “possessing her even in her past and in the still unknown meanderings of her future.”²⁷⁰

As noted by Merleau-Ponty, for Françoise “nothing can claim to exist without somehow being caught in the web of my experience. I am not this particular person or face, this finite being: I am a pure witness, placeless, ageless, equal in power to the world’s infinity.”²⁷¹ She is pure consciousness and as such rejects anything that would limit that would limit her, including her own body.²⁷² Françoise is the subject and everything, everyone else is an object which lives but which does not necessarily exist.²⁷³ Xavière is her pawn or her plaything, Elisabeth her foil,²⁷⁴ Gilbert her physical satisfaction. As she sees it, Françoise cannot allow another person, another consciousness to

alone released the meaning of these abandoned places, of these slumbering things. She was there and they belonged to her. The world belonged to her.” SCS2 1, LI 10.

²⁶⁶ SCS 6, LI 14.

²⁶⁷ SCS 29, LI 29.

²⁶⁸ SCS 15, LI 23.

²⁶⁹ SCS 11, LI 19.

²⁷⁰ SCS 26, LI 34.

²⁷¹ Merleau-Ponty, 1964, 28.

²⁷² Perhaps this best explains Françoise’s claim that “most of the time, she was not even aware that she had a face.” SCS 13, LI 21. To have a face, to have a body would give to her existence a kind of immanence that she both desires, knowing that it is a condition for the possibility of identity, and abhors, for it limits her freedom.

²⁷³ This is an important distinction made by Hegel and later picked up by both Beauvoir and Sartre. To live is to exist only at the level of consciousness, that is, it is to exist as an object in a world of objects. On the other hand, to exist is to choose one’s way of living in the world. One chooses, one creates and as such, one demonstrates that one is a subject and not just an object. One as such exists. For more on this distinction in Beauvoir’s work see Spelman, 1990, 57 - 79.

²⁷⁴ She sees as her antithesis Elisabeth who cannot create herself but rather can find herself only in the images of herself provided by others.

exist, for to grant them this status would be to risk the possibility that she could be considered an object.

That this is the case is made ever more evident by Beauvoir through her decision to make Françoise a script-writer, a decision that has gone under appreciated in commentaries on this work. Françoise, mirroring Beauvoir, is the writer at the theater— she gives to them their lines and their scenes, their stories. They are the actors on the stage she has created, rehearsing the lines she has written for them, acting out the scenes she has constructed.²⁷⁵ How better could Beauvoir construct a solipsist?

Given this role, given this perspective she takes on life, what worries Françoise despite her claim to the contrary, “is other people.”²⁷⁶ For her,

It’s almost impossible to believe that other people are conscious beings, aware of their own inward feelings, as we ourselves are aware of ours (*qui se sentent du dedans comme on se sent soi-meme*). .. To me it’s terrifying when we grasp that. We get the impression of no longer being anything but a figment of someone else’s mind. But that hardly ever happens, and never completely.²⁷⁷

Across the pages of the novel, Françoise’s optimism that this “hardly ever happens,” is undermined and slowly erodes as she is forced to discover that there exists other consciousnesses and that far from being able to subsume or annihilate them, she is instead always already caught up with them in “a battle to the death.”

²⁷⁵ See SCS 11, LI 19; SCS 24, LI 32; SCS 113, LI 115; SCS 120, LI 122. Readings of this novel have tended to overlook or underestimate the significance of Françoise being a playwright and the theatre being cast as the backdrop for this novel.

²⁷⁶ SCS 6, LI 14.

²⁷⁷ SCS 7, LI 14 -15. The alternative translation offered up of this passage in the 1990 translation reads as follows: “It is almost impossible to believe that other people are conscious beings, aware of their own inward feelings, as we ourselves are aware of ours . . . To me it’s terrifying, especially when you begin to feel that you’re nothing more than a figment of someone else’s mind. But that hardly ever happens, and never completely.” SCS2 16.

The oppositional account of the relationship between self and other referred to in her student diaries is given context and given play in this novel. Françoise is the self or she is an object. There is no alternative, no means for her being both at the same time, that is, of embodying what she would later discuss as ambiguity. She is a self alone or she becomes “just anyone . . . just anything.”²⁷⁸

It is from within this logic, the logic of self versus other, that it is necessary to consider Françoise relationships, her experiences of friendship and love. Indeed, keeping this in mind helps perhaps to explain some of the more perplexing elements of the structure and content of this novel. It helps to explain, for example, Beauvoir’s characterization of Pierre.

Beauvoir herself noted that Pierre was never given a voice in this work. Writing in limited third person, she shifts the perspective from which the sections of the book are written from Françoise to Xavière and even to Elisabeth and Gerbert.²⁷⁹ It is remarkable as such, that the reader is never given access to Pierre’s thoughts, to his view of the characters in the book especially since so much of the action in the book revolves around him. Why this exclusion?

While Beauvoir considered her portrayal of Pierre a failure for he lacked what she characterizes as a three-dimensional quality,²⁸⁰ read as a study of the problem of the other’s consciousness, perhaps her approach to Pierre is more consistent with the logic of the novel than she acknowledged. He is characterized at various points in the text as an actor, a ghost²⁸¹ and even, as God.²⁸² He is ephemeral, never quite becoming fully realized on the page, fully human.

²⁷⁸ SCS 180, LI 187.

²⁷⁹ This would be the only novel that Beauvoir would write in the third person – hereafter, her works would all be written as first person narratives. Yet neither does she adopt an omniscient third person stance either – rejecting, along with Hemingway, one of her most revered writers, the use of objective description in her work. See PL 344, FA 353.

²⁸⁰ PL 342, FA 350.

²⁸¹ SCS , 288-289, LI 298.

²⁸² SCS 260, LI 269; SCS 300, LI 309; SCS 308, LI 317.

That is, Pierre is never cast as an individual, as a subject with a voice. To understand why this must be the case within the logic of the novel, it is necessary to consider the account of love set forward by Françoise and Pierre in the early pages of this work. Pierre tells Françoise early on in the novel that, “You and I are simply one. It is true you know. Neither of us can be defined without the other.”²⁸³ Françoise shares Pierre’s conviction noting how, “Nothing that happened was completely real until she had told Pierre about it; it remained poised, motionless and uncertain, in a kind of limbo.”²⁸⁴ Indeed, the oneness achieved in this relationship is such that Xavière notes that she is never sure with whom she is speaking, Françoise or Pierre.

This recognition is key to understanding Beauvoir's construction of this character for it explains why Pierre need not have, indeed, why he cannot have a voice of his own. His words and thoughts, never take over the narrative and his lines and actions seem stiff – planned or scripted – acted, as it were. He cannot have an independent existence – cannot have that “true to life” quality that Beauvoir seeks for him, as he is nothing but an appendage to Françoise – her other part, her other self – herself. He and Françoise are not two: they are one.

This interpretation of the characterization of Pierre offered up by Beauvoir conditions the need to carefully rethink received readings of the text. At first seeming to be an example of reciprocity, or, perhaps more accurately, as an example of the possibility of reciprocity, this relationship, is revealed across the course of the novel to be yet another example, a remarkably subtle example, of the opposition of self and other. Being one, the conditions for the possibility of reciprocation are not met. Pierre is not a separate consciousness. Rather, he is yet another reflection of Françoise as is Xavière, Elisabeth, and Gerbert – yet another one of her possessions. As such, their relationship cannot be, could never be, an example of reciprocity. There is no other consciousness

²⁸³ SCS 17, LI 25.

²⁸⁴ SCS 17. LI 25.

with which to enter into such a relationship. Pierre is subsumed by and into Françoise. Hence, this is an example of domination not a portrait of reconciliation.

There is a growing awareness of this reality by Françoise as the oneness of their love slowly dispels across the novel. Françoise comes to see that her claim to be “but one” with Pierre was simply a convenient illusion, a “convenient confusion.”²⁸⁵ She comes to see that they were, they always were “two separate persons ... she was aware that he lived his own life, and the result of her blind trust was that she suddenly found herself facing a stranger.”²⁸⁶ Pierre “lived only for himself.”²⁸⁷ Love was merely a disguise. It was yet another means used to transform the other into an object. The reciprocity that Pierre claims once existed between himself and Françoise, the give and take between them premised on the belief that “the moment you acknowledge my conscience, you know that I acknowledge one in you, too” is undermined by the inability or perhaps unwillingness of both parties to renounce individual self-importance. The implication for this recognition is great. Romantic love and friendship become “impossible.”²⁸⁸ And, for Françoise, it means that someone would have to kill Xavière.²⁸⁹ To understand how Françoise arrives at this conclusion, it is necessary to consider the risk she takes in attempting to subjugate Xavière and consider the price she pays when she fails at this project.

When the novel opens, Françoise is clear that, for her, Xavière is a new conquest, a new opportunity to exercise her ability to dominate, to possess another. That is, she provides a new opponent against which to wage a battle to the death – a battle to establish her own subjectivity. She undoubtedly believes that this will be an easy victory. But unlike Elisabeth and Gerbert, Xavière does not readily or willingly capitulate.

²⁸⁵ SCS, 131, LI 138.

²⁸⁶ SCS, 131, LI 138.

²⁸⁷ SCS 154, LI 161.

²⁸⁸ SCS 302 -303, LI 312.

²⁸⁹ SCS 303, LI 312.

Xavière represents for Françoise a challenge to her dominance over the world and more importantly, over herself. Xavière will not conform to Françoise's image of her no matter how she tries. Françoise treats her with tenderness and with anger. She asks others to intervene, and, yet regardless of the strategy she employs, she cannot render Xavière an object. And as she works to get Xavière to succumb, increasingly she becomes aware that she is losing her self – that she is losing the ability to create and act on her own wishes. Becoming increasingly aware that Xavière exists, that she exists on her own terms, for herself, Françoise finds herself coming under the sway of Xavière's "gentle tyranny."²⁹⁰

The slow erosion of Françoise's subjectivity is traced across the novel. She is "transformed," to use Beauvoir's term,²⁹¹ from a subject into an object. That this is the case is clear from a consideration of Beauvoir's use of mechanical imagery. Françoise acknowledges that, "she did treat Xavière rather like a piece of machinery, but at least she handled the delicate mechanism with the greatest of care."²⁹² However, as the novel progresses it is Françoise who takes on a mechanical quality. "She felt herself turning into a lump of lead from head to foot."²⁹³ After recognizing that she can never truly trust Xavière, that is, having recognized that it "was impossible to give herself up unreservedly to this friendship; she had a peculiar taste in her mouth, the taste of metal shaving."²⁹⁴ The significance of this small beginning to Françoise's transformation is made clear later in the novel as she watches Paula perform a dance as a mechanical person. Françoise wonders what it is to be considered and to consider oneself to have nothing but "motions of steel" – to be part of a machine – a cog in a wheel, as it were, acted upon and acting not based on one's own free will but rather as a simple consequences of other machinations beyond her control. Indeed, she will experience what this

²⁹⁰ SCS 133, LI 140.

²⁹¹ PL 338, FA 347.

²⁹² SCS 90, LI 97.

²⁹³ SCS 102, LI 109.

²⁹⁴ SCS 141, LI 144.

means, how this feels when through the course of the novel she recognizes that she had “lost all control over her body and her thoughts kept eluding her. She was an old, broken down machine.”²⁹⁵ Throughout these passages Françoise is transformed from a subject into an object, from a self to an other.

Beauvoir incorporates into the text a second analogy to further make evident the subtle means by which a subject is transformed into an object.²⁹⁶ She considers what it must be like to be a jacket:

It (her old jacket) was old and worn but it could not complain as Françoise complained when she was hurt; it could not say to itself, “I’m an old worn jacket.” It was strange, Françoise tried to imagine what it might be like if she were unable to say ‘I’m Françoise, I’m six years old, and I’m in Grandma’s house.’ Supposing she could say absolutely nothing: she closed her eyes. It was as if she did not exist at all; and yet other people would be coming here and see her and would talk about her. She opened her eyes again; she could see the jacket, it existed. Yet it was not aware of it exists. There was something disturbing, a little frightening, in all of this. What was the use of existing if it couldn’t be aware of its existence? She thought it over: perhaps there was a way. “Since I can’t say ‘I’, what would happen if I said it for the jacket?” It was very disappointing; she could look at the jacket, see absolutely nothing but the jacket and say very quickly, “I’m old, I’m worn; “ but nothing happened. The jacket stayed there, indifferent, a complete stranger, and she was still Françoise. Besides if she became the jacket, then she Françoise, would never know it. Everything began spinning in her head and she ran downstairs and into the garden.²⁹⁷

Herein, Beauvoir provides her readers with a poignant account of the experience of being an object.

As noted by Simons, in so doing, she explores the phenomenon both from the external and the internal perspective, offering perhaps her clearest homage to Bergson’s philosophy.²⁹⁸ It is an account

²⁹⁵ SCS 349, LI 360.

²⁹⁶ This passage was drawn from the original two chapters of this novel that were excluded from the published version of this novel by Gallimard. See this passage for a more detailed description of the parallels being drawn herein. PE 41, LE 275.

²⁹⁷ SCS 120, LI 122.

²⁹⁸ Simons, 203, 121.

not only of what it is to have others look at an object but as well to begin to think of oneself only in these terms.

Despite her knowledge of the risks at hand, Françoise wages a battle with Xavière. And she loses. Consider the parallels between her description of the jacket in the passage above and her account of her moment of recognition when she realized Xavière had usurped her subjectivity and made her nothing more than an object – an old and worn object – in the passage below:

For many weeks Françoise had no longer been able to dissolve Xavière's hatred, her affection, her thoughts, to harmless vapours. She had let them bite into her; she had turned herself into a prey. Freely, through her moments of resistance and revolt, she had made use of herself to destroy herself. She was witnessing the course of her own life like an indifferent spectator, without ever daring to assert herself, whereas Xavière, from head to foot, was nothing but a living assertion of herself. She made herself exist with so sure a power, that Françoise, spellbound, had allowed herself to be carried away so far as to prefer Xavière to herself, and thus to obliterate herself. She had gone so far as to be seeing places, people, and Pierre's smiles, through Xavière's eyes. She had reached the point of no longer knowing herself, except through Xavière's feelings for her, and now she was trying to merge into Xavière. But in this hopeless effort she was only succeeding in destroying herself.²⁹⁹

Xavière's attempt to take back her own subjectivity and in so doing, to render Françoise an object, culminates in the scene in the novel at the Spanish bar. Experiencing Pierre's jealousy while simultaneously feeling jealous of Françoise, Xavière takes up her own hand and "pressed the lighted end (of her cigarette) against her skin, a bitter smile curling her lips"³⁰⁰. Beauvoir, in this instance, demonstrates Xavière's refusal to play the role that Pierre and Françoise have assigned her --- she refuses to be their pet, their object of affection. In this moment, not allowing another to take up her hand but taking it up herself and burning herself, she asserts, she announces her own subjectivity. In a choice between fidelity and freedom, Xavière chooses freedom and in so doing wins her subjectivity.

²⁹⁹ SCS 292 – 293, LI 302.

³⁰⁰ SCS 283, LI 293.

Having risked everything in this battle to the death, she becomes something of what Beauvoir will later discover is a Hegelian master. And Françoise is transformed into a slave. For, it is in this moment Françoise realizes that while “For a long time Xavière had been only a fragment of Françoise’s life, . . . suddenly she had become the only sovereign reality, and Françoise had no more than the pale consistency of an image.”³⁰¹

Beauvoir’s careful construction of this novel reveals upon study that this scene -- the man and the woman at the table in the bar or the cafe – and the decisions to be made, decisions simultaneously known and unknown, about desire and subjectivity, is played out repeatedly as the novel moves towards this climax. Earlier in the novel there is a scene in which a blond girl and a very young man are tenderly holding hands but she does not seem to notice it,³⁰² a young woman looks at a man’s hand that has “just pounced on hers,”³⁰³ a woman who “coquettishly fingers her black hair which is hidden in a hair net as she tells the young man that she is with that “nobody has ever seen my hair. It belongs only to me.”³⁰⁴ In each of these scenes the simple act of hand holding conditions an existential crisis in which the woman struggles to see herself as both facticity and transcendence – that is, she struggles to accept her own ambiguity. Rather than acknowledge that she is body and

³⁰¹ My translation. The 1964 translation of this passage reads “For a long time Xavière had been only a fragment of Françoise’s life, and suddenly she had become the only sovereign reality, and Françoise now possess no more than the colourless contours of a reflection. “ (SCS 292) An alternative translation offered in the 1990 edition of the text reads “For a long time Xavière had been only a fragment of Françoise’s life, and suddenly she had become the only sovereign reality and Françoise had no more consistency than a pale reflection. “ (SCS2 291) These are differing translations of the original “Longtemps, Xavière n’avait été qu’un fragment de la vie de Françoise: elle était soudain devenue l’unique réalité souverain et Françoise n’avait plus que la pale consistance d’une image.” (LI 301) Note how the meaning and significance of this passage changes given these various interpretations.

³⁰² SC 21, LI 29.

³⁰³ SC 52, LI 61.

³⁰⁴ SC 228, LI 234.

consciousness, object and subject, she denies one part of herself and plunges into what Sartre will describe as “bad faith.”³⁰⁵ She lies to herself.

But not so for Xavière. She does not follow suit. She will not allow others to reduce her to an object. She takes up her own hand and burns it and feels nothing. She is neither body nor consciousness but both and neither in that moment.³⁰⁶ She risks both in this single act, and, as in Hegel’s account of “the battle to the death,” in risking everything, in that single moment wins her freedom, wins the role of master, of consciousness, absolute consciousness.

And for Françoise, it is the moment of her defeat. For in that moment before her

. . . very eyes, and yet apart from her, something existed like a sentence without an appeal: detached, absolute, unalterable, an alien conscience was taking up its position. It was like death, a total negation, an eternal absence, and yet, by a staggering contradiction, this abyss of nothingness could make itself present to itself and make itself fully exist for itself. The entire universe was engulfed in it and Françoise, forever excluded from the world, was herself dissolved in this void, of which the infinite contour no word, no image could encompass.³⁰⁷

What Françoise recognizes is that Xavière “has a consciousness like mine.”³⁰⁸ Or perhaps, more accurately she had a consciousness like that which Françoise once had.

For in her recognition of Xavière’s subjectivity she finds herself in a situation that she herself recognizes as “intolerable.”³⁰⁹ Pierre gives voice to the dilemma she now faces: “It’s quite true that everyone experiences his own consciousness as an absolute. How can several absolutes be compatible? This problem is as great a mystery as birth or death, in fact, it’s such a problem that

³⁰⁵ Sartre defines bad faith as the hiding, from oneself, a displeasing truth or the presenting as a truth a pleasing untruth.” (Sartre, BN 89) In his discussion of this phenomenon, Sartre would adopt this scenario of the couple holding hand as his model for explaining bad faith. (Sartre, BN 96 – 97)

³⁰⁶ We are, as Sartre noted, “a being which is what it is not and which is not what it is.” (Sartre, BN 100)

³⁰⁷ SCS 292, LI 301.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ SCS 296, LI 305-306.

philosophers break their heads over it.”³¹⁰ Françoise quickly recognizes that this is not just a philosophical puzzle, a “metaphysical problem” to be pondered and dropped. It is for her,

. . . something concrete. The whole meaning of my life is at stake . . . to me, an idea is not a question of theory . . . It passes the test or, if it remains theoretical, it has no value. . . Otherwise, I wouldn’t have waited for Xavière’s arrival to be certain that my consciousness is not unique in the world.³¹¹

If Xavière is another consciousness, if she is not a machine or a pet or an actress, Françoise’s own consciousness is denied. It is her life, her freedom that is not merely at stake, but lost in this recognition. In granting Xavière her subjectivity, she already had forfeited her own. It is in this moment that Françoise’s transformation is complete.

Françoise’s growing awareness of Xavière’s existence as a self-consciousness coincides with her own growing understanding of herself as object. Beginning with her illness and culminating in her looking in the mirror before going out to the Spanish bar on the night of her final defeat, she is forced more and more to acknowledge that she is a body, that she is a finite being who is as much an object for herself as she is for others.³¹² Xavière sees Françoise as petty, jealous, and vengeful, and Françoise is as such. There is nothing that Françoise can do to negate that view. Her belief that she was a consciousness, that she was the only consciousness, had saved Françoise from recognizing that she not only created herself but that others also created her. As noted before, she forgets she has a face, she shows little concern for her appearance, she takes little concern for her bodily needs.³¹³ All these are strategies for maintaining her view of herself as an infinite subject. Xavière’s insistence that she be regarded as a consciousness requires Françoise to recognize herself as object, to see herself as others see her.

³¹⁰ SCS 302, LI 311. As noted earlier, herein the term *conscience* is better translated as consciousness than conscience in Beauvoir work. The original translation of this text has been modified to reflect this herein.

³¹¹ SCS 302, LI 312. Not in the original text the term “conscience” is used in place of “consciousness.”

³¹² SCS 273, LI 282.

³¹³ See, for example, SCS 169, LI 179; 187 – 188; SCS 348, LI 360.

Xavière forces Françoise to confront this external view of her self, and to take it inside herself. Reflecting on this relationship in his review of this novel, Merleau-Ponty recognizes that

all our actions have several meanings, especially as seen from the outside by others, and all these meanings are assumed in our actions because others are the permanent coordinates of our lives. Once we are aware of the existence of others, we commit ourselves to being, among other things, what they think of us, since we recognize in them the exorbitant power *to see us*.³¹⁴

Perhaps it is because Xavière compels Françoise to see “herself from the outside for the first time,”³¹⁵ more specifically, to see herself with qualities she has not seen in herself that explains why she remains tied to Xavière throughout the novel. She cannot let Xavière go, cannot cut her free, even after she has betrayed her, even after she has lied. She cannot let Xavière continue to see her in this way, for, if she does, Françoise cannot help but see herself in this manner as well. When she again looks at herself in a mirror, “She faced herself. ‘No,’ she repeated, ‘I am not that woman.’”³¹⁶ Merleau-Ponty aptly describes this experience when he notes that in this moment “The fundamental contingency of our lives makes us feel like strangers at the trial to which others have brought us.”³¹⁷

Indeed it is a trial that Françoise is all too familiar with. It is a trial to which Françoise herself had brought Elizabeth to stand before such judgment. She criticizes Elizabeth for only being able to see herself through others.³¹⁸ She becomes what others need her to be. Elizabeth is the quintessential actress on the stage of her own life, “slavishly” repeating her lines, acting her part, remodeling herself for others.³¹⁹ Françoise’s judgment is swift; her sentence is harsh. She learns just how swift and how harsh as the novel unfolds and she is forced to recognize that she is not as different from Elizabeth as she might wish.

³¹⁴ Merleau-Ponty, 1964, 37.

³¹⁵ Merleau-Ponty, 1964, 33.

³¹⁶ SCS 406, LI 416.

³¹⁷ Merleau-Ponty, 1964, 37.

³¹⁸ SCS 135, LI 142.

³¹⁹ SCS 135, LI 142; SCS 215, LI 223.

She herself reaches “the point of no longer knowing herself, except through Xavière’s feelings for her. And now she was trying to merge into Xavière. But in this hopeless effort she was only succeeding in destroying herself.”³²⁰ As she recognizes later, “(S)he had fallen onto the trap. She was at the mercy of this voracious conscience that had been waiting in the shadow for the moment to swallow her up. Jealous, traitorous, guilty. She could not defend herself with timid words and furtive deeds. Xavière existed; the betrayal existed.”³²¹ And so she must fight, she must fight to regain her subjectivity, fight to regain her own self. And fight not with fond remarks, affection, nights out at dancehalls or gossip in cafes. These tactics having failed her, Françoise now wages a war on another front – in harsh deeds, deception and ultimately, in violence.

Reflecting on this change of circumstance, this inversion of roles, Françoise asks herself “Why should it be she rather than I? She need only have said one word, she need only say ‘it is I.’” But she would have had to believe it; she would have had to choose herself.”³²² In choosing herself, she will first choose Gerbert. She wages her battle by seducing Gerbert and then by turning both Pierre and Gerbert against Xavière revealing her deceptions while covering up her own. Having achieved these goals, she declares “she has won,”³²³ that she has returned to herself having taken back from her rival what she had lost to her. But she is quick to discover that this is an insignificant and short-lived victory. Finding that Xavière has stolen the key to the desk in which she kept the letters she had received from Pierre and Gerbert, letters that lay bear her betrayals, Françoise recognizes that she had not only failed to achieve a victory over Xavière but that “There would be no victory.”³²⁴

In order to regain herself, in order to once again become subject, Françoise concludes that she has no choice but to eliminate, “to annihilate” Xavière, for she

³²⁰ SCS 293, LI 302.

³²¹ SCS 406 – 407, LI 416.

³²² SCS 292, LI 302.

³²³ SCS 379, LI 388.

³²⁴ SCS 403; LI 412.

. . . was there, existing only for herself, entirely self-centered, reducing to nothingness everything for which she had no use; she encompassed the whole world within her own triumphant aloneness, boundlessly extending her influence, infinite and unique, everything that she was, she drew from within herself, she barred all dominance over her, she was absolute separateness.³²⁵

It is only by murdering Xavière that Françoise believes she can recover her self, that is, to re-establish herself as a consciousness, as the consciousness. Her victory lays not so much in the death of her rival as in her choice of herself, for, in her mind,

She had acted alone: as alone as in death. . . . No one could condemn or absolve her. Her act was her very own. 'It is I who will it.' It was her own will which was being accomplished, now nothing at all separated her from herself. She had at last made a choice. She had chosen herself.³²⁶

It is telling that the play that Françoise had written and helped to stage with Pierre is *Julius Caesar*,³²⁷ a fact overlooked by commentators on this text to date. Beauvoir carefully plots the scenes in her novel so as to mirror the play. Both are tales of betrayals undertaken by friends. Both raise questions about the very possibility for love. Both conclude with murder as the means for taking back of power. Both make clear that there can be only one subject one's self to rule and that to gain that title one must be willing to risk everything to risk all. In the act of killing Xavière, Françoise reclaims her subjectivity, reclaims the status of the self or the subject by literally turning her nemesis into an object, a corpse. Or has she?

A careful reading of the novel reveals that Beauvoir foreshadows the murder that will conclude the book. With the growing awareness of Xavière as a distinct consciousness, references to Xavière's death, whether by her own hand,³²⁸ or that of Françoise,³²⁹ intensify. Indeed, Françoise's

³²⁵ SCS 408, LI 417 – 418.

³²⁶ SCS 409; LI 418.

³²⁷ See, for example, SCS 36, LI 44 and SCS 266, LI 275.

³²⁸ SCS 102, LI 109; SCS 312, LI 322; SCS 319, LI 327; SCS 393, LI 402; SCS 404, LI 413.

³²⁹ SCS 288, LI 297; SCS 303, LI 312; SCS 319, LI 328.

last desperate act is foreshadowed by Elisabeth, who, when frustrated by Claude's failure to leave Suzanne, imagines what it would be like to kill him. "(T)his dark murderous desire violently took possession of her. She sighed – she was no longer young enough for insane violence – that was too easy."³³⁰ Elisabeth thus stands in this instance as a "disturbing challenge" to Françoise.³³¹

But while Elisabeth was willing to live with her rival, to take up her role as other or object or slave, Françoise is not so content. She gives up looking for ethical solutions to Xavière's "invasion".³³² Thus the murder of Xavière is a brutal and irrational act,³³³ an act through which she regains her subjectivity. Beauvoir herself noted that this interpretation of her conclusion was not uniformly accepted.³³⁴ Her critics questioned whether Françoise could re-establish her self as a subject for, with Xavière gone, there was no one to play the part of the slave and grant to her the recognition she sought.³³⁵ In killing Xavière Françoise was left unable to either affirm her mastery or confirm her slavery. She had left behind the logic of self and other, and, indeed, all logic. Read in this fashion, this can be considered the first of a series of descriptions Beauvoir offers of instances in which the master-slave dialectic is negated or stepped beyond.³³⁶ The battle to the death does not end in the securing of mastery for one at the expense of the objectivity of the other. Rather as Beauvoir enacts in this novel, this battle results in the inability of either party to ever secure their subjectivity.

Beauvoir readily acknowledges the inadequacy of her conclusion to this novel. From a philosophical perspective, she notes "murder is not the solution to the difficulties engendered by

³³⁰ SCS 71, LI 78-79.

³³¹ PL 342, FA 350.

³³² PL 340, FA 349.

³³³ PL 339, FA 348.

³³⁴ PL 342, FA 350.

³³⁵ PL 339, FA 348.

³³⁶ Most famously is her claim in *The Second Sex* that woman is "Absolute Other." (TSS2 80, DS1 120; TSS2 160, DS1 233; TSS2 245, DS1 353) See pages 184 – 196 and pages 255 – 265 of this study for an extended discussion of this concept.

coexistence. Instead of stepping around them, I wanted to face them squarely.”³³⁷ Beauvoir maintains that the conclusion was the weakest aspect of what she considered her weakest novel. There is, she notes, a difference between dreaming of murder and building up the malice and hatred that would lead one to commit the act. In *Françoise* she could never build up these emotions enough and convincingly to warrant her killing Xavière.³³⁸

While the ending to *She Came to Stay* indeed seems unanticipated and, in many ways, implausible, its inadequacies reveal more than just Beauvoir’s own frustration with this project³³⁹ or stylistic limitations; it reveals deeper philosophical shortfalls underpinning the novel. *Françoise* cannot recognize her own ambiguity. Or, perhaps more accurately, she refuses to recognize her own ambiguity. And this failure makes it impossible for her to acknowledge the ambiguous existence of those around her. Within this framework, there was either self or other, subject or object. Hence, it was either *Françoise* or Xavière.

In light of this conclusion, commentators have read *She Came to Stay* as either a study of self-discovery or as an advocacy of a view of our relations with others grounded fundamentally on hostility or conflict. In light of this exegesis it should be clear that neither of these interpretations does justice to the story. *Françoise* does not discover herself, that is, she does not discover anything about the self in this story. In fact, quite the opposite is the case. At the end of the story *Françoise* holds onto the same misconceptions about herself and about her relations to others that she began the story with. She continues to believe that there is only one subject that in order for one to be that subject one must render all others objects. Far from being a story about self-discovery, this is a story of self-deception.

³³⁷ PL 339, FA 348.

³³⁸ PL 339, FA 348.

³³⁹ PL 340, FA 349.

Françoise remains as unwilling in the end to acknowledge that she is both subject and object, both created and self-creating as she was on the first page of the novel. She deceives herself into believing that if she acts there will no longer be anything keeping her from herself. She cannot gain herself back, for she never had herself. She cannot create herself anew for she is unwilling to entertain the possibility that she is both self and object. This reveals yet another element of her deception. Françoise characterizes all relations as grounded in hostility. Far from advocating this account of the relation between self and other, this story reveals the inadequacies of such a view.

Beauvoir's growing awareness of history – or perhaps more accurately – of her inability to deny history – is evident in *She Came to Stay*. In the early pages of the novel, with the threat of war already providing the backdrop for the story unfolding, Françoise notes how “She had never believed in the possibility of war. War was like tuberculosis or a railway accident: something that could never happen to *me*. Things like that happened only to other people.”³⁴⁰ As the pages pass, Françoise has a growing awareness of history but maintains that it will not affect her “even if war came, we should go on living”³⁴¹ Pierre questions what this means. Indeed, he comes to question whether history or art has any meaning at all. He responds to Françoise's optimism concerning the value of art in light of the political upheavals of their time, telling her that “It's not a question of producing my play at all costs. . . It's rather one of finding out just how much sense there is in producing plays at all.”³⁴²

This is an attitude that Françoise will slowly grow to adopt for, as the war approaches “Everything seems pointless to me . . . How can I explain it to you? In the old days, whatever I did, I had the impression of being thoroughly involved in things: for instance, in my novel. It existed. It

³⁴⁰ SCS 4, LI 12.

³⁴¹ SCS 88, LI 95.

³⁴² Ibid.

demanded to be written. Nowadays, writing is simply heaping up pages”³⁴³ Gerbert has not this luxury. He is drafted and history takes hold of his future.³⁴⁴

No doubt in framing the problem of the other’s consciousness, Beauvoir was conditioned by her own experience in wartime Paris. Like Françoise in her novel, Beauvoir had wanted to stand outside of history. But with the oncoming war this would be impossible. She would find herself embedding history and would need a theoretical basis to explain what she would come to describe as her “situatedness.” And she would need an account of history to give her hope in the dark times she would face. To find this account, she would turn to Hegel, to his *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

³⁴³ SCS 231, LI 240.

³⁴⁴ SCS 252, LI 261.

Chapter 4

Responsibility

4.1 The Moral Period

“I decided to go to the Bibliothèque Nationale every day from two to five o’clock and work on Hegel. It’s the most soothing activity I could find. First of all the very setting reminded me in a poetic way of the year of my aggregation. Then there’s the reality of books, of the ideas in the books and about human history of which this is only a moment – I felt more assured in the world than I had for a long time.”³⁴⁵

- Beauvoir

In *She Came To Stay*, Beauvoir adheres to the logic of the master slave dialectic in her plot. However, in her diaries and autobiography, she reveals an increasing awareness of the limitations of this philosophy even as she attempts to complete the work. First, while writing the novel, she comes to face the ways in which history is structuring her own life in wartime Paris, and so too do her characters become ever more conscious of their own subjection to the force of time. As noted earlier, in the early pages of the novel, Françoise denies, indeed, condemns history’s attempt to shape her world.³⁴⁶ Across the pages, she is forced to realize that history, in this instance war, is not a factor that she can choose to ignore. Gilbert and Pierre are mobilized. The city shuts down at eleven each night. The sirens sound. History cannot be overlooked or escaped. Yet nothing in Hegel’s account of the master-slave dialectic makes evident this need to frame the relationship between self and other, to situate this relationship, in time. There is, as such, a growing and encroaching awareness of history and thus of the presence of others, not supported by her early reading of Hegel. Further, Beauvoir is dissatisfied with the conclusion to the novel. In her original draft, Françoise kills Xavière in self-defence.³⁴⁷ Even as she writes a new ending it seems that she remains convinced that this is a *roman à*

³⁴⁵ WD 304, JG 339.

³⁴⁶ This awareness is perhaps best evidenced in Françoise’s recognition that “She had never believed in the possibility of war. War was like tuberculosis, or a railway accident – something that could never happen to her. Things like that only happened to other people.” SCS 14, LI 12.

³⁴⁷ PL 607, FA 622.

these --- that the novel does not merely suggest but demonstrates a theory.³⁴⁸ But she did not find this device convincing. In her notes she makes clear that while she can account for why Françoise would dream of killing Xavière; she is not sure she has given to her enough reason to account for why she would act upon this desire.³⁴⁹ “Murder is not the solution to the difficulties engendered by coexistence,” she writes³⁵⁰. This literal “battle to the death,” seemed false, a device more than part of the story itself. It is while seeking an alternative ending to the story that she turns to reading Hegel’s *Phenomenology*.³⁵¹

What leads Beauvoir to take up this particular text in 1940 is uncertain. Perhaps she was directed to this reading by her need for structure during the early days of the war. Paris was occupied. Sartre was in service and her world was dramatically altered. In her diaries and letters she recounts her visits to the Bibliothèque Nationale where, for three hours a day, she went to study the *Phenomenology*, in order “to soothe” herself.³⁵² Perhaps, discussion of Kojève’s lectures amongst her friends and colleagues as well as in the popular press peaked her interest in the text. Or, perhaps she came to this work in search of a distraction as she tried to finish a novel that now seemed far removed from whom she was and what she believed when she had began to write. There are few clues as to her exact motive. But regardless, it is to the *Phenomenology* she turns, and therein she finds an account of

³⁴⁸ Beauvoir agrees with Blanchot that novels always discuss ideas but that there is a difference between suggesting and demonstrating a theory. The later undermines the value of the novel. As she notes, “The writer’s aim is to *make people see* the world, by re-creating it in words; he betrays and impoverishes it if he does not respect its essential ambiguity.” PL 544, FA 558. While Blanchot regards *The Blood of Others* to have failed at this task, he does not raise the same critique of *The Blood of Others* on the grounds, as Beauvoir claims, that the ending is open. It seems, however, from her own critique of this novel, that Beauvoir herself worried if she did not fall prey to this criticism.

³⁴⁹ PL 339, FA 348.

³⁵⁰ PL 607, FA 622.

³⁵¹ The received interpretation of *She Came To Stay* is that it was Beauvoir’s reading of the *Phenomenology* that framed the novel. However, with the publication of Beauvoir’s diaries, this reading has been challenged. Beauvoir had finished a draft of this novel by February of 1940. She would not take to reading Hegel’s text at the Bibliothèque de Nationale until July of that year.

³⁵² Interestingly, had Beauvoir undertaken this project a month earlier she would have been unable to complete this project for at that time Benjamin was reading this copy of Hegel’s *Phenomenology* as he wrote “On the Concept of History.” The similarities and differences in the account of history advanced by Beauvoir and Benjamin from their various readings of this text is a project worthy of careful study.

the relationship between self and other that would not only account for hostility between consciousnesses but would provide her with the apparatus necessary to hold open the possibility for relationships that transcend such conflict. In so doing, it would challenge her to rethink her account of the problem of the other's consciousness, placing it within history, recognizing its moral implications and in so doing, giving rise to a more complex understanding of both self and other.

Within the confines of discussion of "Lordship and Bondage," Beauvoir can only recognize the antagonism between consciousnesses. Consciousness is either master or slave, either subject or object. The singularity of the self is replicated in the singularity of the kind of relationships into which he can enter. But turning to the text in its entirety, she encounters an alternative account of the relationship between consciousnesses. Reading beyond this moment in the text, beyond this moment in the dialectic, Beauvoir identifies "A profound idea by Hegel in his recognition of consciousnesses the one by the other."³⁵³

As noted earlier, Hegel in "The Unhappy Consciousness" complicates the model of the self that is found in "On Lordship and Bondage" and in so doing, secures the conditions for the possibility of recognition. In this later section, self-consciousness recognizes itself as both subject and object, and struggles with the possibility of holding both positions at one and the same time, sometimes falling prey to the temptation to see itself only as object (stoicism) and at others only subject (skepticism). And what self-consciousness finds within itself it finds mirrored in its world. Unhappy consciousness not only acknowledges its own complexities, it further and consequently recognizes the shifting nature of its relation to others in the world. At times subject, at times object; reciprocity is at

³⁵³ My translation. In French the passage reads "Idée confonde de Hegel sur la reconnaissance des consciences les unes par les autres." JG 365. In her edition of Beauvoir's *Wartime Diary*, Anne Deing Cordero translates this passage as follows: "A profound Hegelian idea on the mutual recognition of consciousnesses." WD 322. In the original French, Beauvoir provides a hint towards her understanding of the problem in a manner not clearly evident in this translation.

hand. This more complicated conception of the self and of its relation to the other is reminiscent of that which Beauvoir found in Bergson.³⁵⁴

As she reads beyond the discussion of the master and the slave, as she navigates her way into later sections of the text, she reads alongside them Jean Wahl's *La Malheur de la conscience dans la philosophie de Hegel* along with "some English commentators."³⁵⁵ Wahl's work is worthy of mention here for this text marks not only the beginning of Beauvoir's study of Hegel but also the beginning of the Hegel Renaissance in France. Wahl, a student of Bergson, is often considered to have introduced the French academe to Hegel's ideas through a study of his early works. While references to Hegel can be found in French studies prior to this time, the focus of attention lies on the *Logic* and the *System*.³⁵⁶ Wahl, along with Alexandre Koyré, the other key figure in this revival, offers readers a different Hegel, gleaned from his *Jena Writings* and from the *Phenomenology*.

Roth identifies two key themes that frame Wahl's reading of Hegel.³⁵⁷ First, in a manner that foreshadows Hyppolite's seminal work on Hegel in France, *The Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology*³⁵⁸, Wahl focuses on the unhappy consciousness in his reading regarding it not only as emblematic of Hegel's philosophical development but also holding the potential for finding in this work modern resonances. In this context, he emphasizes that, while conflict and alienation are key components pushing forward the dialectic, encouraging both personal and historical progress,

³⁵⁴ See page 65 of this study for a further discussion of this issue.

³⁵⁵ It is hard to determine just what texts Beauvoir is referring to herein. English commentaries on Hegel that might have been available to her at the time include McTaggart's *Studies in Hegelian Cosmology* (1901), Royce's *Lecture on Modern Idealism* (1919), Mure's *An Introduction to Hegel* (1940), and Foster's *The Political Philosophies of Plato and Hegel* (1935).

³⁵⁶ Consider, for example, and most importantly in light of Beauvoir's work Brunschvig's *Le Progrès de la conscience dans la philosophie occidentale*.

³⁵⁷ Roth, 1988, 3-6.

³⁵⁸ See Part Four of this study for a comparative study of the readings of Hegel offered up by Beauvoir and Hyppolite.

reconciliation remains the goal and an open possibility for self-consciousness.³⁵⁹ This recognition gives way for the development of Wahl's second theme in his writings on Hegel, namely, his consideration of Hegel's philosophy of history.

For Hegel, history bears witness to that fact that conciliation is possible and progress is made despite great loss – despite, or perhaps more accurately, in light of the pain of alienation and separation. Or so it does on Wahl's reading of his texts. The dialectic provides the grounds for believing that suffering incurred is redeemed at some future point. However, Wahl argues that that time in history is not near nor can it be known. That is, for him, while all of history is the movement towards Absolute Spirit, it is a movement that can never achieve its goal.³⁶⁰

Read in this fashion, Hegel's philosophy offered a means for overcoming the divide between self and other, it gave solace for losses incurred and it provided the necessary impetus to fuel future political actions. It is clear why these ideas resonated with the French populace. In a time when even the victory in The Great War seemed problematic, Hegel's philosophy, as read by Wahl, offered hope. It provided an explanation of the violence that had been done and the violence that had been suffered raising questions concerning the attribution of responsibility. It provided solace for the losses that had been accrued and offered up a justification for the sacrifices that would still yet be required. And in so doing, it held open the possibility of redemption and reconciliation in the interwar years. While for many this Hegel which provides consolation to horrors encountered and those undertaken

³⁵⁹ This aspect of Wahl's interpretation of Hegel would become cornerstones of existential interpretations of Hegel. See Gutting, 2011, and Butler, 1987 for further discussion of Wahl's role in the development of French Hegelianism.

³⁶⁰ In this regard Wahl seems to attempt an interpretation of Hegel that is in keeping with the existential considerations advanced by Kierkegaard. In so doing, Wahl attempts to extract an element of Hegel's philosophy from the overarching structure of the *Phenomenology*, that is to dislodge the idea of movement of history from its culmination in a known result, in Absolute Spirit, giving rise to the same plethora of problems, problems both logical and metaphysical, that Beauvoir will face when she makes a similar attempt in her interpretation of the text.

which drew them to his texts in the 1940s, it was this Hegel, this “tranquilizing” Hegel³⁶¹ that Beauvoir encounters in Wahl’s commentary that she finds untenable and will seek to refashion.

4.2 Reading Hegel’s *Phenomenology*

*“As soon as one considers a system abstractly and theoretically, one puts himself, in effect, on the plane of the universal, thus of the infinite, that is why Reading the Hegelian system is so comforting. I remember having experienced a great feeling of calm on reading Hegel in the impersonal framework of the Bibliothèque Nationale in August 1940. But once I got into the street again, into my life, out of the system, beneath a real sky, the system was no longer of any use to me: what it had offered me under the show of the infinite was the consolations of death; and I again wanted to live in the midst of living men.”*³⁶²

- Beauvoir

In her journal, Beauvoir notes that Wahl and the other “English commentators” were of little help in her attempt to follow Hegel’s argument in the *Phenomenology* since “each of them makes clear at length how he understands nothing.”³⁶³ Almost as quickly as she reads Hegel and is consoled, she is frustrated and dissuaded by what she identifies as the limitations of his thinking, of his system. Her dissatisfaction centered on the concept of the Absolute that framed the *Phenomenology*. In challenging the need and legitimacy for this frame, she consequently places into question his notion of the dialectic, his understanding the relationship between the particular and the universal and his inability to account for the ambiguity that defines the human condition. Yet, as will be seen, despite her rejection of these aspects of his philosophy, Beauvoir’s admiration of the *Phenomenology* leads her to rework his ideas in her novels and essays.

For Hegel, all of History³⁶⁴ is the working out, the working towards of Absolute Spirit or Absolute Knowledge. Each moment or stage of the dialect, as interpreted by Beauvoir, surpasses the previous moment ensuring progress as Reason makes its way across time destined to achieve this

³⁶¹ PL 469, FA 482.

³⁶² EA 158, PMA 228 -229.

³⁶³ Beauvoir, 1991, 326.

³⁶⁴ As discussed, Hegel maintained that all of history was the working of Spirit towards Absolute Knowledge. To capture his idea of a history achieved in the realization of Spirit, the term “History” is employed herein.

goal. It is this appeal to a foreign Absolute that assures the outcome of the dialectic that is the focus of Beauvoir's critique of Hegel. For her, there could be no a priori principles or values directing the dialectic. There are no infinite ends drawn and authorized from "the civilization, the age and/or the culture"³⁶⁵ that serve to justify all actions. There are no such guarantees.³⁶⁶ Such "mythical ends"³⁶⁷ serve only as abstract evasions that undermine the truth of life and "If man gives himself up to an indefinite pursuit of the future he will lose his existence without ever recovering it; he then resembles a madman who runs after his shadow."³⁶⁸

Indeed, if Hegel is right, if all of History is seen as the progress of Reason individuals do indeed become nothing more than shadows. In Hegel's account of History, as it is recounted by Wahl and as it is interpreted by Beauvoir, the self "is abolished within the universal. Spread out to infinity, my place in the world is erased just as if I had succeeded in containing it in one dimensionless point."³⁶⁹ In the "trend of world-development" the individual self merged with Universal Being allowing one "to observe one's own life in the perspective of Historical Necessity, with a detachment that also carried implications concerning one's attitude to death"³⁷⁰ She is quick to conclude

How ludicrous did this brief instant of time then appear, viewed against the world's long history, and how small a speck was this individual, myself. Why should I concern myself with my present surroundings, with what happened to me now, at this precise moment!³⁷¹

She explains her reasoning pointing towards the fact that

In Hegel the individual is only an abstract moment in the history of absolute mind. This is explained by the first intuition of the system which, identifying the real and the relational, empties the human world of its sensible thickness; if the truth of the here and now is

³⁶⁵ EA 142, PMA 205.

³⁶⁶ EA 125, PMA 180.

³⁶⁷ EA 128, PMA 185.

³⁶⁸ EA 124, PMA 179.

³⁶⁹ PAC 101, PEC 265.

³⁷⁰ PL 468-469, FA 482- 483.

³⁷¹ PL 468-469, FA 482- 483.

only space and time, if the truth of one's causes is its passage into another, then the attachment to the individual substance of life is evidently an error, an inadequate attitude. The essential moment of Hegelian ethics is the moment when consciousness recognize one another; in this operation the other is recognized as identical with me which means that in myself it is the universal truth of my self which alone is recognized; so individuality is denied, and it can no longer reappear except on the natural and contingent plane; moral salvation will lie in my surpassing toward the other who is equal to myself and who in turn will surpass himself toward another. Hegel himself recognizes that if this passage continued indefinitely totally would never be achieved, the real world peter out in the same measure; one cannot without absurdity, indefinitely sacrifice each generation to the following one.³⁷²

For Hegel, at the moment when self-consciousnesses recognize each other, at the moment of recognition, both are lost into a universal truth or totality, into the Absolute. Hence recognition, in its Hegelian formulation, is not the moment when the self is at home in the other but when the self becomes lost along with the other.

In Hegel's account, so understood by Beauvoir, the individual is shown to have always already been irrelevant to the working of the dialectic. If all of History is the unfolding of reason towards Absolute Spirit, then individual choices are ultimately irrelevant. They soon are forgotten. They do not, they cannot, affect History; they cannot change its course which has already been determined. Considered within the backdrop in which she was reading this text, the war and all its atrocities were justified as necessary moments leading towards individual self-consciousness and the collective self-consciousness attaining some higher order existence.

Beauvoir recognizes that this argument, examined carefully, presupposes and necessitates the individual. As she notes, "this effort to identify myself with the universal immediately receives a denial. It is impossible for me to assert that it is the universal that is since I am asserting it – by

³⁷² EA 104 -105, PMA 150 -151.

asserting, I make myself be: it is I who am.”³⁷³ In claiming the existence of a universal, the individual is assured his existence, as it is he who must make the claim. Hence for reasons both logical and ethical “no individual can lose himself in the circumambient universe.”³⁷⁴

Beauvoir’s critique of Hegel on this count reflects her readings of Heidegger. She juxtaposes the views of these two philosophers, noting how she must choose “Hegel or Heidegger?”³⁷⁵ While Hegel takes up the particular into the universal, loses the particular in the universal, on Beauvoir’s reading, Heidegger, she argues, remains ever focused on the individual, on the individual experience, in and of itself. Meaning need not await or reflect the Absolute – Absolute Knowledge, Absolute Spirit, and/or God. Hence she confronts a choice. She asks herself, in light her of reading of Hegel via Wahl,

Why would my individual destiny be so precious if consciousness can transcend itself? I can’t decide. At times it seems to me that the Hegelian-Marxist universal point of view deprives life of all meaning and that wanting to give it one is a delusion. The idea of personal *salvation* – but why that idea? (Kierkegaard, Jaspers, Kafka, etc.). Does it have meaning? Where is the truth and where is the delusion? Do we need only *to think* that it has meaning? But how could the universal have meaning if the individual has none?³⁷⁶

For Beauvoir, if the individual is nothing, then “society cannot be something;”³⁷⁷ they appear in tandem or not at all. Indeed, it is only in relation to the individual that meaning is at all possible. Indeed, “if one denies with Hegel the concrete thickness of the here and now in favour of the

³⁷³ PAC 101, PEC 265.

³⁷⁴ PL 470, FA 483.

³⁷⁵ WD 320, JG 362. While Beauvoir herself attributes her focus on lived experience to her reading of Heidegger, an equally convincing argument might be made that her views herein are in line with those of Merleau-Ponty, particularly as outline in his *The Phenomenology of Perception*. For a further discussion of the overlapping of the views of these two writers, see Heinämaa in PE 154 and Heinämaa, 1999.

³⁷⁶ WD 320, JG 362.

³⁷⁷ EA 106, PMA 152.

universal space-time, if one denies the separate consciousness in favour of the mind, one misses with Hegel the truth of the world.”³⁷⁸

While Hegel holds, on Beauvoir’s reading, that meaning can only be understood from within the logic of journey of consciousness towards Absolute Spirit, that is, while meaning is always reflected in and through the relation of the particular to the universal, Heidegger, with his focus on lived experience (*l’expérience vécue*), finds meaning within the particular itself. Reflecting on these questions in 1940, she realizes that

The further I went, the more I diverged from Hegel, without ever losing my admiration for him I was bound up with my contemporaries; now I was learning that this dependent condition carried a complimentary burden of responsibility. Heidegger has convinced me that ‘human reality’ is accomplished and expressed in each separate living identity. Conversely, each person also commits and jeopardizes that reality as a whole. The individual’s concept of himself, either as a man among men or an ant on an anthill, will depend on whether his society is aiming at the achievement of freedom, or content to endure mere passive bondage; yet each one of us has the power to challenge that collective decision, to reject or confirm it.³⁷⁹

The particular, the individual, is the source of meaning, outside of considerations of the transcendental, for “In order for the world to have any importance,” she concludes, “in order for our undertaking to have a meaning and to be worthy of sacrifices, we must affirm the concrete and particular thickness of this world and the individual reality of our projects and ourselves.”³⁸⁰ In siding with Heidegger, Beauvoir lays out the plans for her next novel, a novel that “will be about *the individual situation*, its moral significance and its relation to the social. The importance of this

³⁷⁸ EA 122, PMA 176.

³⁷⁹ PL 468, FA 482.

³⁸⁰ EA 108, PMA 153.

metaphysical dimension.”³⁸¹ Her recognition of what she describes as “the thickness of the world,” poses yet another challenge to the theory that had once “soothed” and “calmed” her.

She notes how

The least flutter of my heart gave such speculations the lie. Hate, anger, expectation, or misery would assert themselves against all my efforts to by-pass them, and this ‘flight into the Universal’ merely formed one further episode on my private development.³⁸²

Lived experience did not reveal the unity of experience. It did not reveal the cohesive and progressive movement of Spirit towards some set end or goal but, rather, it revealed the individual confronted with ambiguities that could not be reconciled in *Aufhebung*. Not only is the individual lost in the universal, so too are the multitude of ambiguities which define his day-to-day existence.

Upon reflection, Beauvoir concludes that “neither History nor the Hegelian system could, any more than the Devil in person, upset the living certainty of ‘I am, I exist, here and now, I am myself.’”³⁸³ The flight from the particular into the universal that Beauvoir finds in the *Phenomenology* not only necessitates the abandonment of the individual for the universal, it also encourages the turning away from lived experience.³⁸⁴ Mind and body, immanence and transcendence, eternal and temporal, finite and infinite, freedom and servitude, self and other in the Absolute these ambiguities of daily life dissolve within the logic of the transcendent being reduced to one or the other – to matter or mind, pure interiority or pure exteriority. As Beauvoir notes,

As long as there have been men and they have lived, they have all felt the tragic ambiguity of their condition, but as long as there have been philosophers and they have thought, most of them have tried to

³⁸¹ WD 320-321, JG 362 – 363.

³⁸² PL 469, FA 482.

³⁸³ PL 469, FA 483.

³⁸⁴ Whether Hegel himself advocates this view or whether this is a misreading of Hegel on Beauvoir’s part is open for debate. While some commentators including, most importantly, Kojève, share Beauvoir’s reluctance to adopt Hegelianism as it advocates a form of absolutism, other commentators offering a more existential reading of the text, challenge this concept. For such a reading see Williams 2002.

mask it. They have striven to reduce mind to matter, or to reabsorb matter into mind, or to merge the two within a single substance.³⁸⁵

And yet these very ambiguities define human experience giving to it its “thickness.” The challenge as such is to “not conceal the antinomies between means and ends, present and future; they must be lived in a permanent tension; one must retreat from neither.”³⁸⁶ This is in the end what is hard, what is difficult, in existentialism; it “is worrisome not because it despairs of man but because it demands a constant tension from him.”³⁸⁷

It is clear that Beauvoir is employing the notion of ambiguity herein. In particular, as she herself acknowledges, it is important that

The notion of ambiguity must not be confused with that of absurdity, to declare that existence is absurd is to deny that it can ever be given a meaning; to say that it is ambiguous is to assert that its meaning is never fixed that it must be constantly won. Absurdity challenges every ethics; but also the finished rationalization of the real would leave no room for ethics; it is because man’s condition is ambiguous that he seeks, through failure and outrageousness, to save his existence.³⁸⁸

In recognizing the ambiguity which frames the human condition, Beauvoir is pointing towards the fact that individuals are faced with, indeed, are defined by an indefinite questioning rather than given the assurance of an answer as Hegel’s Absolute provides. No decision is ever made in complete assurance that it will lead to progress, but rather “The man of action, in order to make a decision, will not wait for a perfect knowledge to prove to him the necessity of a certain choice; he must first choose and thus help fashion history.”³⁸⁹ In juxtaposing this open-ended and ambiguous nature of individual experience with her reading of Hegel’s account of the dialectic’s pathway towards the

³⁸⁵ EA 7-8, PMA 10 – 11.

³⁸⁶ EA 131, PMA 188.

³⁸⁷ “Existentialism and Popular Wisdom” in PW 214.

³⁸⁸ EA 129, PMA 186.

³⁸⁹ EA 123, PMA 177.

Absolute, Beauvoir lays bare her indebtedness, not to Heidegger, in this regard, but rather to Kierkegaard.

“At the beginning of existentialism,” as Le Doeuff notes,

...it was either Hegel or Kierkegaard, Husserl and Heidegger re-read by the French. Either the idea of a struggle between consciousness to transcend a reciprocal exteriority seen as a given or a theory centered on one consciousness and one alone; mine, defined at first for-itself, and by a “fissure” within consciousness, ‘in an ipseity (selfhood) to which comes to be added an ‘other’ who constitutes me.³⁹⁰

The French philosophic tradition out of which Beauvoir is writing opposed Hegel against those writing more directly within the tradition of existential phenomenology and, in so doing, to force a choice between the particular and the universal, between lived experience and abstraction, between the division and the unity of consciousnesses. It is to Kierkegaard’s writings and to *Fear and Trembling* in particular, that Beauvoir turns to find a conception of ambiguity as an alternative to Hegel’s totalizing Absolute.³⁹¹

Despite Beauvoir’s own recognition of the influence of Kierkegaard’s thought on her work, despite the many references in the essays from her moral period as well as in her later works, most notably, in *The Second Sex*, to his texts, to date little has been written exploring her use and her critique of his ideas.³⁹² While such an investigation exceeds the bounds of this present study, in order to better understand her critique of Hegel and to identify the ideas guiding her attempt to rewrite his phenomenology outside the bounds of the Absolute, it is important to consider her claim to have chosen Kierkegaard to ground her ideas. Her account of ambiguity is clearly indebted to him. Neither finite nor infinite, neither body nor mind, neither particular nor universal, neither subject nor object, neither singular or plural, but rather always and necessarily both, Kierkegaard maintains that human

³⁹⁰ Le Doeuff, 1995, 64. See as well on this point, Weiss, 1995, 46.

³⁹¹ EA 9, PMA 13.

³⁹² See, for example, PL 550, FA 564 and PL 589, FA 603. Exceptions are found in the works of Stewart, 2009 and Sipe, 2012.

existence is framed by, defined by inescapable and irreducible ambiguities and hence by irresolvable anxieties. Never is any choice made wholly satisfying; never is it wholly correct. To kill Isaac is as wrong as to let him live, Kierkegaard concludes in this text. Such is the fate of human existence, never to know, never to do right. To live with and in ‘indefinite questioning.’” It is some such notion of ambiguity and of anxiety that Beauvoir finds lacking in Hegel which she aims to incorporate into his dialectic in her re-envisioning of the *Phenomenology*. But there are questions as to whether she need necessarily make this move or if, indeed, it escapes the problems that she intends it to.

Kierkegaard’s account of ambiguity is often contrasted with Hegel’s *Aufhebung*. While Kierkegaard sees dualities within the world, dualities that are inevitable and irresolvable, Hegel argues for the possibility of the reconciliation of such ambiguities.³⁹³ What is often overlooked is that Hegel does not deny the centrality of such ambiguities in his account of human existence. Self-consciousness struggles to experience itself as self and other, as subject and object, while simultaneously trying to encounter the other in both of these dimensions. Indeed, it is desire, the recognition of all that the self is not, all that it lacks, that fuels this dialectic. Thus, Hegel’s phenomenology gains its impetus via the recognition of the ambiguity.

Moreover, Hegel does not maintain, contrary to many French commentators on this work, including Beauvoir, that there are no ambiguities, for what seems to be a dualism dissolves into some kind of “synthesis.” For Hegel, the ambiguities which frame our lived experience never disappear, but rather they are encompassed in the movement of the dialectic. The particular is not lost in the universal but rather it entails the universal just as the universal entails the particular. That is, for Hegel, self-consciousness both is master and slave, self and other, body and mind, divine and human, in-itself and for-itself. The use of the term “synthesis” with regard to the dialectic has been misleading in this regard, for a synthesis suggests the intermingling and the disappearance of all that

³⁹³ EA 8, PMA 12.

comes before. Beauvoir herself notes this arguing that it is not a Hegelian surpassing that is at hand but rather a conversion, something akin to the Husserlian epoché that best captures the movement of the dialectic. For Hegel, “the surpassed terms are preserved only as abstract moments,”³⁹⁴ that is, they are reduce one to the other or folded both into some kind of (Absolute) third.³⁹⁵ She wants these moments not to be subsumed in this manner but rather assumed – not suppressed or lost but rather always ever present. Clearly, this frames her introduction of the idea of the “conversion” of moments.³⁹⁶ Yet upon reflection, this seems an unnecessary move of her part, one made based on misreading of Hegel. As discussed earlier, the stages of the dialectic do not disappear but rather are preserved and transcended in each subsequent moment.³⁹⁷ As readily as Kierkegaard, Hegel admits that the subject “must not attempt to dispel the ambiguity of his being but, on the contrary, must accept the task of realizing it.”³⁹⁸

Beauvoir’s avocation of Kierkegaard’s existentialism not only is grounded upon her failure to account for these aspects of Hegel’s Phenomenology but is as well premised on an oversight in her reading of *Fear and Trembling*. For while she notes that for Hegel the dialectic culminates in Absolute Knowledge or Absolute Spirit, a point Beauvoir is quick to recognize and criticize, she seems oblivious to Kierkegaard’s similar faith in God to dissolve the ambiguities he describes in his recounting of the story of Abraham and Isaac. Both Hegel’s *Phenomenology* and Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling* attest to the fact that individuals live lives defined by ambiguities, lives characterized by anxieties as such. And both too in their closing pages seek solace from a world too hard in an Absolute – through the culmination of the Absolute or via the leap of faith. Both treatises end with the avocation of the universal, that is, both end with the resolution of ambiguities into some better

³⁹⁴ EA 13, PMA 18.

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

³⁹⁶ For a further discussion of this concept of conversion, see Deutscher 1999, 19-58.

³⁹⁷ See page 41 of this study for a further discussion of this point in Hegel’s philosophy.

³⁹⁸ EA 13, PMA 18.

end. In a manner more similar to Hegel than different, Kierkegaard in his later works will speak of this turn as a leap of faith that is undertaken by the individual not so much in spite of, as in light of, such ambiguities.³⁹⁹ Ambiguities are ever present yet surpassed in this turn towards God. If Hegel is to be criticized for his resolution or dissolution of the contradictions that define human existence in some form of totalizing ideal, in an Absolute, it seems that Kierkegaard too must be subject to such a critique. Yet Beauvoir does not offer up such criticisms of his works but rather aligns herself with his philosophy. It seems that what she is able to overlook or divorce from the philosophy of one she cannot similarly disregard with regard to the other. Her critique of Hegel seems unduly harsh. But, as will be seen, this harshness will be generative.

Just months after reading the *Phenomenology* Beauvoir already recognizes that she is “far from the Hegelian point of view that was so helpful to me in August. I have become conscious of my individuality and of the metaphysical being that is opposed to this historical infinity where Hegel optimistically dilutes all things.”⁴⁰⁰ It seems Beauvoir rejects Hegel from the outset. However, an idea lingers; the profound idea referred to previously, captures her attention.

As much as she might want to abandon the logic of the *Phenomenology*, she is struck by Hegel’s account therein of

... the exigency of mutual recognition of consciousnesses – it can serve as a foundation for a social view of the world – the only absolute being this human consciousness, exigency of *freedom* of each consciousness in order for the recognition to be valid and free: recognition in love, artistic expression, action, etc.⁴⁰¹

Thus, rather than reject his philosophy, she turns to re-writing it, extracting this concept from the broader Hegelian dialectic, re-framing it outside references to the Absolute, grounding it in the lived experience of situated consciousnesses, and uniting it with what she describes as “the existential idea

³⁹⁹ Kierkegaard, 1989.

⁴⁰⁰ WD 319, JG 361.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

that humanity reality is nothing other than what it makes *itself* to be, that toward which it transcends itself.”⁴⁰² Rather than subsume each decision within the Absolute each action must be seen as a free decision that needs to find its meaning in itself.⁴⁰³ As she notes, “The ends of action . . . are neither given nor even prefigured in reality, they have to be willed.”⁴⁰⁴ For Hegel

Particularity appears only as a moment of the totality in which it must it must surpass itself. Whereas for Existentialism, it is not impersonal universal man who is the source of values, but the plurality of concrete, particular men projecting themselves, toward their ends on the basis of situations whose particularity is as radical and as irreducible as subjectivity.⁴⁰⁵

This means that each decision need be legitimized concretely⁴⁰⁶ within the context of the situation in which it arises. Hence each action entails “the risk of inventing an original solution.”⁴⁰⁷

Actions as such must be undertaken

. . . in uncertainty and risk, and that is precisely the essence of freedom. Freedom is not decided with a view to a salvation that would be granted in advance. It signs no pact with the future. If it could be defined by the final point for which it aims, it would no longer be freedom.⁴⁰⁸

Freedom does not affirm pre-existing values but rather sets up values.⁴⁰⁹ And hence freedom comes with responsibility. Responsibility cannot be renounced⁴¹⁰ in favour of some “great current of history,”⁴¹¹ nor in light of some inner purity or foreign object or ideal.⁴¹²

⁴⁰² Ibid.

⁴⁰³ EA 128, PMA 185.

⁴⁰⁴ “Moral Idealism and Political Realism” in PW 181.

⁴⁰⁵ EA 17-18, PMA 24 -25.

⁴⁰⁶ EA 148, PMA 214.

⁴⁰⁷ EA 142, PMA 206.

⁴⁰⁸ PAC 139, PEC 365.

⁴⁰⁹ EA 149, PMA 215.

⁴¹⁰ “Existentialism and Popular Wisdom” in PW 211.

⁴¹¹ “Moral Idealism and Political Realism” in PW 181.

⁴¹² “Moral Idealism and Political Realism” in PW 190.

What Beauvoir thus proposes is not a deterministic account of the dialectic but rather one that is open-ended, that allows, as Beauvoir notes, for Cleopatra's nose or Cromwell's wart to change the course of history. It is a synthetic account of the dialectic,⁴¹³ an account that does not undermine but rather relies upon and preserves individual freedom amidst the thickness of life.⁴¹⁴ Attempting to reconcile these themes, she offers up her interpretation of the text in the essays and novels that she would write starting in 1941.

The period between 1940 and 1947 is often characterized as Beauvoir's "moral period".⁴¹⁵ Following the completion of *She Came to Stay*, and her first reading of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, her philosophical agenda shifts. Recounting this change of focus, Beauvoir notes how while she,

. . . had come to recognize the fact of other people's existence, it was still my individual relationships with separate people that mattered most to me, and I still yearned fiercely for happiness. Then, suddenly, History burst over me, and I dissolved into fragments. I woke to find myself scattered over the four quarters of the globe, linked by every nerve in me to each and every other individual.⁴¹⁶

In her subsequent works she would advance a "broadened individualism" and as a result make "a transition to the social"⁴¹⁷ More specifically, Beauvoir's critique of Hegel's *Phenomenology* provides the starting point from which she would, in her subsequent novels and essays, develop a more complicated conception of the self and of its relation to the other, recognize the role that history played in framing those relationships, and consequently, hold open the possibility for recognition. To speak of the self, she will make evident, is to speak of the other and, as a result, to speak of history and responsibility. History and ethics become the new focus of her attention as they frame and shape the conflict and the recognition that is possible to achieve between self and other. What results is a

⁴¹³ EA 147, PMA 213.

⁴¹⁴ EA 84, PMA 122.

⁴¹⁵ PL 547, FA 561.

⁴¹⁶ PL 369, FA 381 - 382.

⁴¹⁷ WD 323, JG 367 - 368.

new stage in her thinking, a stage in which she addresses “the problem of caring for the other without jeopardizing, relinquishing self,”⁴¹⁸ that is, in which she redresses the problem of the others consciousness. To best understand how these factors restructure her understanding of the problem and how they condition her consideration of the possibility of recognition in acts of generosity and of love, it is necessary to turn to her first published essay, to turn to *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*.

4.3 *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*

“One must assume our actions in uncertainty and risk, and that is precisely the essence of freedom. Freedom is not decided with a view to a salvation that would be granted in advance. It signs no pact with the future.”⁴¹⁹

- *Beauvoir*

Pyrrhus and Cinéas is the first in a series of works that Beauvoir publishes between 1944 and 1946 that question the relation between self and other within the framework of her war experiences. Written in Occupied Paris and published in the early days of Post-war France, it was in its time a remarkable success for a then unknown author. Yet, despite this acclaim, it remained untranslated and virtually unexamined for fifty years. This has had serious consequences for understanding the development of her understanding of the problem of the other’s consciousness for, in the course of her discussion of individual freedom herein, Beauvoir first attempts to conceptualize a theory of recognition in and through her reflections on responsibility, violence and generosity.

In line with her reading of Hegel and her discovery of history, Beauvoir realizes that “All men live a political existence and so almost all are faced with the problem of action.”⁴²⁰ It is this question of action that she turns to addressing in *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*. She frames her meditation on with consideration of the claim made by Voltaire in *Candide* that “We must cultivate our garden.” Beauvoir agrees with this assertion that lives are determined through action but she is clear that “This

⁴¹⁸ Simons, 1990, 488.

⁴¹⁹ PAC 139, PEC 365.

⁴²⁰ MIPR in PE 176.

advice will not be of much help to us because what is my garden?”⁴²¹ It is to this question that she more specifically addresses herself herein.

To begin an essay with so abstract a question as “what” or “where” is my garden may seem inappropriate given the historic backdrop in which it was written. Yet, in many ways this was one of the most pertinent questions to be raised in Beauvoir’s time. Written under Nazi occupation and published in the early days after the liberation, the significance of the question and its central import becomes clear. For whom am I responsible? And, for what? It is to ask, in other words, “Who is my neighbour?” and to enquire as to “What . . . is the measure of a man? What goals can he set for himself, and what hopes are permitted him?”⁴²² With the war coming to a close, and questions looming as to what was to be done with collaborators, these questions no longer were theoretical queries but instead became pressing practical issues to be addressed in both public and private domains.⁴²³ Raising these questions, Beauvoir undertakes a brazen meditation on the issue of violence. While others seemed to turn away from these pressing issues pertaining to the aftermath of war, satisfied to take up logical problems or to find solace in their idealism, Beauvoir dared to ask if violence ever justified and to force consideration of who was to be held accountable for the violence committed and the violence suffered.

Beauvoir structures her response and thus her essay into two parts. In section one, Beauvoir demonstrates the inadequacies of grounding a response, a theory of responsibility, on considerations of God⁴²⁴ or some generalized vision of Humanity.⁴²⁵ Returning to her arguments against Hegel and Marx, she gives voice to her belief that attempts to sidestep the question of responsibility through flights into pure immanence or pure transcendence are destined to fail. “Man,” she recognizes, “can

⁴²¹ PAC 91, PEC 236.

⁴²² PAC 91, PEC 237

⁴²³ Beauvoir would go on to take up these questions directly in *The Blood of Others* and *An Eye for an Eye*.

⁴²⁴ PAC 102, PEC 268.

⁴²⁵ PAC 106 – 109, PEC 277 – 295.

neither indefinitely reduce his being, nor expand it to infinity. An indefinite project is absurd since it leads to nothing.”⁴²⁶ Having recognized as such, that “There exists no readymade attachment between the world and me,”⁴²⁷ in part two of this essay she turns considering what she describes as the “positive basis for morality.”⁴²⁸ That is, she identifies those factors that must be taken into consideration when attempting to determine the limits or parameters of moral obligation. In so doing, she offers up not only a theory of subjectivity but also simultaneously an account of intersubjectivity.

In some regards, the account of the self that Beauvoir presents in this essay is consistent with that she enacts through the main characters in *She Came To Stay*. In both works, freedom is the defining feature of the subject. It is through her ability to act and to escape being acted upon that Françoise defines herself as a consciousness, more accurately, as self-consciousness. Similarly, in this work freedom is taken to be the identifying feature of subjectivity. However, herein she gives more specific content to this account attempting to articulate what it means to be free.

She begins by making clear that her garden cannot be delineated in words or via other “empty pretensions.”⁴²⁹ Freedom is not a thought, nor is it a rhetorical device. Rather,

What is mine is therefore first what I do. But as soon as I have done it, the object goes and separates itself from me: it escapes me . . . in order for the past to be mine, I must make it mine again each instant by taking it toward my future.⁴³⁰

To be free, as such, is not to have acted or to think of acting. Rather, it lies in present actions undertaken and in the ability to act and act again.

What is more, for an act to be free it must be undertaken without knowing or being assured of an outcome. Hence, “One must assume our actions in uncertainty and risk, and that is precisely the

⁴²⁶ PAC 102, PEC 266.

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

⁴²⁸ PL 549, FA 563.

⁴²⁹ PAC 93, PEC 244.

⁴³⁰ PAC 93, PEC 246.

essence of freedom. Freedom is not decided with a view to a salvation that would be granted in advance. It signs no pact with the future.”⁴³¹ Referring herein to her critique of Absolutes via her reading of Hegel, Beauvoir claims that with the future undetermined, freedom must be won in and through the choices made not only as to how to act but, indeed, whether to act at all.

Kruks identifies two key assumptions that inform this account of freedom.⁴³² First, Beauvoir asserts that individuals are first and foremost defined by their freedom and hence by their separation from others. Human existence is grounded in the fact that individuals are born free and that they can will themselves free that is, in “wanting to practice their freedom.”⁴³³ What is initially a matter of constitution then becomes a matter of choice. Second, Beauvoir asserts that freedom and hence subjectivity are indestructible.⁴³⁴ While freedoms can encounter one another, they cannot destroy each other. A prisoner in jail can be locked away, a political dissident tortured, but even in so doing it not possible to deprive the individual of his or her own freedom. To understand why this is the case it is necessary to consider the distinction drawn by Beauvoir between freedom and facticity.

In the course of offering up her description of subjectivity, Beauvoir recasts the mind/body distinction advanced by Descartes into a discussion of interiority and exteriority. While the subject is defined by his freedom, there is, she argues, no escaping his facticity. As she notes

A man is freedom and facticity at the same time. He is free, but not with that abstract freedom posited by the stoics; he is free in situation. We must distinguish here, as Descartes suggest, his freedom from his power. His power is finite, and one can increase it or restrict it from the outside . . . violence can only act upon the facticity of man, upon his exterior. Even when it stops him in his élan toward his goal, violence does not reach him in his heart

⁴³¹ PAC 139, PEC 365.

⁴³² Kruks, 1992.

⁴³³ Vintges in PHW 226.

⁴³⁴ Kruks, 1992.

because he was still free in the face of the goal that he proposed to himself.⁴³⁵

Born free, the potentiality for action remains ever-present. This acknowledgement shapes the extent and the nature of relations between consciousnesses. The actions of others can affect only the exteriority of a subject. Freedom itself, while it is limited by the situation, cannot be destroyed.⁴³⁶ Hence subjects can neither do anything for or against the other. Their freedoms are not directly connected but rather, she argues herein, they are intertwined via their projects.

To say that individuals are defined by their freedom is to recognize that they are defined by the “projects” that they have freely chosen to act upon. Born free, they must exercise that right, they must will themselves free. However, the moment the action is complete, the project comes to a close. As such, alone in the world, projects would be limited. Hence it is necessary to appeal to the other to pick up our projects to give them a future beyond the limits of the self.

Beauvoir notes that “In truth, society has been all about me from the day of my birth; it is in the bosom of that society and in my close relationship with it, that all my personal decisions must be formed.”⁴³⁷ I find myself thrown into a world in which there have always already been others. And while these others are unknown and in some regards unknowable to me, they are nonetheless necessary for me – necessary for me to know and be known in the world, necessary for me to know and be known by myself. For, as she explains,

⁴³⁵ PAC 124, PEC 326 -327.

⁴³⁶ Beauvoir here anticipates her later discussion of situated freedom in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. Therein rejecting the idea of radical freedom encapsulated in Sartre’s claim that “even a prisoner in chains is free.” BN 622; BN 703. Beauvoir recognizes that “The negro slave of the 18th century, the Mohammedan woman enclosed 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 judged only within the given situation, and it is possible that in this situation, limited like every human 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 dishonest and which is a positive fault.” EA 38, PMA 56. This concept will be explored in detail in relation to *The Second Sex*.

⁴³⁷ PL 550, FA 564.

I am thrown into the world among these strange freedoms. I need them, because once I have surpassed my own goals, my acts will fall back upon themselves inert, useless, if they are not carried by new projects towards a new future ... the movement of my transcendence appears vain to me as soon as I have transcended it; but if through others my transcendence prolongs itself always further than the project I presently form, I will never be able to surpass it.⁴³⁸

To explain this point Beauvoir notes how a writer “does not only want to be read; he wants to have influence. He wants to be imitated and pondered.”⁴³⁹ In this regard, the writer seeks a reader to take up his project and give it a future beyond his own.

In order for individuals take up and give meaning to projects not their own, it is necessary that they recognize each other as freedoms. Echoing Hegel’s argument, she recognizes that in order for freedom to be acknowledged, for it to be recognized the subject must be willing to grant to the other the same kind of freedom he attributes to himself. Without such freedom, others are nothing more than objects and objects cannot pick up such project, let alone extend them into the future. As such,

In enlightened, consenting gratitude, one must be capable of maintaining face to face these two freedoms that seem to exclude each other: the other’s freedom and mine. I must simultaneously grasp myself as object and as freedom and recognize my situation as founded by the other, while asserting my being beyond the situation.⁴⁴⁰

This necessitates that there not just be one but that there be rather “several freedoms” that there be “a multiplicity of freedoms, each supporting the others, which can overcome individual infinite”⁴⁴¹

Because there are those who are capable of taking up the projects initiated or perpetuated by others, and giving to them a future which goes beyond not only the present, but beyond death, the subject is able to transcend himself.

⁴³⁸ PAC 135, PEC 355.

⁴³⁹ PAC 132, PEC 346.

⁴⁴⁰ PAC 123, PEC 324.

⁴⁴¹ PAC 131, PEC 344.

As Moser notes, Beauvoir in this essay develops not an ethics of progress such as that outlined in Hegel's *Phenomenology* but rather "an ethics of the project."⁴⁴² Via the projects initiated and those picked up the dimensions of Beauvoir's garden are established – that the limits of moral obligation are established. In a passage from *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* that Beauvoir will revisit in *The Blood of Others*, a child is reprimanded for crying over the death of servant's baby.⁴⁴³ In both instances, "His parents let him weep, but then became irritated. 'He wasn't your brother.' The child dried his tears."⁴⁴⁴ This scene warrants repetition for herein Beauvoir makes her central claim evident that it is through the act of crying or refraining from crying that the subject determines for whom he is responsible.

It is because my subjectivity is not inertia, folding in upon itself, separation, but on the contrary, movement toward the other that the difference between me and the other is abolished, and I can call the other mine. Only I can create the ties that unite me to the other. I create it from the fact that I am not a thing, but a project of self toward the other, a transcendence . . . I am not first a thing but a spontaneity that desires, that loves, that wants, that acts." This little boy *is* not my brother." But if I cry over him, he is no longer a stranger to me. It's my tears that decided before me. When the disciples asked Christ "Who is my neighbour?" Christ didn't respond by enumeration. He told the parable of the Good Samaritan. The latter was the neighbour of the man abandoned on the road; he covered him with his cloak and came to his aid. One *is* not the neighbour of anyone: one makes the other a neighbour by making oneself (*se faisant*) his neighbour through an act.⁴⁴⁵

There are no readymade ties between the world and the subject or between subjects. Rather, such bonds are forged through actions. It is thus through the enactment of his freedom that individuals give

⁴⁴² Moser, 1994, 57.

⁴⁴³ BO 10 -11, SA 12 -13.

⁴⁴⁴ PAC 92, PEC 241.

⁴⁴⁵ PAC 93, PEC 245.

the world meaning and themselves “only take a form, an existence,” as Beauvoir notes, only if they cast themselves “into the world, loving, doing.”⁴⁴⁶

There is as such a need for the other – for the “foreign freedoms” whom the subject is thrown amidst in the world.⁴⁴⁷ As she goes on to argue “I need them because once I have surpassed my own goals, my actions will fall back upon themselves, inert and useless, if they have not been carried off toward a new future by new projects.” Hence, “An individual ... only receives a human dimension by recognizing the existence of others.”⁴⁴⁸

In this regard Beauvoir claims “our freedoms support each other like stones in an arch, but in an arch that no pillars support,”⁴⁴⁹ for “the other both simultaneously makes and, more importantly gives the world to me.”⁴⁵⁰ This necessary and inescapable interdependence of subjects, however, comes with risks. As will be seen, it is this intertwining of subjectivities that serves as the condition for the possibility of violence.

4.4 Reframing the Problem: On Violence and Generosity

“We are condemned to failure because we are condemned to violence. We are condemned to violence because man is divided and in conflict with himself.”

- Beauvoir

In light of her recognition of the intertwining of selves, the intertwining of projects that define and advance freedom, Beauvoir is led to accept violence as an inevitable and unavoidable reality. It is impossible to act without in some regard affecting the freedom of the other. Each act creates a “new situation” for the other.⁴⁵¹ It offers a new point of departure, if others respond and pick up the appeal

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁷ PAC 135, PEC 351.

⁴⁴⁸ Beauvoir, 1962, 550.

⁴⁴⁹ PAC 140, PEC 357. In *The Blood of Others*, Beauvoir will employ this analogy arguing that individuals are like stones one piled upon the other. However, therein she will emphasize what easily can be overlooked in this reference. Stones both need and use each other. See BO 238, SDA 225 and BO 240, SDA 226.

⁴⁵⁰ Tidd, 2006, 232.

⁴⁵¹ PAC 126, PEC 332.

that it entails. But what if no one responds to this call? Respect for the other's freedom being "the first condition for my successful effort. I can only appeal to the other's freedom, not constrain it. I can even the most urgent appeals, try my best to charm it, but it will remain free to respond to those appeals or not, no matter what I do."⁴⁵² It is for this reason that "in order for men to be able to give me a place in the world, I must first make a world spring up around me where men have their place. I must love, want and do. My action itself must define the public to which I propose it."⁴⁵³ But what if charm fails? What if it is given no public? "Wherever persuasion fails, only violence remains to defend oneself,"⁴⁵⁴ Beauvoir argues. In failing to have their appeal heard, individuals are denied their freedom and thus they are turned into objects amidst other objects. In this regard,

It is this interdependence which explains why oppression is possible and why it is hateful. As we have seen, my freedom in order to fulfill itself requires that it emerge into an open future; it is other men who open the future to me. It is they who, setting up the world of tomorrow, define my future; but if, instead of allowing me to participate in the constructive movement, they oblige me to consume my transcendence in vain, if they keep me below the level which they have conquered and on the basis of which new conquests will be achieved, then they are cutting off from the future, they are changing me into a thing.⁴⁵⁵

Echoing Hegel's account of the master-slave dialectic, Beauvoir herein makes evident the need to resort to violence in order to regain freedom and hence to re-establish subjectivity.⁴⁵⁶

Such violence, in one sense, is not evil for it can affect only the facticity of the subject. The freedom of the other – their birthright remains intact. Yet, while it is not an evil, it does not mean that

⁴⁵² PAC 136, PEC 358.

⁴⁵³ PAC 135, PEC 353.

⁴⁵⁴ PAC 138, 361 - 362.

⁴⁵⁵ EA 82, PMA 119.

⁴⁵⁶ In *An Eye for An Eye*, Beauvoir will question whether acts of revenge fulfill a "metaphysical requirement because it re-establishes the reciprocity between humans that the crime negated." – that is, she considers whether such acts re-establish the ambiguity of the human existence by forcing victimizers to confront their facticity while allowing victims regain through their actions, their freedom. PHW 250

it is not without its moral consequences. For while it does not affect the interiority of those on whom it is perpetuated, it does affect the freedom of him who would perpetuate such acts. In acting violently

. . . we give up taking the other as a freedom and we restrict accordingly, the possibilities of expanding our being. The man to whom I do violence is not my peer, and I need men to be my peers. The resort to violence arouses correspondingly less regret in cases where it seems less possible to appeal to the freedom of the man to whom violence has been done.⁴⁵⁷

In so reducing opponents to things, to their facticity, the subject denies himself the conditions for the possibility of seeing himself as a freedom. As she notes “The other’s freedom alone is capable of necessitating my being, my essential need is therefore to be faced with free men.”⁴⁵⁸ Without such others, he becomes a thing among things.⁴⁵⁹

The ambiguity of human existence thus requires that there be recognition that

We are condemned to failure because we are condemned to violence. We are condemned to violence because man is divided and in conflict with himself. Because men are separate and in conflict among themselves . . . renouncing the struggle would be renouncing transcendence, renouncing being. However, no success will ever erase the absolute outrage of each singular failure.⁴⁶⁰

It is for this reason that Beauvoir concludes that while violence cannot be avoided, “one cannot . . . light-heartedly accept resorting to force. It is the mark of a failure that nothing can offset.”⁴⁶¹

In her subsequent essays, Beauvoir will go on to make clear that “Freedom which is interested only in denying freedom,” Beauvoir argues, “must be denied.”⁴⁶² In this important passage from *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, she gives further direction as to those circumstances in which violence is justified, claiming that

⁴⁵⁷ PAC 138, PEC 362.

⁴⁵⁸ PAC 129, PEC 338.

⁴⁵⁹ EA 100, PMA 144.

⁴⁶⁰ PAC 138, PEC 363.

⁴⁶¹ PAC 138, PEC 363.

⁴⁶² EA 90, PMA 131.

It is not true that the recognition of the freedom of others limits my own freedom: to be free is not to have the power to anything you like; it is to be able to surpass the given toward an open future; the existence of others as a freedom defines my situation and is even the condition of my own freedom. I am oppressed if I am thrown into prison, but not if I am kept from throwing my neighbour into prison.⁴⁶³

In attempting to stop those who would deny others their freedom, it is necessary, Beauvoir recognizes “to destroy not only the oppressor but also those who serve him, whether they do so out of ignorance or out of constraint.”⁴⁶⁴ Their deaths cannot be made right by any kind of utilitarian calculation – by any kind of appeal to future good nor with references to necessary sacrifices offered up in the name of progress or in the working out of History. The ambiguity of human existence necessitates that such actions be seen as failures, not valorized. Yet even in such instances, in fighting to maintain one’s own freedom in and through the fight for the freedom of others, the intertwining of subjectivities makes evident the possibility for something more than violence to exist between subjects and objects. For, as she notes in *An Eye for an Eye*, while our actions “always imply a failure, . . . this failure must not keep us from loving and acting. For we have not only to establish what our situation is, we have to choose it in the very heart of its ambiguity.”⁴⁶⁵

Beauvoir recognizes that while the intertwining of freedoms provides the conditions for the possibility of violence, it simultaneously holds open the potential for recognition. How is this possible? Given that subjects are free and that the actions of one necessarily limits the action of another, how are relations with others not grounded in conflict possible? Beauvoir responds to this question by noting that in claiming that individuals are defined by their freedom, she is not forced to conclude that relations between freedoms are necessarily discordant. She notes that, “freedoms are

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁴ EA 98, PMA 142.

⁴⁶⁵ PHW 259.

not united or opposed,” but, rather, that they are separate.⁴⁶⁶ What is the distinction to be drawn herein between opposition and separation? Beauvoir seemingly is attempting to avoid the immediate assumption that the schism between freedoms, between consciousnesses, necessarily results in acts of hostility and domination. That is, she is trying to escape the kind of individualism enacted in *She Came To Stay* and thus of charges of solipsism leveled at her work and at existentialism more generally.⁴⁶⁷ Returning to her reading of the *Phenomenology* directly, Beauvoir notes how

‘Each consciousness,’ said Hegel, ‘seeks the death of the other.’ And indeed at every moment others are stealing the whole world away from me. The first moment is to hate them. But this hatred is naïve, and the desire immediately struggles against itself. If I were really everything there would be nothing beside me; the world would be empty. There would be nothing to possess, and I myself would be nothing. If he is reasonable, the young man immediately understands that by taking the world away from me, others also give it to me, since a thing is given to me only by the movement which snatches it from me.⁴⁶⁸

Being separate from other freedoms hence does not necessitate acts of violence and hostility, but neither does it discount such actions.

Beauvoir in this essay for the first time ventures to consider the potential for relationships developing that are not grounded in the conflict between self and other but rather in their acknowledgement of each other as subjects. The example she provides is that of gratitude or generosity. An act of generosity must by definition meet two conditions, two conditions that ensure, by definition, that it is an example of recognition. First, such acts must be free. Each assumes their actions as nothing more than “situations that will be new points of departure for others.”⁴⁶⁹ If not so entered into on the subject’s own accord, the act is not generous but rather at best is an instance of reciprocity, at worst a subtle form of coercion. There can be neither debt nor devotion at hand.

⁴⁶⁶ As translated by Kruks, 1998, 47.

⁴⁶⁷ See for example, Nye, 1986, 106.

⁴⁶⁸ EA 70 – 71, PMA 101.

⁴⁶⁹ PAC 124, PEC 323.

Nothing is owed and nothing deserved. Indeed, “Between what he has done for me and what I will do for him, there can be no measure.”⁴⁷⁰ For this reason, generosity cannot be repaid. Indeed, any such offerings, any such “gifts are not touching; they wound.”⁴⁷¹ For they deny a second condition which acts of generosity must fulfill. To be generous not only necessitates the free action of a subject; it further requires the subject to see the other as he sees himself. “In enlightened, consenting gratitude,” or “lucid generosity” as Beauvoir describes it,

One must be capable of maintaining face to face these two freedoms that seem to exclude each other: the other’s freedom and mine. I must simultaneously grasp myself as object and as freedom and recognize my situation as founded by the other, while asserting my being beyond the situation.⁴⁷²

The self must grant to the other the same qualities he ascribes to himself. Generosity thus goes beyond acts of reciprocity involving not the taking of turns at being subject to being an example of recognition in the confrontation of subjects.

The novelty of Beauvoir’s project in *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* is twofold. First, she articulates the outline of the theory of subjectivity that informs and frames of her writing of *She Came To Stay* and her reading of Hegel’s *Phenomenology*. She dares to identify the conditions for the possibility of freedom being not just voiced but enacted. In so doing, secondly, she conceives of relationships between consciousnesses that are defined not only nor necessarily by hostility and conflict but that give way to the recognition of subject by subject. However, while advancing on her earlier project in these important regards, Beauvoir nonetheless remains dissatisfied with this essay.

Her concerns about the essay are multiple. Firstly, the essay yet still too detached from the history and the particularities of the situation which gave rise to the questions concerning freedom and responsibility that had sparked its writing. Divorced of particularities the abstractions it entailed

⁴⁷⁰ PAC 123, PEC 324.

⁴⁷¹ PAC 123, PEC 325.

⁴⁷² PAC 123, PEC 325.

confounded rather than clarified the questions concerning responsibility for the other it takes up. Further, she found that she had not successfully escaped the kind of subjectivism or individualism that had pervaded her previous novel. As she describes it, in this essay

Coexistence appears as a sort of accident that each individual should somehow surmount; he should begin by hammering out his 'project' in a solitary state, and only then ask the mass of mankind to endorse its validity. In truth, society has been all about me from the day of my birth; it is in the bosom of that society and in my own close relationship with it, that all my personal decisions must be formed. My subjectivism was, inevitably, doubled up with a streak of idealism that deprived my speculations of all, or nearly all, their significance.⁴⁷³

What she had written of herein, the interdependence of freedoms, did not so much build the framework for recognition as it elucidated the way projects in which overlapped incidentally rather than showing how they revealed each other's freedom necessarily.

With these criticisms in mind, Beauvoir turns to writing a new novel. Therein the abstract formulation of the problems raised in *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* give way to a more grounded or contextualized consideration for the ethical issues which marked post-war France. More specifically, such generalized considerations of "What is my garden?" evolve into more detailed reflections on the question of violence and the nature (extent, dimensions, limitations) of responsibility. And she would therein take seriously what perhaps can best be understood as the difference between the revealing, the reciprocity and the recognition of freedoms. She would do so by having her new main character take up the challenge of determining how to live amidst others recognizing at one and the same time, that he is separate yet dependent upon others, acknowledging that he is responsible and yet not responsible for them. In so doing, she would revisit Hegel's philosophy and further complicate her understanding of the problem of the other's consciousness.

⁴⁷³ PL 549 – 550, FA 563 – 564.

4.5 The Blood of Others

*“Another aspect of consciousness of the other: in a sense it is the enemy but then again, nothing has value except through it (Hegel). The only absolute is the consciousness. The only absolute is the consciousness of the other, whether embodied (as Sartre is for me), or indistinctly, denied. If the meaning of the value of these consciousnesses disappears, then the value of mine does not exist either. A profound Hegelian idea of the mutual recognition of consciousnesses. This could be the theme of a new novel that would be more intimately linked to the social than the first novel.”*⁴⁷⁴

- Beauvoir

Writing of her plans for a new novel in her *Wartime Diaries*, Beauvoir notes how she wants

.to illustrate this relation to the other in its existential complexity. It is a beautiful subject. *To suppress* the other’s consciousness is a bit puerile. The problem gets back to the social, etc., but must start off from an individual case. I must find a subject-object relationship; perhaps simply a case of unrequited love.⁴⁷⁵

Wanting to move beyond the limitations of her first novel and incorporating her growing awareness of the complexities of the relationship between self and other and of the role of history in shaping those relationships, she takes up this project and turns to writing *The Blood of Others*.

The novel opens with the main character, Jean Blomart, sitting at the bedside of his friend and sometimes lover, H el ene. She had joined him in his Resistance efforts and is fatally wounded in a shelling. As H el ene lies dying, Blomart reflects on whether he will order bombings for the next day. In so doing he finds himself recounting the story of his life. For Blomart, “the voice speaks and the story unfolds. My personal history.”⁴⁷⁶ But it is not just his personal history. As Blomart discovers, to tell the story of his life, he must necessarily tell the stories of the lives of others:

Because of me – first Jacques and now H el ene. Because I did not love her and because I loved her; because she came close to me and because she remained so far apart. Because I exist and she, free, solitary, and eternal, is bound to my existence, unable to avoid the brutal fact of my existence, fettered to the mechanical sequence of her life; and at this last link of the fatal chain her very heart struck by

⁴⁷⁴ WD 322, JG 365.

⁴⁷⁵ WD 321, JG 364.

⁴⁷⁶ BO 215, SDA 203.

the blind steel, by the hard presence of metal, by my presence – her death. Because I was there, solid, inevitable, for no apparent reason.⁴⁷⁷

In this important quote, Blomart acknowledges the intertwining of narratives and of actions. He begins to tell the story of his life but inevitably ends up speaking of the lives and deaths of his friends, Hélène and Jacques. He cannot help it. While he does not want to be implicated in the lives of others, while he does not want to be responsible for them, his intentions are irrelevant. His personal history is part of the “March of History,⁴⁷⁸” part of a series of links between consciousnesses that run both backwards and forwards, to which individuals ascribe meaning. Both the content and the structure of the novel mirror his growing awareness that his personal history, his life, is made up of his “relationships with the remainder of the world.”⁴⁷⁹

Beauvoir regarded *The Blood of Others* as a continuation of the study of the problem of the other began in her early philosophical studies and first brought to the public in *She Came to Stay*. But as noted earlier, in these works there is a shift in her understanding of the problem arising from her reading of Hegel in 1940. Beauvoir herself notes this difference when contrasting the main characters in these novels. She writes that,

My new hero, Jean Blomart, did not insist, as Françoise had done, on remaining the one sentient personality when confronted with other people. He refused to be a mere object where they were concerned, intervening in their lives with the brutal opacity of some inanimate thing; his problem was to get around this stumbling block and establish a clear relationship with them, involving freedom on both sides.⁴⁸⁰

While Françoise could only conceive of relationships with others within the logic of self versus other, of subject versus object, Blomart attempts to conceptualize relations between consciousnesses in

⁴⁷⁷ BO 8, SDA 10.

⁴⁷⁸ BO 199, SDA 187 - 188.

⁴⁷⁹ BO 121, SDA 116.

⁴⁸⁰ PL 541, FA 555.

which the freedom of both is acknowledged. As Simon notes, through this character, Beauvoir undertakes “a study of the problem of the Other . . . establishing a relation of freedom and freedom.”⁴⁸¹

Blomart’s desire to be respectful, to recognize the freedom of others is confounded by his recognition that his actions were never wholly self-regarding but inevitably affected the lives of others. It is not just that in telling his story he tells the stories of others. Moreover in acting, he acts both on and for others. Blomart insists upon freedom being the defining feature of all consciousnesses. He never argues for this premise – he assumes it. The belief that individuals are free, acts as his point of departure. But the call to act is not as simple as it might first appear. Firstly, individuals must act, but act without guarantees – act without knowing all the possible consequences of those actions. There are ripple effects. One cannot control the limits of an action. One cannot know what one is doing. For as Beauvoir will acknowledge in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, the individual always must, in the end, “decide by himself in the darkness,”⁴⁸² that is, he must, “not wait for perfect knowledge to prove to him the necessity of a certain choice; he must first choose and help fashion history.”⁴⁸³ The indeterminacy of action has important implications for the creation of meaning and value. To act always entails risk.

As actions have unforeseen, unanticipated consequences, they cannot be easily categorized or judged. There is no universal standpoint from which they can be assessed.

‘Others live and others die . . . But it does not prevent each person’s life being unique, and each person dying on his own account . . . It’s absurd to try to see the world as if we were standing on Sirius; we’re not on Sirius but on the beach, each of us in our own skin,’⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸¹ Simons, 1999, 49.

⁴⁸² EA 139, PMA 200 -201.

⁴⁸³ EA 123, PMA 177.

⁴⁸⁴ BO 154, SDA 146.

notes Blomart. There are no right or wrong acts. Rather, he realizes that, “whatever I did. I was in the wrong.”⁴⁸⁵ Blomart must choose but it will always be a choice between two unsatisfactory options – between wrong and wrong, between right and right.

Beauvoir elaborates on this point in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* when she notes that ‘chances and risks must be assumed or not the given circumstances must be decided without help, and in so doing one sets up values.’⁴⁸⁶ The implications of this claim must be carefully considered. That there is no absolute or universal standpoint, no Sirius from which to evaluate actions, does not mean there is no value to be attributed to them. Value is not conferred from powers above or outside the acts themselves but, rather, the individual gives meaning and significance to those actions. As such, there are risks entailed in acting and those risks have moral implications -- moral implications that come with few consolations. For while the individual acts, while he makes choices and offers up meanings, in so doing he can expect no comfort from others. He must act, act in ignorance, and act alone. There is no escape.

“Choose,” “decide,” “act,” are words which resonate throughout the text. So too are the words “alone,” and “separation.” Individuals are free and as a result, Blomart discovers that they are alone. No one can act for another individual. No one can understand another’s experience of freedom. As he notes,

People are free ... but only so far as they themselves are concerned; we can neither touch, foresee, nor insist on them using their liberty. That is what I find so painful; the intrinsic worth of an individual exists only for him, and not for me; I can only get as far as his outward actions, and to him I am nothing more than an outer appearance, an absurd set of premises; premises which I do not even choose to be.⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸⁵ BO 112, SDA 107.

⁴⁸⁶ EA 148-149, PMA 215.

⁴⁸⁷ BO 108, SDA 103.

The freedom of another can never be known. Individuals are free and separate and thus “There was no place in the world where the absolute separation of those fates could again be fused.”⁴⁸⁸ Yet, Blomart, in recounting his life with Jacques, Marcel, Madeleine, Denise and H  l  ne, recognizes the paradox implicit in this claim.

For if he decides, if he acts, inevitably he affects the lives of others. True, each individual exists only if he or she acts, but there is no way that he or she can act without affecting others, without limiting or framing the ways which he or she can act. This point does not go unnoticed by H  l  ne. In the final scene of the novel, she tells Blomart how he often told her to choose yet even in insisting on her acting he treated her like a “little dog.”⁴⁸⁹ The more Blomart attempts to treat H  l  ne like a freedom, the more in effect he ends up relegating her to the level of an object. They are separate freedoms yet they are nonetheless intrinsically interdependent. He notes that when it comes to H  l  ne

. . . to leave her free was still tantamount to deciding for her; to remain inactive and docile to her will, was still to create by my own authority a situation to which she could not submit. She was there, bound by my docile hands, imprisoned in a joyless love. In spite of herself and in spite of me.⁴⁹⁰

She is free yet determined, separate yet dependent.

Initially, Blomart attempted to deny his responsibility for others. He indeed finds his union activities appealing for he sees himself as “merely an instrument through which it expressed its existence.”⁴⁹¹ He believes himself to be a conduit. He “took no decision; each member of the union expressed his own will, or the collective will.”⁴⁹² And, as such, he did not feel responsible for the consequences of those decisions.

⁴⁸⁸ BO 120, SDA 115.

⁴⁸⁹ BO 102, SDA 97.

⁴⁹⁰ BO 130, SDA 124.

⁴⁹¹ BO 60, SDA 68.

⁴⁹² Ibid.

But Jacques' death reveals the deceptive nature of this claim. His death does not seem to be the simple reflection of collective will; it does not seem necessary for the greater good. This critique of the communists' conception of individual accountability leads Blomart to recognize that being responsible is the outcome of existing: "It wasn't a question of what I did – the fault lay in no act of mine – I was beginning to understand; it lay in the essence of my being; it was my own self."⁴⁹³ He is responsible because his very existence makes it impossible for him to not be.

And it becomes particularly salient as he confronts the deaths that surround him. Revisiting a scene first set out in *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, Blomart's narrative begins with him recounting a time when, as a small child in the home of his father, he cries learning of the death of the son of their maid, Louise. He cries for the child until his father tells him that, "it's very sad that Louise's baby is dead, I'm deeply grieved for her, but not all our life are we going to mourn it. Now, just you hurry up."⁴⁹⁴ The themes of death and blood link together the moments of this novel. There is the death of Louise's baby noted above, the death of his friend, Jacques, Hélène's aborted fetus, the death of the Jewish population at the hands of the Nazis who occupy Paris, the death of Hélène and the pending death of the innocent people who will be harmed if Blomart decides to order the bombing of a city site. It is the blood of others that marks the cornerstones of Blomart's narrative and leads him to reflect on the themes of history, responsibility and risk. His story is an attempt to justify the loss of the blood of others at his hand.

As his actions affect others, he is responsible yet not responsible, for others. Moreover, he is responsible whether he acts or whether he fails to act. As he notes, he has "learned ... that there's as much guilt in sparing blood as shedding it."⁴⁹⁵ He is responsible even for those consequences of his action or inaction that are unforeseen. Blomart notes that he "didn't create the world, but I create it

⁴⁹³ BO 112, SDA 107.

⁴⁹⁴ BO 11, SDA 13.

⁴⁹⁵ BO 189, SDA 179.

again, by my presence at every instant.”⁴⁹⁶ He is always already in a world that is inter-subjective – a world filled with meanings that he did not give it, and yet which shape what he can do, how he can act. In continuing that world, he is responsible. The world is not given but is willed through actions. And as such he is responsible for the world that he has created. To quote Merleau-Ponty, “we choose the world and the world chooses us.”⁴⁹⁷ It is in Blomart’s experiences of guilt that his recognition of the responsibility this entails is manifest.

Just as action defines human existence, so too does guilt. Guilt is the means through which the interconnectedness of all freedoms is demonstrated. Throughout the novel, Blomart struggles with his guilt, guilt for his role in spilling the blood of others, noted above.⁴⁹⁸ But guilt cannot render him inactive. It cannot be an excuse for him to avoid action. Rather, guilt must be borne. This is to a great extent the lesson of Blomart’s narrative. He cannot live without risk any more than he can live without guilt. At best, he can hope to bear the burden of his recognition of this responsibility.⁴⁹⁹ Beauvoir will note in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* that this account of action and responsibility derives from Hegel who recognizes that “the essence of duty and the essence of thinking and willing subject are absolutely identical.”⁵⁰⁰ Because subjects are free, even though they are determined, because they are separate, even though interdependent, they are responsible, even though not responsible.⁵⁰¹ And there is no escaping this ambiguity.

Blomart describes this as “the curse of being a separate being.”⁵⁰² It is the “crime of existing.”⁵⁰³ “How can we choose for the other,”⁵⁰⁴ this Beauvoir tells us in her journals was to be the

⁴⁹⁶ BO 122, SDA 117.

⁴⁹⁷ Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 454.

⁴⁹⁸ See, for example, BO 240, SDA 226; BO 189, SDA 179; BO 238, SDA 225.

⁴⁹⁹ See here BO 240, SDA 226.

⁵⁰⁰ EA 17, PMA 23.

⁵⁰¹ Mahon, 1977, 29.

⁵⁰² BO 104, SDA 98. It is described herein as “malediction d’être un autre.” Note that elsewhere in the text this is referred to as the “sin of being another being.” See, for example, BO 12, SDA 14.

⁵⁰³ BO 27, SDA 27.

question on which this novel centered. Her answer is clear. How can she choose for another? She chooses because she cannot help but choose.⁵⁰⁵ As Blomart acknowledges “You are the fates of others.”⁵⁰⁶ Blomart comes to recognize this as the inevitable fate of subjects. Whatever he does, whether he acts or does not act, his decisions will affect others in the present, in the future and indeed, even those in the past, as he effectively re-writes history through his actions.⁵⁰⁷ Blomart is struck by the recognition that

. . . there is not an inch of my path which does not trespass on the path of someone else: there is no way of living which can prevent me overflowing from myself at every moment. This life, which spins from my own substance, presents a thousand unknown faces to other men; it flows impetuously through their fate.⁵⁰⁸

Hence the epigraph for the novel: “Each of us is responsible for everything and every human being,” as Dostoyevsky, notes. In her later essays Beauvoir will elaborate on this point noting that “immobile or in action, we always weigh upon the earth. Every refusal a choice, every silence has a voice. Our very passivity is willed in order to not choose not to choose. It is impossible to escape.”⁵⁰⁹

Throughout the works written during Beauvoir’s moral period, there is an emphasis on the ambiguity that defines human existence. It is her goal to demonstrate that this ambiguity that was the cornerstone of existentialism did not lead to the impossibility of ethics. Convinced of his freedom, Blomart must learn of his facticity in the course of his telling of this story, his story. History reveals this ambiguity. It reveals that individuals are both actors and acted upon – they give the world meaning and the world gives meaning to them.

⁵⁰⁴ WTD 323, JG 368.

⁵⁰⁵ In her wartime diaries, Beauvoir identifies this as one of the themes that she had planned to set out to explore in this novel. WD 323, JG 364.

⁵⁰⁶ BO 115, SDA 110.

⁵⁰⁷ Recall for Beauvoir history was not just a series of past events but was a series of meanings ascribed to those events. My present actions can as such challenge and change those meanings and as such alter not only the present and future but also the past. This point will be further discussed in relation to *All Men are Mortal*.

⁵⁰⁸ BO 115 – 116, SDA 110.

⁵⁰⁹ PAC 126, PEC 331.

This revelation is enacted in both the content and the structure of this novel. Beauvoir offers up two narratives in this text – that told from Blomart’s perspective and that offered up from the perspective of H el ene. Subject and object, master and slave, neither tells the full story. The two parts of the self are divided into the two narratives. While his story is told from the perspective of pure universality, pure abstraction, hers is grounded in time and space, immanent and particular. In other words, while Blomart represents the flight into subjectivity, H el ene embodies the opposite tendency, that is, she embodies the reduction of the self to pure objectivity.

H el ene, in the early parts of the story, considers only her own wishes and desires – her own comfort and convenience. As she notes “I need no one, I exist me, H el ene; isn’t that enough?”⁵¹⁰ It is with this attitude, thinking only of her own self, that she has Blomart brought back from the front against his wishes. The same motive leads her to associate with the German. Indeed, she plans to leave Paris for Berlin for a more luxurious life. All this she does for no reason other than her own pleasure and ease. Others are mere instruments in her pursuits. As she tells Blomart, she does what she wants. “You were just a stone. Stones are necessary to make roads, otherwise how could one choose a way for oneself.”⁵¹¹ Maintaining this attitude, an attitude reminiscent of that held by Fran oise in *She Came To Stay*, H el ene is not able to understand the political activism of Paul and Jean. She sees collective action as useless for “we always seek to further our own interests ... and I think we are quite right ... after all, we only have ourselves.”⁵¹² It is to a kind of individualism that she is wed. But her story is not that of Beauvoir’s earlier character. Her individualism does not hold, cannot hold as the war encroaches and as she becomes ever more aware of her own freedom and hence her responsibility.

⁵¹⁰ BO 49, SDA 47.

⁵¹¹ BO 238, SDA 225.

⁵¹² BO 49, SDA 47.

As the novel progresses, H el ene begins to question whether she can live in a purely self-regarding fashion or if, in so doing, she comes to “no longer (be) herself.”⁵¹³ In losing the other by reducing them to nothing but an object for herself she finds that she has “lost herself.”⁵¹⁴ H el ene believes that she has herself, that all her decisions should benefit herself. She maintains this view, clings to it until she catches a glimpse of herself “in the looking-glass”⁵¹⁵ when dancing with the German. In that moment, she sees herself as others see her and realizes that the ideal she has hung onto is an illusion. It is not enough to assert her desires. It is not enough that she knows herself. She is what others see her to be. In this key scene, H el ene recognizes that it is the other who gives her to herself. To be a self, is to be what others see. Individualism, solipsism of any sort, fails on this count. The self and the other are so intertwined that the one cannot exist without the other. In recognizing the role others play in her life, H el ene simultaneously recognizes herself.⁵¹⁶

In recounting this transformation, Beauvoir clearly is responding to critics who would claim existentialism to be a form of individualism. In this scene as well as that in which the Nazis come to get Yvonne,⁵¹⁷ H el ene realizes that her own fate is tied up with the fate of others. She cannot live alone in the world. She needs others. She needs both their objectivity, that is, their otherness and their freedom or their subjectivity. And for the same reasons, in and for her duality, they need her. She discovers that she is already implied in the lives of others. She acts and is responsible for those acts. Or, she does not act and nonetheless is responsible.⁵¹⁸ That this is the case is made evident when

⁵¹³ BO 205, SDA 194.

⁵¹⁴ BO 207, SDA 195.

⁵¹⁵ BO 214, SDA 202.

⁵¹⁶ This scene is reminiscent of that in *She Came To Stay* in which Fran oise sees her reflection in the mirror and states “I am not that woman,” (SCS 406, LI 416) and anticipates similar scenes in *The Woman Destroyed*. See page 246 of this study.

⁵¹⁷ Bo 227 -228, SA 214 – 216.

⁵¹⁸ In these moments, she learns that she is at one embodies the kind of conversion that Beauvoir further will describe in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*.

returning to German occupied Paris on the train, Hélène gives up her seat in a car to a mother with her baby suddenly feeling “the weight of the child on her knees and the appeal of its reproachful eyes.”⁵¹⁹

Hélène’s growing awareness of her political and ethical responsibilities evidences her acknowledgement that individuals are always already amidst inter-subjective relationships. And this recognition is premised on her realization of the complexities of subjectivity. In acknowledging the complexities of her relation to others, she simultaneously acknowledges the complexities of herself. In the moments described above Hélène realizes that while she has a body, while she is grounded in time and space, she is also more than this. She is more than immanence, more than a particularity, more than just a body amidst other bodies. She thinks. She chooses for herself and for others. She acts. At one and the same time she is both immanence and transcendence, both subject and object, both facticity and freedom. Describing the transformation of Hélène, Beauvoir notes that

In the generous atmosphere bred by comradeship and action she finally won through to that ‘recognition’, in the Hegelian sense of the word, which preserves men from mere immanence and contingency. She died as a result; but only after reaching a point where death itself could not prevail against her.⁵²⁰

This involves the recognition of others as freedoms necessarily bound to us, a theme that entails the recognition of the self as both subject and object.

4.6 On History

“History burst over me and I dissolved into fragments.”⁵²¹

- *Beauvoir*

In many ways Hélène’s story in *The Blood of Others* mirrors Beauvoir’s own wartime experiences. In her journals and autobiography, Beauvoir notes that reading Hegel lead her to the recognition of the

⁵¹⁹ BO 240, SDA 226.

⁵²⁰ PL 542, FA 550.

⁵²¹ PL 369, FA 381.

importance of History. As noted earlier, she describes how “history burst over me.”⁵²² In the novel history takes hold of H el ene in a similar manner. Beauvoir recognizes that she could no longer adhere to the radical form of individualism or solipsism that had characterized her pre-war work. Nor could she hold onto the kind of ahistoricism on which it was premised. Reading Hegel had led her to conclude that, “To suppress one’s awareness of the Other’s existence is mere childishness.”⁵²³ She had lived through History and had come to understand that its legacy of meanings could not be overlooked nor could the call to re-create it be left unheeded. To study the problem of the other’s consciousness, was to study history for all present relations between self and other were framed by past situations, by situations which continued to exert their influence on attempts to transcend the present and move toward the future.

Mahon argues that *The Blood of Others* “is perhaps best seen as a statement of an existentialist theory of human history.”⁵²⁴ But what does this theory entail? To begin this analysis it is perhaps best to look at the theories of history explicitly rejected by Beauvoir in this text. Blomart rejects the account of history offered by both Paul, his communist friend, and by his father. Communism, with its adherence to historical materialism, is a form of historical determinism guided by belief in revolution. The outcome of history was rule by the proletariat. Blomart rejects the belief that there is any kind of necessary outcome of history. He notes how in adhering to this idea the “Communists treat human beings like pawns on a chessboard, the game must be won at all costs; the pawns themselves are unimportant.”⁵²⁵ For Blomart the outcome of history cannot be anticipated. There are no guarantees that the proletariat will win the game, for the “pawns” are free and their actions have affects that cannot be predicted. Neither revolution nor salvation is assured. His criticism is not limited to communism: Blomart rejects all accounts of History that are grounded in a belief in

⁵²² Ibid.

⁵²³ PL 546, FA 560.

⁵²⁴ Mahon, 1997, 34.

⁵²⁵ BO 59, SDA 57.

progress, regardless if that progress is the communist dream of a classless society or his father's vision of a capitalist future. His father "did not think of stopping the blind progress of the world."⁵²⁶ But Blomart sees no progress. He sees atrocities that have no cause, no reason. And he must intervene or become implicated in those actions.

In this regard, Beauvoir uses her character of Blomart to offer up her critique of Hegel's notion of history. History is, for Beauvoir, the unfolding of human freedom. It is not determined as agents are, by definition, free. Individuals are free not limited by either their biology or the historical settings in which they were born and raised. Beauvoir, from her standpoint, did not see history as necessarily moving forward towards some better future. History was motion but there was no assurance that such movement would result in progress. As individuals are free, they do not know that they will choose what is better over what is worse. They do not know that they will choose what they wish they would. The future is open. To believe otherwise was to fall prey to what Beauvoir describes as the "tranquilizing effect" of Hegel's philosophy, described earlier. That is, it is to develop a faith in future progress that gives way to withdrawal from recognition of present atrocities and from the acknowledgement of personal responsibilities. She recognizes that

Reading the Hegelian system is so comforting. I remember having experienced a great feeling of calm on reading Hegel in the impersonal framework of the Bibliothèque Nationale in August 1940. But once I got into the street again, into my life, out of the system, beneath a real sky, the system was no longer of any use to me: what it had offered me, under a show of the infinite, was the consolations of death; and again, I wanted to live in the midst of living men.⁵²⁷

Aware of its pull, acknowledging the solace to be offered by losing oneself in the pull of something bigger and something grander than her self and in so doing, to absolve her self of accountability, she rejects his view of history. But what theory of history does this leave open for her?

⁵²⁶ BO 14, SDA 15.

⁵²⁷ EA 158, PMA 228 – 229.

For Beauvoir, history is neither the unfolding of universal principles nor is it a series of random events. History entails meaning, meaning that it acquires from those who enact it and those who tell of it. It is not a meaning ascribed to it by outward and predetermined forces. It is a human construct, and, hence, a sign of freedom. But it is not an easy freedom. As Mahon notes, in *The Blood of Others* Beauvoir makes clear that “humans make history that we humans are free, but this freedom is constantly imposed upon and often overwhelmed by such apocalyptic forces as war, fanaticism, and class struggle.”⁵²⁸ There is no easy meaning to be ascribed to history. It is not a series of events. But it also is not a litany of words. Rather, it is a series of meanings ascribed to events via action and word.

More specifically, history is the account of the relationships between self and other placed into context. Each individual is born into a time and a place, into a situation that was already inhabited by meanings borne out by others. As such, history reveals that subjects are always already caught up in relations with others regardless of their intentions and despite their actions. It is never personal but always necessarily entails the meanings ascribed to it by others. It entails many meanings and, further, is ever open to re-writing. Beauvoir would further reflect on the meaning and influence of history in *All Men are Mortal* and in the essays she writes during this period, although it would not be until she re-reads Hegel’s *Phenomenology* in 1947 and begins writing *The Second Sex* that she begins to develop a more complete theory. For therein, taking up in yet an even more direct manner Hegel’s philosophy, she will have to consider if the self and the other can be reconciled.

As Tidd notes, Beauvoir’s discovery of history and her turn away from solipsism necessitates a more complex understanding of self and other.⁵²⁹ In *The Blood of Others*, the problem of the other’s consciousness is complicated by the influence of history, the recognition of the interdependence of

⁵²⁸ Mahon, 1997, 34.

⁵²⁹ Tidd, 2006, 203.

freedoms, and the acknowledgement of the ambiguities that define human existence. Recognizing that the self is always already in a world where others exist, gives rise to her discussion of guilt and responsibility. Blomart can no more escape his sense that he has done wrong by his friends than he can change the events that lead to their death. Thus it is that history gives rise to ethics in Beauvoir's writings.

To consider the history of a relation between self and other is to simultaneously engage in ethical reflections, for while history tells of what has been, ethics reflects on what might have been. This focus leads Beauvoir to dramatically reconceive of this kind of reasoning. Ethics, for Beauvoir, is not a collection of rules: it is not, as she states in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, "a collection of recipes,"⁵³⁰ a list of "do's" and "don'ts." Rejecting both deontological and teleological models of ethical reasoning, Beauvoir attempts to redefine the field grounding her ethics in the recognition of the ambiguity of human existence and in human freedom. None live in such a manner that they can know all the effects of their actions. How they act influences people in far off places and in distant times in ways that they cannot begin to imagine. Yet this should not, it cannot lead to paralysis. It cannot lead to inaction. For as seen in *The Blood of Others*, even inaction is action. Regardless of the limitations of their knowledge, regardless of their inability to control and anticipate consequences, individuals must nonetheless act. And, because they act, they are responsible for those actions. Framed by these conditions, there can be no "recipes" for living. Ethics, rather, becomes a method. Or, perhaps more specifically, it becomes what Vintges has described as "the art of living."⁵³¹ It entails reflections on the way the world could be grounded on an understanding of the way the world has been.

⁵³⁰ EA 134, PMA 194.

⁵³¹ Vintges, 1996, 9.

The final paragraph of *The Blood of Others* sets forth the philosophical agenda that Beauvoir takes up until 1947. In the conclusion of the novel, Hélène dies and Blomart considers his next action.

He claims that,

For you, only an innocent stone – you had chosen. Those who will be shot tomorrow have not chosen; I am the rock that crushes them; I shall not escape the curse; forever I shall be to them another being, forever separated from them. But if only I dedicate myself to defend that supreme good, which makes innocent and vain all the stones and the rocks, that good saves each man from all the others, and from myself. Freedom – then my passion will not have been in vain. You have not given me peace, but why should I desire peace? You have given me the courage to accept forever the risk and the anguish, to bear my crimes, and my guilt, which will rend me eternally. There is no way.⁵³²

This quotation pulls together the themes explored in the novel – the need to choose, the paradox of freedom, the intertwining of actions, the risks entailed in acting, the responsibility for others and the guilt that is inevitably shared, and the need for History to go forward. In the novels and essays that would follow the publication of *The Blood of Others*, Beauvoir would provide further reflections on these subjects and offer up a theoretical defense of the philosophy it entails, a philosophy that would take up many of the assumptions grounding Hegel's *Phenomenology*.

4.7 All Men are Mortal

*“After wars peace, after peace, another war. Every day men are born and others die.”*⁵³³

- *Beauvoir*

Describing *The Blood of Others* and *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, Beauvoir states that she,

. . . attempted to define our true relationship with other people (autrui). I reached the conclusion that, whether we like it or not, we do impinge on other people's destinies, and must face up to the responsibility which this implies. But such a conclusion also produced its opposite corollary: though keenly aware of my

⁵³² BO 240, SDA 226.

⁵³³ AMM 526.

responsibilities, I nevertheless felt myself wholly incapable of action. This impotence is one of the main themes I tackled in *All Men are Mortal*.⁵³⁴

In *All Men are Mortal* Beauvoir continues the study of history and ethics she begins in *The Blood of Others*. Of particular importance to the development of her understanding of the problem of the other's consciousness, is the further development of her critique of Hegelian and Communist accounts of history and the discussion of ethics and immortality offered therein. In this novel she challenges claims that all historical actions are movement toward a final, common end. Unlike her early novel, however, she goes on to offer in its place an account of history as a series of discontinuous events. Moreover, herein she challenges those theories of ethics grounded outside of history. Rejecting the connection drawn between immortality and ethics in the Judeo-Christian tradition, she argues that meaning and value are possible only because humans exist within time and space. In offering these reflections on history and ethics, Beauvoir does not present her readers with an alternative philosophy of history.⁵³⁵ Indeed, many of the claims made about history and mortality in this novel seem irreconcilable. The importance of this work is not, however, premised on her demonstrating such a theory herein. Rather, the significance of this work lies in the reading of Hegel's philosophy it encompasses and the account of otherness that it entails. She offers in this work no systemic account of history but rather sets the stage for the development of such a theory in her later works, in particular, in *The Second Sex*.

All Men are Mortal, like *The Blood of Others*, is one man's narrative. And, as in the earlier novel, it entails recognition that to tell the story of one man's life, it is necessary to tell the stories of the lives of others. But the narrative offered up by Fosca, the main character in this novel, is different. He not only tells the stories of the lives of others, he tells the stories of his own lives. Fosca is immortal.

⁵³⁴ PL 607, FA 622.

⁵³⁵ Beauvoir makes this point clear in her autobiography. While she does engage in a critique of philosophies of history, she notes that this work offers no alternative theory of history.

As ruler of the Kingdom of Carmona in the 14th century he drinks elixir that grants him immortality. He steps outside of history not understanding that contrary to his beliefs, he is not as a result exalted but rather is condemned.⁵³⁶ He does not understand his wife Catrina's warning that, "when Christ wanted to punish the Jew who laughed in his face, he condemned him to live forever," but he will.⁵³⁷

The book traces Fosca's various incarnations across time. He must constantly re-make himself for no one can accept him as he really is. Across time, he takes on the role of an advisor to King Charles V, an explorer in the New World, a scientist in Paris during the era of salons and the rise of the scientific revolution, a rebel during the French Revolution, an insane man in Paris in the 20s or 30s.

Fallaize has described *All Men as Mortal* as a study of the problem of the individual's relation to history.⁵³⁸ This seems an apt description for in this text Beauvoir explores the necessity of history that is the impossibility of denying history's influence on the individual. As noted earlier, this was a theme developing already in *The Blood of Others*. What Beauvoir adds to this earlier account of history is a definition of the term. That is, in this text, Beauvoir explores various philosophical accounts of history with the goal of trying to fill in the blank from her earlier works. She knew that history shaped meaning, shaped human existence. Now she needed to understand how and why it did so.

Her investigation of history in this regard takes the form of a critique of the theories of history being advanced at the time she wrote and published this novel, that is, between the years 1943 and 1946. The atrocities of the war had made appealing the philosophy of history found in Hegel and, in one form or another, developed in Communism. Hegel's dialectical account of History as the movement of Reason across time as it approaches Absolute Knowledge, gave consolation to those

⁵³⁶ AMM 119, THM 122.

⁵³⁷ AMM 101, THM 106.

⁵³⁸ Fallaize, 1988, 68.

who could not comprehend the horrors of the Holocaust, of massacre and deprivation. If Hegel was right, the events WWII could be explained in terms of some end goal to which they contributed. These events could be justified. They would be given meaning and eventually would be forgotten, would be dissolved in a better future. The horrors of today would provide the building blocks for a better tomorrow. For Hegel, that tomorrow would be one in which Absolute Spirit was realized. The Communists envisioned class struggle leading to a classless society. The appeal of such accounts of history is clear. However, for Beauvoir, this appeal was illusory.

Fosca, in first incarnations, embodies Hegel's philosophy of History, a philosophy that sees the movement of time offering the possibility for union amongst individuals, amongst people under one rule, under one will – namely his own. It is important to note that this desire is not entirely egoistic. Fosca may have initially drank the elixir with the desire to simply escape his own death, but across time he comes to believe that his immortality can serve a greater good, namely, the union of humanity. He attempts to live Hegel's philosophy of History. But it fails. Events take on their own meaning. No one listens to him. There is no way to explain the various event of history in term of the manifestation of reason.

This view of History that sees across time and space the enacting of a single will, a single goal, is dispelled by Fosca's lived experience. Beauvoir describes *All Men Mortal* in such terms. "The Communists," she claims,

. . . following Hegel, speak of Humanity and its future as of some monolithic individuality. I was attacking this illusion by embodying this myth of unity in Fosca; the meanderings, the backslidings, the miseries of History, and its crimes, are too hard to encompass for one consciousness to recall them down through the length of centuries without yielding to despair; fortunately, from father to son, life

begins afresh indefinitely. But this perpetual renovation implies also the pain of separation.⁵³⁹

In this important quote, Beauvoir identifies one of her primary points of departure with Hegel. Hegel desired to see history as a continuous story, as a meta-narrative, uniting events across time and space. Beauvoir, while in her diaries she initially finds this theory appealing, cannot reconcile this view with her lived experience -- her experience, particularly during the war, of hatred, of division and of events that could not be rendered continuous except by an act of fabrication too fantastic to be accepted.

Fosca wished for unity. He wanted “to gather the universe” in his hands, that is, to have it “governed by a single will,” his own.⁵⁴⁰ This is why he could not accept Luther’s call for each to decide on his own. If each individual followed his own consciousness “then the world would be even more divided than it had been.”⁵⁴¹ Adopting this stance, “Nothing can be done for man, his good depends only upon himself.”⁵⁴² The world kept slipping out from under Fosca’s control, out of his hands. He wanted to see progress in the world, the development of ideas, that advancement of humanity, but instead he only saw repetition. Part of Fosca’s lesson is that history cannot fall under the will of one – one consciousness or one ideal. Rather, as noted by Fallaize, “History ... becomes a discontinuous succession of freedoms with endless departures towards individual projects but for which there can be no overall goal.”⁵⁴³ Fosca’s discovery of history is Beauvoir’s discovery. The two find that, “The universe is elsewhere, always elsewhere, and it is nowhere; there are only men, men forever divided.”⁵⁴⁴ History cannot be superseded; it cannot be overcome. Rather, each moment must be lived in all its ambiguity.

⁵³⁹ PL 73, FC 77.

⁵⁴⁰ AMM 192 - 193, THM 191.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid.

⁵⁴² AMM 238, THM 233.

⁵⁴³ Fallaize, 1988, 76.

⁵⁴⁴ Barnes, 1959, 214.

For Fosca, history thus loses all meaning. Standing outside of time, divided from others, there is no value in the world. All events are equal and he is overcome by indifference. That this is the case, however, is not true for those he encounters. Marianne, Beatrice, and Armand engage in the world, they find value in it and it is from that context that their actions gain meaning. Meaning and value does not come from sources outside of history. They do not lie beyond or outside of time. Neither the future nor the past, gives meaning and value to the present. Rather, history is created by our actions as they take place in time and space. As Armand notes, “A limited future, a limited life: that’s man’s lot, that’s enough”⁵⁴⁵ It is that limitation; it is the ability to die for a cause, to risk life, to suffer the consequences of his actions, that gives life meaning. Fosca cannot enter into the battle to the death that according to Hegel gives meaning to actions and content to the idea of the self. He is without limitations. He can risk nor gain anything and as such he is denied the happy ending of a death.⁵⁴⁶ Thus, he lives without meaning and without value as no one.⁵⁴⁷

Beauvoir challenges traditional ethics on a number of fronts in this novel. Judeo-Christian ethics is grounded on the belief that the opportunity for immortal life necessitated that humans act in a moral manner. Within this context, values which transcended time and place are to be upheld in order to ensure salvation and eternal life. Fosca unveils the illusion of such reasoning. He demonstrates that immortality rather than necessitating ethical action, takes away the conditions for the possibility of value being attributed to his actions. It is his ability to risk all, to risk life itself that gives value to the world. Fosca acts neither morally nor immorally for he stands outside of all time. For him there is only indifference.⁵⁴⁸ Fosca’s immortality makes evident that it is through living and acting in their own time, that individuals create value. From the perspective of eternity, all principles are useless. It

⁵⁴⁵ AMM 387, THM 372.

⁵⁴⁶ AMM 170, THM 169.

⁵⁴⁷ In this regard, standing outside the master-slave dialectic Fosca’s stance anticipates Beauvoir’s discussion of the Absolute Other in *The Second Sex* and in *Old Age*. See this study pages 184 – 196 and pages 255 – 265 for a further discussion of this issue.

⁵⁴⁸ AMM 74, THM 78.

is the temporal and contingent nature of human action that allow for the exercise of freedom and the creation of value. Fosca's immortality thus condemns him to not only a life without meaning but also a life alone.

Fosca's immortality not only separates him from others but it also separates him from himself. It is this that he tries to explain to Regina in recounting to her his many lives. He is the other and will always remain so. He cannot engage with others. He cannot participate in their projects. Fosca, according to Beauvoir, "steals the world, without reciprocity, he casts them into the agonizing indifference of eternity."⁵⁴⁹ He can only live through others: he cannot live with them or for them, as he watches Armand and Marianne do. As such, he "never reaches the true meaning of friendship or love because the whole basis of our brotherhood is that we all must die."⁵⁵⁰ As Savage Brosman notes,

Others can be affected by what he does, but he is separated from them because he does not share in the defining relationship between these actions and time. Cut off from the most telling fact of human situation and from the consequences of his own deed, he is a type of imposter, the quintessential alienated man.⁵⁵¹

Images of Fosca as an imposter, as an alienated man, are apt. In a manner clearly echoing Hegel's account of self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology*, he finds himself alienated from others and alienated from himself.

In the early part of the book, Antonio describes his father as "a foreigner in your own city."⁵⁵² This claim proves prophetic. While Fosca recognizes the truth of Antonio's accusation, he does not yet understand the consequences of living as such. Fosca is a foreigner not only in his own city: he is a stranger to himself – to his own body, to his own mind. He has lived many lives, lives that are not

⁵⁴⁹ AMM 74, THM 78.

⁵⁵⁰ AMM 74, THM 78.

⁵⁵¹ Savage- Brosman, 1991.

⁵⁵² AMM 152, THM 152.

continuous, lives of which that he can never acknowledge the implications. Moreover, he must continually recreate himself. He talks of taking up new roles and new costumes.⁵⁵³ He must in other words, always be other than himself, other unto himself.

Fosca's is a morality tale. The pull of history cannot be escaped nor can it be conveniently conceived of as continuous progress. Fosca's lesson is that History is what individuals make of it. It is the collection of meanings attributed to it based on actions undertaken in time and space. At the end of the novel, Fosca describes himself as

A man from nowhere, without a past, without a future, without a present. I wanted nothing; I was no one. I advanced step-by-step towards the horizon which receded with every step; drops of water sprang forth and fell to earth again, each instant destroying the last. My hands were forever empty: an outsider, a dead man. They were men; they were alive. I was not one of them. I had nothing to hope for.⁵⁵⁴

To be a subject is not to try to escape the pull of time but rather it is to embrace it and to risk a life.

4.8 Transition Points

*"Each book thenceforth impelled me towards its successor, for the more I saw of the world, the more I realized that it was brimming over with all I could ever hope to experience, understand and put into words."*⁵⁵⁵

- *Beauvoir*

The completion of *All Men Are Mortal* in 1946 marks the end of Beauvoir's "moral" period. Spurred by her reading of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, there is in the writings dating from this time a growing awareness of the role that history plays in situating freedoms. This recognition in turn required her to revisit and revise the account of subjectivity and of the problem of the other's consciousness that informed her earliest works. In particular, it gave rise to a consideration of the interdependence of

⁵⁵³ See, for example, AMM 281, THM 274.

⁵⁵⁴ AMM 400, THM 382.

⁵⁵⁵ PL 607, FA 622.

subjectivities, that is, of the possibility of relations between consciousnesses not defined by hostility or conflict.

Yet in these works already she begins to problematize these ideas. While she advances a theory of interlinking freedoms, she still is yet to adequately account for the manner in which projects do more than overlap. That is, she has still yet to escape the pull of individualism. As well, her understanding of situated freedom would require further requirement. While she acknowledges that history frames individual freedom, she is still yet to consider how to discern degrees of responsibility as a result. Finally, while she ventures to write of love, fraternity, friendship and generosity, each attempt ends in failure. Fosca will be unable to love neither Marianne nor Regina. Blomart will disappoint his friends. Generosity will not flourish. The conditions for the possibility of recognition will not be met.

And yet she does not give up on her project. Indeed, as will be seen, her explorations of these ideas from this period provide the foundation for her mature writings – writings that she herself will characterize as offering her best resolution to this problem.

Chapter 5

Reciprocity

5.1 The Mature Works

*“Through the body we can ‘frequent’ the world, understand it; we can ‘have a world.’ The space in which we situate objects is not an abstract form imposing itself upon us from outside; our perception of space expresses the manner in which we stretch out toward the future through our body and through things. It expresses the entire life of the subject. The experience of spatiality is the experience of our situation in the world.”*⁵⁵⁶

- *Beauvoir*

After completing *All Men are Mortal*, or perhaps more accurately, amidst her writing of this work, a shift takes place in Beauvoir’s thinking – a shift that, though subtle, would have a great effect on her understanding and resolution to the problem of the other’s consciousness. As Kruks recognizes, Beauvoir, in her writings from the mid-forties, in what might be considered her transition period,

. . . puts into question her earlier characterization of the self as always free to make its own choices within its situation. Instead, she develops an account in which selves make their choices not only as free affirmations of a future but also as expressions of their specific present situations – situations that are freighted by their past. Thus accompanying Beauvoir’s greater focus on the weight of situations, in both *The Second Sex* and *The Mandarins*, there is a greater attention given to the particularities of lived experience and in both works Beauvoir turns more fully to the use of a phenomenological method.⁵⁵⁷

Addressing the questions she herself raised about the excessive individualism and abstraction evidenced in *The Blood of Others*, *All Men are Mortal* and *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, Beauvoir seeks to ground her works more clearly in the life-world. The problem of the other’s consciousness was not a theoretical problem but a lived dilemma that could only be understood and ultimately resolved when situated clearly in history, in a place and in the particularities of an individual life.

⁵⁵⁶ “Review of *The Phenomenology of Perception*” in PW161.

⁵⁵⁷ Kruks, 2005, 69.

This shift is first evident in an often overlooked but important review that Beauvoir writes in 1945 of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *The Phenomenology of Perception*. In this essay Beauvoir points her readers towards her growing awareness of the ways in which time, space and the body frame the problem of the other's consciousness and delimit its possible resolution. That is, it evidences, as Kruks notes, Beauvoir's growing recognition of "The Force of Circumstances"⁵⁵⁸ and lays the foundation for a new approach to her problem in *The Second Sex* and *The Mandarins*.

In adopting this approach, Beauvoir does not take a wholly new direction in her study. As discussed in the previous chapter, there is already in her writings from her moral period a growing awareness of the role that time plays in structuring and framing relationships between self and other. As the war came to an end this awareness intensifies and becomes more pressing as questions are raised as to whether an individual can be held responsible for what occurred in the past, whether there can be restitution, whether retribution and revenge are justified. Underlying and informing answers to these questions, questions that Beauvoir will explore in *The Mandarins*, is a conception of time – both a phenomenological account of how time is lived and also an ethics of time. It is such an account of time, an account that did not just theorize the past but that also conceptualized the future, that she finds the beginnings for in Merleau-Ponty's work.

For Beauvoir, the past, as Keltner aptly describes it, is "a signification that is revealed as a solicitation."⁵⁵⁹ The past is always already caught up in the future. This has an evident effect on her account of the problem of the other's consciousness. As Kruks notes, she comes to develop an understanding of this problem in "which selves make their choices not only as affirmations of a future but also as instantiations of a present that is heavily freighted by the past."⁵⁶⁰ Considering how the past along with the present and the future configures the self and hence the other, leads Beauvoir to

⁵⁵⁸ Kruks, 2005, 68.

⁵⁵⁹ Keltner, 2006, 210.

⁵⁶⁰ Kruks, 2009, 163.

recognize along with Merleau-Ponty the ways in which the situation more generally shapes and frames the problem of the other's consciousness.

Developing this more nuanced and sophisticated theory of temporality based on her reading of Merleau-Ponty's work, Beauvoir is drawn to consider as well the concept of space. Deutscher rightly notes that for Beauvoir there is a necessary link between time and the "imaginative and transformative relationship one has to one's environment."⁵⁶¹ It is not just history but also all the particularities of the places and spaces that the self finds itself in that shape its understanding of itself and of the other. It is his situation that defines for him these relationships in the same moment as he defines them. Considered in the abstract, outside of a particular place and outside of a particular body, this was not so much a problem as a logic game or perhaps a thought experiment. What the *Phenomenology of Perception* makes clear to Beauvoir is the need for her to ground her work in concreteness of lived experience.

Her growing awareness of the importance of the situation in defining the parameters of the problem of the other's consciousness leads Beauvoir via her reading of *The Phenomenology of Perception* to recognize the importance of the body. In his study Merleau-Ponty "defines the body as our manner of being in the world, our 'anchorage' in this world, or even the collection of 'holds' we have on things."⁵⁶² That is, the body is the means by which and through which the individual gains a world. But how is this the case? Elaborating on this definition, Beauvoir recognizes herein that

. . . through the body we can 'frequent' the world, understand it; we can 'have a world.' The space in which we situate objects is not an abstract form imposing itself upon us from outside; our perception of space expresses the manner in which we stretch out toward the future through our body and through things. It expresses the entire life of

⁵⁶¹ Deutscher, 2008, 128.

⁵⁶² "Review of *The Phenomenology of Perception*" in PW 161.

the subject. The experience of spatiality is the experience of our situation in the world.⁵⁶³

As Beauvoir will write in *The Second Sex*, “A life is a relation with the world; the individual defines himself by choosing himself through the world.”⁵⁶⁴ These choices will be made and this link between self and the world will be constructed in and through the body. It will be the means by which the self constructs its world. And it thus will provide the vantage point from which to determine what is of the self and what is other. Summarizing Merleau-Ponty on this point, Beauvoir notes that

In order to perceive, I must be situated, and the same movement by which I accede to the world by rooting myself here and now, pushes away the world to the always inaccessible horizon of my experience. Indeed, I am not an impersonal and timeless consciousness. If I exist as subject, it's because I make time.⁵⁶⁵

For Beauvoir, taking up her project, her problem, once more the body hereafter will prove to be a point of departure for considering the manner in which the problem of the other's consciousness is lived and the manner in which it may be resolved.

It is important to recognize that the body to which Beauvoir refers and which Merleau-Ponty describes is not pure corporeality. The body is composed of the physical object along with all of the meanings ascribed to it based on its location in time and in space.⁵⁶⁶ Situated and situating, the body both defines and is defined by what is other. And this body is not closed in an instant but implies an entire history and even a pre-history.⁵⁶⁷

The world gives meaning to the body and hence to the self. But the body simultaneously gives the world to the self. As Beauvoir notes, the body, as described by Merleau-Ponty, is

⁵⁶³ “Review of *The Phenomenology of Perception*” in PW 161.

⁵⁶⁴ TSS2 58; DS1 97.

⁵⁶⁵ “Review of *The Phenomenology of Perception*” in PW 160.

⁵⁶⁶ “Review of *The Phenomenology of Perception*” in PW 163.

⁵⁶⁷ “Review of *The Phenomenology of Perception*” in PW 163.

“a certain way of being in the world that is proposed to us from a point in space, and that our body takes back and assumes. . . .And in order for the sensible to be sensed, it must be subtended by my gaze or by the movement of my hand. To perceive the blue sky is not a matter of positing myself in front of it. I must abandon myself to it, so that it ‘thinks itself within me.’”⁵⁶⁸

The body is a meeting-point, an intersection between immanence and transcendence, between the individual and the world, between self and other.

Situating the self in a time, in a place, and in a body radically transforms understandings of the other. Indeed, what Merleau-Ponty is suggesting and what Beauvoir is acknowledging is that it is only so situated in the confines of lived experience that the other can be encountered. Extracted from the situation, from the life world, there is no other -- there is only an idea. As Butler notes, “The skin and flesh expose us to the gaze of others . . .to touch and to violence.”⁵⁶⁹ It is through the flesh that we come to know the other and, as this quote makes evident, that the self comes to know itself. For it is only through the other that the self’s own otherness is acknowledged. The body makes evident the thingness of the self that cannot be escaped through theory or through denial. It makes evident the vulnerability of the self to the other, its fragility as the other approaches with tenderness or hostility.

Merleau-Ponty’s study of perception thus provides Beauvoir with the foundation for developing a more sophisticated account of the relationship between self and other. He makes evident that “the object is always given to a subject, and the subject is always directed toward an object. The two are interdependent but can be separated by analysis,” as noted by Heinämaa.⁵⁷⁰ Beauvoir’s tendency towards individualism and her addressing of the problem of the other’s consciousness in the abstract made it difficult for her to theorize such interconnectedness. In situating self-consciousness, Merleau-Ponty succeeded in giving

⁵⁶⁸ “Review of *The Phenomenology of Perception*” in PW162.

⁵⁶⁹ Butler, 2004, 26.

⁵⁷⁰ Heinämaa “Introduction to Review of *The Phenomenology of Perception*” in PW 155.

. . . back to man the right to an authentic existence, by eliminating the opposition of the subject and the object. It is impossible to define an object in cutting it off from the subject through which and for which it is object; and the subject reveals itself only through the objects in which it is engaged.⁵⁷¹

In *The Second Sex* and *The Mandarins* Beauvoir will put this theory into practice, giving life to these ideas, creating a catalogue of the various ways in which self and other, subject and object become so intertwined – a catalogue that will include relations of hostility and conflict but will not preclude other possible forms of recognition.

The review Beauvoir writes of *The Phenomenology of Perception* marks the beginning of a new period in her work. As Kruks describes it, “This period is marked by an increasingly profound acknowledgement of the weight of situations, of what she will call *la force des choses*. In this new period she stopped attempting to ‘exorcise’ those elements of life that are beyond the control of the self.”⁵⁷² It is not so much this change of focus itself, but the effect of this change that is key to this study. She leaves aside questions of ontology for matters of history.⁵⁷³ She tries to leave aside abstractions following Merleau-Ponty’s lead and centering her work on lived experience⁵⁷⁴. In so doing, in situating the subject within a time, a place and a body that had always already been ascribed a meaning, a shift occurs in Beauvoir’s understanding of the dimensions of the problem of the other’s consciousness and consequently of possible resolutions. These effects become evident as, adopting this new approach, she turns her attention to the “problem of woman.”

5.2 The Hegel Renaissance

“Our epoch is a birth-time, and a period of transition. The spirit of man has broken with the old order of things hitherto prevailing, and with the old ways of thinking, and is in the mind to let them all sink into the depths of the past and to set about its own transformation.”⁵⁷⁵

⁵⁷¹ “Review of *The Phenomenology of Perception*” in PW 160.

⁵⁷² Kruks, 2005, 68.

⁵⁷³ Blanchard, 2004, 185.

⁵⁷⁴ “Review of *The Phenomenology of Perception*” in PW 163.

⁵⁷⁵ PS § 11, 6.

- *Hegel*

In 1947 as she began the process of writing *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir turns once again to Hegel. In a letter to Nelson Algren dated September 28th, 1947 she writes of how she and Sartre "sat at a terrace of a café, on the Boulevard Montparnasse, and we spoke about Hegel whom we are studying together and who is a very difficult philosopher."⁵⁷⁶ Little is known as to why Beauvoir picked up Hegel's *Phenomenology* in 1947. It may be that her own questions concerning Hegel's *Phenomenology* raised during her moral period led her to return to this work. Or perhaps it was that Hegel was becoming fashionable in France in the late 1940s. Or yet another reason may have been Sartre's desire to read Hegel as he turned his attention towards writing an existential ethics, an ethics which he would never publish but which he outlines in his *Notebooks Towards an Ethics*.

Whatever the reason, Beauvoir returns in 1947 to Hegel's work. The year of this endeavor is significant for it was in 1947 two of what remain to be the pivotal commentaries on Hegel's *Phenomenology* were published in France. Both Kojève's *Introduction to Hegel's Phenomenology* and Hyppolite's *Genesis, Structure, and Phenomenology in Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* appear in this year and set the agenda for Hegelian studies for the next 25 years.⁵⁷⁷

Few details are known about Beauvoir's specific reading and critique of these texts. The sole reference to Kojève's *Introduction* in her own works is found in *The Prime of Life*. Therein she makes reference to a conversation she has with Queneau on Kojève though she provides no details of the nature or content of that discussion nor does she comment on her more general stance on his controversial text.⁵⁷⁸ Indeed, Beauvoir remains vague with regard to her views on this work. In an

⁵⁷⁶ TLA 70, LA 73.

⁵⁷⁷ For accounts of the influence of the works of Kojève and Hyppolite on shaping 20th interpretations of Hegel in the 20th century, see Gutting, 2011, Butler, 1987, Descombes, 1980 and Judt, 1992.

⁵⁷⁸ FC 43, LFC 47.

interview with Lundgren-Gothlin,⁵⁷⁹ Beauvoir claims to have read Kojève's work on Hegel, however once again she does not offer up a detailed critique. And yet, perhaps she does. That it was this year, of all years, that she turns to writing *The Second Sex*, that she turns to addressing the problem of woman employing Hegel's model in the *Phenomenology* perhaps is meant to signal to her readers that this work be read as contributing to the tradition of these writers, read as her contribution to French Hegelianism. Thus it is necessary to look in greater detail at the role of Beauvoir in the French Hegelian tradition, positioning her study of women in relation to those studies from 1947 in order to better understand the novelty and import of her contribution to what is regarded in France as the "Hegel Renaissance."⁵⁸⁰

No single scholar had more influence on creating this Renaissance than Jean Hyppolite. While the *Phenomenology of Spirit* was first published in 1807, it would be more than 100 years before this work would gain prominence in France. Although some studies of Hegel were undertaken in France as early as 1831,⁵⁸¹ work on his philosophy in the early part of the century was scant and marginalized. It would be in the early 1920s that the first lectures on the *Phenomenology* would be delivered by Myerson and Andler, and Alain would offer the first course taught on Hegel in France at the Sorbonne. In the late 20's and early 30s a shift takes place in the reception of Hegel's work in philosophical circles in France. It is with the publication of Leon Brunschvicg's *Le Progrès de La Conscience dans La Philosophie Accidentale* and Jean Wahl's *Le Malheur de La Conscience dans La Philosophie de Hegel*,⁵⁸² along with the delivery of a series the lectures by Alexandre Koyré, that attention begins to be given to Hegel's work, attention that would reach a pinnacle in the 1940s with

⁵⁷⁹ Lundgren-Gothlin, 1996, 59 n16.

⁵⁸⁰ Poster, 1975; Rockmore, 1995.

⁵⁸¹ The first document reference is to a lecture given by Victor Cousin on Hegel's *Phenomenology* in that year.

⁵⁸² Note that these were studies that Beauvoir read as a student at the Sorbonne. See pages 62 and 110 of this text for a further discussion of these works.

the completion of the translation of the text by Hyppolite But it was not only his translation that influenced generations of Hegelian scholars.

In *Genesis, Structure, and Phenomenology in Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, as noted earlier published in 1947 along with his translation, Hyppolite offers up his reading of Hegel's text. Therein, Hyppolite aims to reconcile the differing approaches to Hegel's *Phenomenology*. In this regard Hyppolite approaches Hegel's text not as an outline for social change, nor as an examination of the development of Absolute Spirit. Negotiating a middle ground between views that read this work as a revolutionary treatise and those that aimed to keep the text in the realm of abstract reflection, Hyppolite offers a reading of the text that mediates the two approaches. For him, the text, while relying on abstractions and holding open the possibility of being employed to re-shape history, is firstly an account of a personal journey of discovery, of self-discovery, which incidentally proves to be a discovery of an age. Employing this framework, in a manner similar to that adopted by Wahl, Hyppolite focuses on the discussion of the unhappy consciousness. As such, the importance of Hegel's work does not lie in his call to challenge exploitation, but rather it resides in the move to transcend hostile subject/object or self/other relations. And this project is not undertaken in the abstract realm but rather as Gutting notes Hyppolite "negotiates the middle ground between existential phenomenology and Hegelian Absolute Knowledge" he centering Hegel's text in lived experience.⁵⁸³

While it is Hyppolite who kick-starts the Hegel Renaissance, his contribution to this movement is often overlooked as attention is drawn to the more radical work of Alexander Kojève. In his lectures, the notes from which comprise *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, Kojève emphasizes the transformative nature of Hegel's philosophy. Sidestepping the ontological and metaphysical underpinnings of the text, Kojève focuses his attention on the master and slave dialectic. In Hegel's

⁵⁸³ Gutting, 2011, 32.

account of the movement of reason across history, he describes a moment when individuals, confronted with the realization that others are capable of reducing them to the level of objects, that is, that they were capable of denying them their subjectivity, willingly enter into a battle to the death in order to acquire and sustain a sense of self. However, such a battle soon comes to be recognized as eliminating rather than providing the conditions for the possibility of selfhood. The self needs the other to grant him his subjectivity. The self cannot grant this status to him or herself. If others cannot, as such, be eliminated, the alternative is to place them in submission. The world can thus be divided up into masters and slaves – masters being willing to risk life in order to maintain a sense of self, while servants being unwilling to sacrifice all for this cause. For Kojève, the critical moment of this text lies in the recognition that it is the slave, via the experience of labour, not the master who is capable of achieving subjectivity. What results is a reading of the *Phenomenology* as a revolutionary social theory, a social theory that held great appeal in Postwar France.⁵⁸⁴

Sartre's reading of Hegel parallels that of Kojève in many regards. In particular, Sartre joins Kojève focusing on the conflict between consciousnesses. However, he would explore the dimensions of the conflict not in the realm of politics but rather in relation to the inner life of the individual, not turning away from the ontological issues at hand but rather centering his discussion of Hegel on this front. Considering his elaboration of the premises underlying and informing Kojève's interpretation helps to situate Beauvoir's reading of Hegel in regards to the French tradition and as well makes evident the ways in which her reading of the *Phenomenology* is distinct from that of Sartre.

Sartre summarizes his account of the relation between consciousnesses, his account of the problem of the other's consciousness, in his discussion of the Look.⁵⁸⁵ In *Being and Nothingness* he

⁵⁸⁴ The question is whether Kojève finds in Hegel's text this political agenda or whether he imposes on the text his own beliefs. As Taylor wonders, there is a question as to whether Kojève's *Introduction* is "better read as a philosophical treaty than a commentary on Hegel." (Taylor, 1980, 21)

⁵⁸⁵ Sartre, BN 340 – 401.

explains that the minute that one gazes at another, he turns her into an object, an object in time and space. He cannot see another as anything other than an object. He cannot see her in her subjectivity. He sees instead " a "woman", a "flirt." But as he sees others so too is he seen. He is a "man," a "seducer," a "threat." What hence results when two self-consciousnesses encounter each other is a battle of the Look, the battle for the first look. To be subject, he must first see the other, transforming her into an object and securing his own subjectivity. As he notes, "between the Other-as-object and Me-as-subject there is no common measure... I can not know myself in the other if the Other is first an object for me; neither can I apprehend the Other in his true being – that is, in his subjectivity."⁵⁸⁶ One cannot see the self in the other or the other in the self. As such, there is for Sartre a necessary and inescapable ontological separation between consciousnesses.⁵⁸⁷ It is, for him, "In the Look that individuals engage in a social war of mutual objectification," as Murphy argues.⁵⁸⁸

Between consciousnesses, consequently, there can be no reciprocity, no mutual recognition. Such relations are ruled out by Sartre's ontology. In his *Cahiers* he notes that

Recognition must be without reciprocity; an absolute witness, himself the definition of good and evil, must justify me in recognizing me. When this witness is no more, we try to replace him with the interplay of give and take of mutual recognition. But it is just the quickness of this "reflection-reflecting" interplay that prevents our seeing its illusory character. It is also the fact that concrete humanity (or its fibrous structure owing to its great number) is grasped as an unlimited series of men. The unlimited series of men (if some recognize me today I take this recognition as the symbol of a recognition by the whole human past since the present is their heir of the past and for the sign of recognition to come for every present act is given as making some mortgage on the future) is equivalent in my comprehension to a man (a universal, absolute, etc. concept). I am recognized therefore by man. But this man is me. Circle.⁵⁸⁹

⁵⁸⁶ Sartre, BN 328.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁸ Murphy, 1989, 102.

⁵⁸⁹ Sartre, C 70 – 71.

The logic of the Look precludes this possibility. As such, he concludes that consciousness knows itself before it knows the other. The other does not give the self to the self. According to Sartre, Hegel fails to appreciate that the other is perceived only in its objectivity. "The Other is not a for-itself as he appears to me; I do not appear to myself as I am for the other."⁵⁹⁰ He concludes that the subject's relation with others is always defined by an irreducible separation and hostility towards them as he attempts to assert his subjectivity and remain a self. Friendship, love, gratitude-- all these are mere facades for what ultimately are battles for the Look, for subjectivity and hence, supremacy. Reciprocity and mutual recognition were not possibilities, for Sartre.

5.3 The Second Sex

*"To emancipate woman is to refuse to confine her to the relations she bears to man, not to deny them to her; let her have her own independent existence and she will continue nonetheless to exist for him also; mutually recognizing each other as subject, each will yet remain for the other an other."*⁵⁹¹

- *Beauvoir*

These interpretations of the *Phenomenology* offered by Hyppolite, Kojève and Sartre help to frame Beauvoir's project in *The Second Sex*. For while she would share their enthusiasm for Hegel's work, she would in light of her earlier studies of his work and given her new taking up of his text, want to distinguish her reading from all three. First, while along with Hyppolite Beauvoir reads beyond the discussion of the master-slave dialectic to consider the impact and importance of Hegel's discussion of the unhappy consciousness, particularly in relation to the development of an account of reciprocity, in keeping with her critique of Hegel from her moral period, she cannot maintain with him that the dialectic is driven by and leading towards some Absolute.⁵⁹² Nor is she willing to read the text as solely an account of the inner journey of consciousness, as he reads the work. Hyppolite in regarding the *Phenomenology* as a journey of discovery for the self, as the development of self-awareness,

⁵⁹⁰ Sartre, BN 327.

⁵⁹¹ TSS1 731, DS2 576.

⁵⁹² For a discussion of Hyppolite on the Absolute, see Gutting, 2011, 22 -23.

overlooks that the history of the individual and the history of the age are intertwined. The individual cannot be subtracted from history any more than history can be extracted from the individual. In line with Kojève, she rejects both these aspects of Hyppolite's account opting for a reading of the *Phenomenology* that does not succumb to abstraction and that gives to his dialectic social force.

While Kojève rejects Hegel's reliance on the Absolute to inform his account of the dialectic, he nonetheless continues to maintain that there is an end to history, a view that Beauvoir cannot adopt. The dialectic, she maintains must remain open. Further, while Kojève abstracts from the whole of Hegel's dialectic, the discussion of lordship and bondage, Beauvoir sees this as but one moment in the movement of history.⁵⁹³ Indeed, in advancing this interpretive stance, Kojève seems to reduce the whole of the *Phenomenology* to the discussion of "Lordship and Bondage." In so doing he misses the plot and the structure of the *Phenomenology* as a whole. It is for this reason that she, unlike Kojève will not cast all relations between self and other in hostility but will hold open the possibility for recognition.⁵⁹⁴ That is, as Williams notes, he "collapses recognition into master-slave and suppresses the fact that the concept of recognition supports alternative possibilities of realization and outcomes. Finally, it distorts the range and continuum of the concept of recognition in the *Phenomenology* and other writings."⁵⁹⁵ Finally, while Kojève speaks of the revolutionary value of Hegel's work, Beauvoir enacts it. She puts Hegel's ideas into context, into history, unlike her contemporary and she demonstrates the force that institutions, values and beliefs play in shaping and structuring the relationship between individuals at both the interpersonal and the social level.

⁵⁹³ As Lundgren-Gothlin points out, for Beauvoir, the master/slave dialectic is not an endless battle but rather is a stage of development, a stage of development that would be overcome by choosing to act in the world. Lundgren-Gothlin, 1996, 79.

⁵⁹⁴ Note herein I take issue with Gothlin's reading of *The Second Sex*. In her work, *Sex and Existence* (1995) she argues that Beauvoir advances Kojève's interpretation of *The Second Sex*. For a more detailed account of the problems with this reading of Beauvoir's work, see O'Brien, 1999.

⁵⁹⁵ Williams, 1992, 170.

It is on many of these same grounds that Beauvoir also rejects Sartre's interpretation of Hegel. The logic of the Look precludes the possibility of seeing the self in the other and the other in the self. One cannot see into one's self nor can one see beyond the objectified body of the other. As Murphy notes, "Sartre had argued the gaze of others objectified and limited our possibilities. For Beauvoir, the gaze afforded moral possibilities and gave moral content."⁵⁹⁶ It opened up the "possibility of synthesis between male and female, consciousness and body."⁵⁹⁷ Further, Beauvoir rejects Sartre's focus on Hegel's ontology. As Evans notes, Beauvoir does not view Hegel's description of consciousness in abstract theoretical terms but as embodying a truth of lived experience.⁵⁹⁸ Hence her grounding of her study in time and in history, within a body, in a manner not found in Sartre's writings. In keeping with her reading of Merleau-Ponty's *The Phenomenology of Perception*, and in a manner that clearly exhibits the shift in her understanding of the problem of the other's consciousness, a shift conditioning a new emphasis on lived experience, her application of Hegel's ideas is historical and embodied.⁵⁹⁹ Beauvoir thus is led to "quietly subvert" Sartre's account of freedom and his impermeable "walled city subject"⁶⁰⁰ Freedom, she makes clear, is always situated and the self, as noted earlier, is always already caught up with others.⁶⁰¹

In these regards, Beauvoir offers up what is in many ways a more radical interpretation of Hegel --- a more radical appropriation of Hegel --- than that offered up by these other commentators. It is clear that her goal in taking up *The Second Sex*, of writing it alongside the *Phenomenology*, is to use his theoretical account of the problem of the other's consciousness to elucidate the lived

⁵⁹⁶ Murphy, 1989, 103.

⁵⁹⁷ Moser, 1994. 25.

⁵⁹⁸ Evans, 2009, 106.

⁵⁹⁹ Indeed, this shift in focus is evident in the very language that Beauvoir employs in *The Second Sex*. In a manner that starkly contrasts with Sartre's consideration of Hegel's ideas both in *Being and Nothingness* and in his *Notebooks for an Ethics*, Beauvoir's work relies on little if any philosophical "jargon," opting instead for a more descriptive and accessible vocabulary and literary style.

⁶⁰⁰ Kruks, 1992, 98.

⁶⁰¹ For further discussion of Beauvoir on the notion of situated freedom, see Kruks, 1995, Arp 2001, and Andrew, 2003.

experience of those deemed “the other,” not merely to theorize the problem. In *Hegel's Recollection* Verene notes how in the *Phenomenology*

Hegel invites the reader to participate in his work, not just to think about what it says but to think with it, to extend it and bring it to life. If we cannot place ourselves in the work, we become mere technicians of its interpretation. We must be able to think thoughts freely with Hegel and risk something of our own philosophical ability on behalf of our understanding. Without life philosophy goes nowhere.⁶⁰²

It is this view of Hegel that Beauvoir adopts. She would not undertake a theoretical exploration of the ontological and metaphysical elements of Hegel's text. She would leave that to Hyppolite, Kojève and Sartre. Rather she would think with Hegel. She would pick up his project, his dialectic, and she would give it life. Or perhaps, more accurately give it over to life – place it in the context of lifeworld. In so contextualizing or situating the problem of the other's consciousness – in taking it out of the realm of abstract thought and centering it in the lived experience of ordinary people, Beauvoir emphasizes the role that history plays in framing the relationship between self and other. In so doing, in placing Hegel's discussion in time and in space as such, her focus is no longer on abstract individuals but rather on the concrete living subject.

It is this re-orientation of Hegel's project that leads Beauvoir in her mature and late works dating from 1949 onward, to explore the lived experience of racism, ageism, and sexism in works including *American Day by Day*, *Old Age*, *A Very Easy Death* and *The Second Sex* as well as to consider the less obvious, more subtle ways that the media, family, and lovers structure the relationship between self and other in her novels *Les Belles Images* and *A Woman Destroyed* and her four part autobiography. More specifically, it would focus on how these institutions, structures and values transform and maintain woman as the other. Butler claims that Kojève and Hyppolite placed desire in time. It seems to me that what Beauvoir does is place desire in space or place, giving it both

⁶⁰² Verene, 1985, xi.

a body (from which and toward which it can aim) from which it arises and towards which it aims and also a context – a place in time – a location – perhaps this is what is best achieved in the early essays - -- this grounding (literally and figuratively) of desire.

That Beauvoir intended for *The Second Sex* to be situated, amidst these works, that she meant for it to read as her contribution to the Hegel Renaissance is clear from both the form and the content of this work. The very structure of the work beckons for comparisons to be drawn between this study and Hegel's *Phenomenology*. Both works trace a journey across history and across a lifetime from a state of immanence (consciousness) through to its realization in the other. However, Beauvoir, recognizing in this, the first of her mature works, the importance of grounding her studies in the lived experience of subjects situated in both time and space, does not undertake an abstract investigation of the movement of spirit towards Absolute Knowledge such as Hegel undertakes. Rather she grounds her investigation in time and space, and embodies her subject, addressing not the problem of the other's consciousness in this work but rather the problem of women in her account of the dialectic. What results is her phenomenological investigation of woman's journey from being Absolute Other through to a free subject, that is, through to a subject that finds its self in the other and the other in itself. She traces the movement of women from the stage of recognition through to that of mutual recognition. The parallels at hand are too clearly established for this to be mere coincidence. Clearly she employs Hegel's model in structuring this study and thus directs her readers to examine these two texts in tandem, to read her work as both a commentary and an application of Hegel's *Phenomenology*.

It is not, however, only the structure of the text that calls for such parallels to be drawn. Further evidence that Beauvoir intended *The Second Sex* to be read in this fashion, read in this context, can be derived from content of her introduction. She states that her problem that she takes up

therein is to determine "what is a woman?"⁶⁰³ After rejecting conceptualist (essentialist) and nominalist (humanist) answers to this question, she makes clear that she will approach this problem from within the framework of Hegel's discussion of the relationship between self and other, answering her own question stating that, man "is the subject: he is the Absolute. She is the other."⁶⁰⁴ She is clear that she will take up Hegel's account of the hostility between these two self-consciousnesses, the hostility that marks the master-slave dialectic, as the starting point for her analysis. But while she cues her readers to consider her study as an application of Hegel's account of the dialectic in the *Phenomenology*, she is from the start not simply adopting his account but already critiquing and extending the ideas outlined therein in light of lived experience.

In what follows she applies Hegel's account of the relationship between subject and object, self and other, to the relationship between men and women. The language Beauvoir employs herein is the language of Hegel's *Phenomenology*. Moreover, she directly invokes Hegel in noting that "the subject posits itself only in opposition; it asserts itself as the essential and set up the other as inessential as the object."⁶⁰⁵ Indeed, she makes this increasingly clear importing into the discussion the language of master and slave. The other defined by society and sustained by her complicity (as in earlier works Beauvoir regards the self in this manner as both "constituted and constituting."⁶⁰⁶ Yet, despite clearly signalling her intent that *The Second Sex* be regarded as a study of the *Phenomenology*, this text has not been placed alongside the works of Kojève and Hyppolite and read as part of the French Hegelian tradition.⁶⁰⁷

⁶⁰³ TSS1 xxv, DS1 11.

⁶⁰⁴ TSS1 xxviii, DS1, 15.

⁶⁰⁵ TSS2 7, DS1 17.

⁶⁰⁶ Kruks, 1990.

⁶⁰⁷ That this remains the case is evident from Beauvoir's exclusion from seminal and recent texts exploring French Hegelianism. See, for example, Descombes (1980), Judt (1992), Baugh (2003), and Gutting (2011).

Perhaps this has to do with her approach. As noted earlier, starting from her review of Merleau-Ponty's *The Phenomenology of Perception*, there is in Beauvoir's works a new awareness of the need to situate discussions of the problem of the other's consciousness in both time and space. This is not a problem of logic or a metaphysical paradox to be debated. Indeed, she herself had discovered, addressed in the realm of the abstract, that the problem fosters resolutions viable only for abstract, disembodied subjects. Beauvoir increasingly understands that this is a problem of lived experience, that, as such it can only be understood and only be resolved in context. Hence when she turns to considering the situation of woman, and later of the elderly as the other, she does not resort to discussions of ontology or metaphysics but rather undertakes an investigation of the history of their oppression and a study of the physical and psychological development that has embedded and encouraged their complicity in perpetuating this view. Thus she does not describe what it is to be the other, to be the self, but rather she traces, bears witness to the process of othering. This is significant for only by seeing the means used to render woman the other -- only by identifying those institutions, myths and values that instill and maintain the objectification of individuals and groups, only by considering, for example, how "Legislators, priests, philosophers, writers, and scientists have striven to show that the subordinate position of woman is willed in heaven and advantageous on earth,"⁶⁰⁸ can the conditions for the possibility of their return or, perhaps more accurately, their discovery of themselves as selves be fulfilled. Only once explored from this perspective, only once placed in time and space, and explored from within history and in relation to the body, only once the problem of the other's consciousness is explored not as an abstract, hypothetical but as a lived experience,⁶⁰⁹ can the truly revolutionary nature of Hegel's project be realized. Perhaps it is this approach, her application of Hegel's ideas, her undertaking of a study rather than her writing of a piece of scholarship on his understanding of the problem of the other's consciousness, that led to her exclusion from the ranks of

⁶⁰⁸ TSS1 xxxiv, DS1 22.

⁶⁰⁹ See in particular Heinämaa 2003, Bergoffen, 1997, and Scarth 2004.

Hegel scholars such as Kojève and Hyppolite. Or perhaps this omission has something to do with her subject matter.

With the completion of *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, and while contemplating her next project, Beauvoir recounts in how she shared with Sartre her desire to write about her own life. *The Second Sex*, she maintains, took shape when Sartre asked her how her life had been structured, how it was different, given that she was a woman.⁶¹⁰ In fact, Beauvoir's interest in "the question of women"⁶¹¹ dates farther back. Writing in her journal in November of 1939, she notes how

... this psychological inner life is new to me. In the past I had primarily a moral attitude; I tried to believe I was what I wanted to be. This year, however, the presence of the contingent, the passionate due to Bost has been glaringly obvious. Now I enjoy it like a new field. I wouldn't enjoy writing about it, for it's too frivolous and mundane, but it's always interesting to discover and find out about myself. It's a step toward knowing myself which is beginning to interest me. In this respect I feel my age I'm going to be 32 years old; I feel I'm a mature woman, though I would like to know what kind. Last night I spoke with Sartre for a long time about a point that specifically interest me about myself: my 'femininity' and how I'm of my sex and in what way I'm not. This remains to be defined, as well as, in general, what I expect from my life, my thought and how I situate myself in the world. If I have the time I shall address these matters in this notebook.⁶¹²

Indeed. Bair notes that the idea for this study dates back yet further to 1937, to a series of conversations Beauvoir had with Colette Audry while teaching in Rouen about the possibility of writing a work on the contemporary condition of women.⁶¹³ Clearly, the question of woman was on Beauvoir's mind well before 1945 when she finishes her essay and begins to look for a new project.

The radical nature of Beauvoir's project is easily overlooked. Consider that it was only in 1948, one year before the publication of Beauvoir's study, that women in France were first allowed to

⁶¹⁰ See Bair, 1990, 325

⁶¹¹ TSS2 15, DS1 28.

⁶¹² WD 132, CG 125 – 126.

⁶¹³ Bair, 1990, 379.

vote. While she writes of contraception in this text, women would not have access to legal birth control for another eighteen years. And while, perhaps even more radically for 1949, Beauvoir dares to speak of abortion, legal first-trimester terminations of pregnancies would not be permitted for another twenty-six years. While 1950 was declared by *Life Magazine* to be “The Year of the Woman,” in the United States of America, it was not the expansion of her political, economic and reproductive rights that they celebrated. Indeed, in an attempt to encourage women to return to home after their experiences of work in the war years, this edition celebrates the remarkable advancements made in the lives of women by the vacuum cleaner and the electronic washing machine.⁶¹⁴ The controversy this work gave rise to might contribute as well to the failure to appreciate Beauvoir’s contribution to the French Hegelian movement.⁶¹⁵

Perhaps the failure to read Beauvoir in the context she so clearly intends her work to be read, can be so explained. Or perhaps this failure has something to do with the historic importance of the work. *The Second Sex* gave rise to the second wave of feminism and continues to inspire social change more than 60 years later as the agenda Beauvoir sets out therein inspires new generation of women, particular new generations of women in developing nations. No doubt it had something to do with the inadequacy of the standard translation of the text, a translation that omitted large portions of the text and confounded the philosophical terms that Beauvoir employed in order to cue readers as to how to approach her text.⁶¹⁶ Whatever the reason there has been a failure as such to read Beauvoir as she signals to her readers that she wishes to be read.

⁶¹⁴ *Life Magazine*, January 2, 1950.

⁶¹⁵ For Beauvoir’s own response to this controversy, see FC 195 – 207, LFC 203 – 211.

⁶¹⁶ For a discussion of the problems and errors with the translation of *The Second Sex* by Parshley, the only English translation available for more than 50 years, see Simons, 1983; Moi, 2002; and, Sommers, 2011. The new translation of the text undertaken by Borde and Malovany-Chevallier while restoring the missing references and pages from Beauvoir’s original text has likewise met with criticism. See Moi, 2010, Sommers, 2011 and Bauer, 2011.

No other of Beauvoir's works have been investigated as thoroughly as a meditation on the relation between self and other as *The Second Sex* and no work has elicited more consideration of the influence of Hegel's work on the development of Beauvoir's thought. However, reading the ideas found in *The Second Sex* back into her early works and/or seeing only the continuation of the views found in this, what is considered to be her seminal text, in her subsequent writings, has skewed understandings of Beauvoir's ongoing engagement with Hegel's *Phenomenology*. As such, it is necessary to consider this work anew, that is, to consider it in relation to Beauvoir's growing awareness of the manner in which the particularities of lived experience and the force of circumstances shape the problem of the other's consciousness. Explored from this perspective, this work is revealed to bear witness to the dialectics of gender. It traces the process of othering to which women have been subjected to across history and across their life times. And, it brings to light the various resolutions to the problem of the other's consciousness that Beauvoir envisioned by helping to identify the various stages of recognition through which they traverse and towards which they aim.

Taking seriously Beauvoir's suggestion that her study of women be read in tandem with Hegel's *Phenomenology*, a novel reading of her account of the problem of the other's consciousness arises from considering the ways in which she parallels her discussion of women's struggle for recognition with his account of the dialect. As Hegel maps out the journey of spirit from Absolute Consciousness, through to reciprocal recognition (or reciprocity), towards mutual recognition (or universal)⁶¹⁷ so Beauvoir in this study traces the journey of an embodied subject, of a woman, across history and across her life-time from the experience of Absolute Otherness through the struggle for reciprocity and towards the possibility of mutual recognition. While she is clear that these various forms or phases of recognition should not be equated, and while she warns of a mistake that "comes

⁶¹⁷ As noted earlier, my characterization of these phases of recognition is based on Williams account of these distinctions. See page 20 of this study for a further discussion of this characterization of Hegel's project.

from confusing the forms of mutually exclusive alterity,”⁶¹⁸ many commentators heretofore have been too quick to do just that, leading them to find problems and inconsistencies in her work that, when read in this context, simply do not appear. The debate arising between Gothlin and Bauer concerning Beauvoir’s reliance on the master-slave debate, for example, is revealed to be no debate at all.

Deutscher summarizes these competing interpretations of Beauvoir on reciprocity stating that

... where Lundgren-Gothlin argues that the master-slave dialectic cannot, on Beauvoir’s view, take place because of man’s demand for recognition is not met by an equivalent demand from women (a struggle between them in which one of the parties might be willing to risk death even taking place), Bauer responds that Beauvoir is more thoroughly transforming Hegel with an ideal according to which reciprocal recognition would involve a mutually equivalent position in which two subjects are willing to take up positions as both subjects and objects.⁶¹⁹

However, upon reflection perhaps there is not so much a difference of interpretation at hand between these two Beauvoir scholars so much as a difference in standpoint.

Read as mirroring Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, Beauvoir recounts in *The Second Sex*, not the experience of recognition but the process by and through which one comes to see the self in the other and the other in the self. In retracing Hegel’s map of the dialectic in the context of her consideration of the experience of women, Beauvoir does not describe the experience of being the other but rather recounts the various manifestation of the relationship between self and other that develops across time. Considered in this context, the views on recognition advanced by Gothlin and Bauer can be reconciled for what they are in fact describing are two different stages in the dialectic of recognition. That is, they are trying to reduce and equate what Beauvoir aims to distinguish.

⁶¹⁸ TSS2 80, DS1 120. Beauvoir reiterates this point later in the text when she warns that “assimilating the woman to the slave is a mistake.” TSS2 160, DS1 233 In making this claim she likewise points towards the need to distinguish between the various phases or forms of recognition.

⁶¹⁹ Deutscher, 2008, 42 n. 85.

Understood within this framework Deutscher's own concern that the eight different ways she identifies Beauvoir describing recognition are not commensurable or even compatible, similarly can be answered.⁶²⁰ She worries "How best to read the case made by Beauvoir that a number of notions of reciprocity are called for? . . . Perhaps the best question we can direct at this material is: what is accomplished by this multiplicity?"⁶²¹ Deutscher sees here a problem for she has worded her question wrongly. These are not different accounts of "reciprocity" but rather they are accounts of various forms of "recognition" of which reciprocity is but one possibility. Beauvoir is providing, in and through these various definitions, a catalogue of possible ways the struggle between self and other may be resolved. Hence, these descriptions are not commensurable for they do not describe recognition per se but rather describe three different stages, three different experiences of the relationship between self and other. Reading this text in the manner Beauvoir cues her readers to adopt, clarifies what appear to be inconsistencies in the text and makes evident a more nuanced and more sophisticated account of both the problem of the other's consciousness and its possible resolutions heretofore recognized in this work.

Throughout most of history, women, Beauvoir argues, have been regarded as the Absolute Other,⁶²² that is, as "pure alterity,"⁶²³ or "an absolute" alterity.⁶²⁴ Lacking the potential to become a self, standing outside of dialectic as such, she is incapable of either giving or receiving recognition. It is for this reason that while men have created her as such, she can only frustrate him: "She is everything he craves and everything he does not attain."⁶²⁵ She can never give to him the kind of assurance of his mastery, the kind of recognition that he desires.

⁶²⁰ Deutscher, 2008, 163 - 164.

⁶²¹ Deutscher, 2008, 166.

⁶²² See, for example, her use of this term in TSS2 80, DS1 120; TSS2 160, DS1 233; TSS2 245, DS1 353.

⁶²³ TSS2 7, DS1 17.

⁶²⁴ TSS2 8, DS1 18.

⁶²⁵ TSS2 213, DS1 309.

Beauvoir makes clear the consequence of her failure. Destined to be the other to man, never having her subjectivity recognized, woman is other to herself. Alienated as such, she is a mystery to herself, an “absolute mystery.”⁶²⁶ Hence, she is “all that which is inessential: she is wholly the other. And as other she is also other than herself, other than what is expected of her. Being all she is never exactly this that she should be.”⁶²⁷

Gothlin is clear as to the problem that hence arises. She notes that

... while Beauvoir uses the Hegelian master-slave dialectic to explain the origins of oppression, she does not locate man as master and woman as slave in this dialectic. Instead, woman is seen as not participating in the process of recognition, a fact that explains the unique nature of her oppression. Although the man is the master, the essential consciousness in relation to woman, the woman is not a slave in relation to him. This makes their relationship more absolute, and non-dialectical, and it explains why woman is the **Absolute Other**.⁶²⁸

However, given this characterization of women, given she is the Absolute Other, how can she ever escape this profound experience of otherness, of othering and enter into the next stage in the dialectic – enter into the battle for the death and thus acquire reciprocal recognition? Can she enter into the master-slave dialectic or is she destined to stand outside of it – destined to forever be a stranger to the other and “a stranger to herself?”⁶²⁹ Before venturing an answer to this question, it is necessary to explore the second stage of recognition, reciprocity.

⁶²⁶ TSS2 271, DS1 390.

⁶²⁷ TSS2 213, DS1 310.

⁶²⁸ Gothlin, 1996, 72.

⁶²⁹ TSS2 342, DS2 81. This is a problem that Beauvoir inherits from Hegel. He too is vague in his account of how desire facilitates the transition from the stage of Absolute Consciousness or of abstract parochial universality, to the battle to the death in the master-slave dialectic. His solution lies in the subject recognizing its particularity in the face of its encounter with others. However, how and why the self suddenly sees others as no longer appendages but as potential subjectivities is not clear.

Reciprocal recognition as described by Hegel is achieved in and through the master-slave dialectic. Recall that at this stage in his account of the journey of spirit Hegel argues that self-consciousness when encountering another must either take up the role of the other or be relegated to the status of object. Self-consciousness does not see itself in the other but rather sees all that it is not and all that it hopes not be, so in order to win the status of self and to relegate the other to the status of object, it enters into the battle to the death for subjectivity. He who is willing to risk everything in combat, willing to risk his own life, becomes master while she who backs down, unwilling to forfeit life in this battle becomes slave. But recall that the relationship between the two parties is symmetrical – both freely enter into this dialectic, both know what it is to risk and lastly, both fear death. There is, as such, equality established between the two. Such it is that her role as mediator between the master and nature, between the master and the objects in his world, allows the slave to learn her mastery. In and through her labour, she discovers her freedom. The relationship between lord and bondsman, between self and other, thus is inverted. Not yet able to see, to find the self in the other or the other in the self, there is nonetheless not the stasis between individuals seen when women is Absolute Other and men are Absolute Subjects. There is a kind of dynamism that underlies this kind of recognition. The roles of subject and of object, of self and of other oscillate.

This experience of reciprocity is premised on the recognition of equality between master and slave. This marks the difference between women's experience as Absolute Other and her participation in the master-slave dialectic. As Kruks argues, there are "two significantly different kinds of relations of otherness: those between social equals and those that involve social inequality,"⁶³⁰ that mark the difference between these two experiences of recognition. Where there is equality between the parties there is the possibility of reciprocal recognition, that is, it is possible to enter into the master-slave dialectic. However, in instances in which there is no such equality, it is impossible to enter into such

⁶³⁰ Kruks, 1995, 84; Kruks, 1990, 100.

relations. At the stage of Absolute Otherness, "It is not only that woman is the Other; she is the unequal Other,"⁶³¹ that makes the only relations possible between men and women those of oppression and subjection.

As to whether Beauvoir in 1949 believes that women have acquired such equality, leaving behind the stage of Absolute Other entering into this new stage of recognition, it is unclear.⁶³² From both her language and her accounts of the lived experience of women in her time, Beauvoir wavers on this matter.⁶³³ At points in her discussion she herself seems to confuse or conflate the distinction between these kinds of recognition that she is trying to elucidate. She seems at these moments in her text uncertain as to what stage of recognition, what kind of otherness, women in her time are experiencing.

This uncertainty is evident in her account of the lives of her contemporaries. She notes the increasing independence of women within both the public and private realm. And she acknowledges increasingly women agree declaring their transcendence.⁶³⁴ But she questions whether these calls fulfill the necessary condition for women to enter into the dialectic and leave their role as Absolute Other behind. Transcendence is not something that can be ascribed but rather must be recognized. For women to experience their freedom, men must see women as freedoms in themselves. That there are advantages in men offering up such recognition is clear. Men want women to be their possessions -- their slaves -- but they also seek in them their companions. This necessitates that they grant women their subjectivity. Rather than risk that possibility he settles and acknowledges that "He loves

⁶³¹ Kruks, 1992, 101.

⁶³² Indeed, one must wonder if she would find women in the 21st as being capable of reciprocal recognition or if their subjugation, perhaps more insipid, perhaps less prevalent, still keeps the Absolute Other.

⁶³³ Perhaps this is unexpected given her recognition of her own unique experience of being a woman. See her discussion of this point in PL 366 – 368, FA 375 – 377.

⁶³⁴ TSS2 754, DS2 561.

her because she is his, he fears her because she remains other.”⁶³⁵ Without his recognition, women remain the other. Women cannot be assured of their transcendence by the mere speaking of the word. Women had begun to speak such words in Beauvoir’s time, but that was not enough. Their words needed to be heard. That is, their freedom had to be recognized. Moreover, it had to be earned.

It is not through word but through action that transcendence is acquired. For women to enter into the dialectic, they must do more than announce their transcendence. They must earn it. The slave, in Hegel’s dialectic, achieves his freedom via work. Relegated to the domestic sphere, raised to accept and find fulfillment in and through marriage, children and social life, women do not labour in the Hegelian sense. They do not develop projects or do they engage in activities. Giving birth and caring for children, in cooking and in cleaning, these are “natural functions” that repeat life and do not create it. They are functions that do not “involve a problem”⁶³⁶ and so cannot construct meaning. To acquire transcendence women must labour.⁶³⁷ But this requires them to abandon certain comforts that have heretofore been given them.⁶³⁸

Women have never been a class, never formed a community, and hence have never revolted, Beauvoir notes, for they have always already found themselves in relation to men, in *Mitsein*.⁶³⁹ There are advantages associated with maintaining this alliance, particularly for women from the bourgeoisie. Playing the role of the other ascribed to her means there are risks she need never take. Her role as the Absolute Other affords her financial, metaphysical and ontological advantages. Rather than risk such comforts women have “accepted the order of things at hand.”⁶⁴⁰ They have been

⁶³⁵ TSS2 187, DS1 272.

⁶³⁶ TSS2 73, DS1 111.

⁶³⁷ TSS2 470, DS2 230.

⁶³⁸ TSS2 274, D1 395.

⁶³⁹ TSS2 86, DS1 128. For a discussion of Beauvoir’s use of this Heideggerian term see Bauer, 2001, Bauer 2006, Gothlin 2003 and Ruch, 2009.

⁶⁴⁰ TSS2 344, DS2 84.

complicit in their subjugation⁶⁴¹ -- accomplices in their own oppression.⁶⁴² For women to win their transcendence they must eschew such recompenses. In this analysis Beauvoir harkens back to Hegel's recognition

Those who remain bondsmen suffer no absolute injustice; for he who has not the courage to risk his life to win freedom, deserves to be a slave; and if by contrast a people does not merely imagine that it wants to be free but actually has the vigorous will to freedom, then no human power will be able to hold it back in the bondage of merely being governed passively.⁶⁴³

To gain their freedom women must enter into combat, willing to risk enmity and not settle too readily for amity and thus gain reciprocity. In so doing, they risk the possibility of losing themselves. It is a battle to the death that the slave enters into. Recognition will come but at a cost. But, for those who dare it, there is the chance that they might find themselves.⁶⁴⁴

Despite the limited success of women to achieve reciprocity, Beauvoir nonetheless anticipates, she imagines, a time when women will be capable of mutual recognition. In his discussion of "The Phenomenology of Mind," from Hegel's *Logic*, an account that Beauvoir would have read in 1940, Hegel distinguishes between these two stages of recognition.⁶⁴⁵ Mutual recognition or what he alternatively calls "universal self-consciousness," is

. . . the affirmative awareness of oneself in the other self. Each self as free individuality has absolute independence, but in virtue of the negation of its immediacy or desire it does not distinguish itself from the other; it is universal and objective; and it has real universality in the form of reciprocity, in that it is aware of its recognition in the free other, and is aware of this in so far as it recognizes the other and is aware that it is free.⁶⁴⁶

⁶⁴¹ TSS2 312, DS 47.

⁶⁴² TSS1 xxxiii, DS1 17; TSS2 205, DS1 298.

⁶⁴³ Hegel, PM § 435, 161.

⁶⁴⁴ Bauer, 2006, 75 – 76.

⁶⁴⁵ WD 313, JG 350.

⁶⁴⁶ Hegel, PM § 436, 162.

This kind of recognition is distinct from reciprocity where there is necessarily “an unfree but an equally independent self-consciousness.” Hegel elaborates on this distinction making clear that,

. . . at this standpoint ‘the mutually related self-conscious subjects, by sublation for their unequal particular individually, have risen to consciousness of their real universality, of their freedom befitting all, and hence to the intuition of their determinate identity with each other. The master confronting the bondsman was not yet genuinely free for he was still fall from intuiting that his own self in the other. Consequently, it is only by the liberation of the bondsman that the master too becomes completely free. In this condition of universal freedom, in being reflected into myself, I am immediately reflected into the other, and conversely, in relating myself to the other I immediately relate to my own self. Here, therefore, we have the tremendous diremption of mind into different selves which are, both in and of themselves and for one another, completely free, independent, absolutely obdurate resistant and yet at the same time identical with one another, hence not self-subsistent, not impenetrable, but, as it were, merged together’ . . . This unity is obviously present at the standpoint in question. It forms the substance of ethical life, especially of the family, of sexual love (there the unity has the form of particularity, of patriotism, this willing of the universal aims and interests of the state, of love towards God, of bravery too, when this is staking one’s life on a universal cause, and lastly, also of honour, provided that this has for its content not the indifferent singularity of the individual but something substantial, genuinely universal.⁶⁴⁷

Beauvoir echoes this distinction in her description of the different forms of otherness women experience via love, friendship and generosity.

It is in Beauvoir’s account of love in *The Second Sex*, that her vision of the possibility of mutual recognition is best glimpsed. Authentic love arises when “Two separate beings, in different circumstances,” as she imagines it, come “face to face in freedom and seeking justification of their existence through one another.”⁶⁴⁸ She holds open the possibility for authentic love, a love

. . . founded on reciprocal recognition of two freedoms; each lover would then experience himself as himself and as the other; neither would abdicate his transcendence, they would not mutilate

⁶⁴⁷ Hegel, PM § 436, 162 -163.

⁶⁴⁸ TSS2 248, DS1 358.

themselves; together they would both reveal values and ends in the world. For each of them, love would be the revelation of self through the gift of self and the enrichment of the universe.⁶⁴⁹

It is the moment in which independence and love are reconciled.⁶⁵⁰ It is an experience that woman grasp sight of in their erotic encounters for therein they know what it is to find the self in the other and the other in the self, to know oneself as both self and other. In such encounters

. . . recognition of the other requires the understanding that we are ourselves other for the other, that otherness is reciprocal. It means ceasing to project the abject parts of the self, onto the other; taking this ‘otherness’ or ‘strangeness’ within the self.⁶⁵¹

For Beauvoir, as for Hegel before her,⁶⁵² love requires, indeed, it necessitates that the other be seen as other and not be reduced to (a reflection of) the self, to the self-same. Love is not narcissism by another means – it is not some veiled act of conceit or of arrogance. It demands more than that. The other must be loved in his or her otherness.⁶⁵³ It is this experience of mutual recognition Beauvoir also catches glimpses of in friendship, particularly in female friendships, and acts of generosity.⁶⁵⁴ In these experiences and Beauvoir notes how woman have the possibility of finding “a home in oneself”⁶⁵⁵ or, to quote Hegel to whom this reference clearly beckons for comparison, “to find oneself at home in the self through the other.”⁶⁵⁶

⁶⁴⁹ TSS2 706, DS2 505.

⁶⁵⁰ TSS2 701, DS2 499.

⁶⁵¹ Scarth, 2004, 124.

⁶⁵² As translated by Westphal, Hegel in *Early Theological Writings* notes how “The beloved is not opposed to us. He/she is one with our very being. We see ourselves in him/her, and nevertheless she is not. We – a miracle which we cannot comprehend.” (Westphal, 1998, 131) For a discussion of Hegel on love see Williams, 1992, 185 – 211.

⁶⁵³ Note herein I take issue with Bauer’s claim that Beauvoir appropriated Hegel’s master-slave dialectic in an original way. She argues that ‘Hegelian reciprocity demands that beings mutually recognize one another as subjects,’ while Beauvoir believes ‘that a person must acknowledge himself and the other as objects as well as subjects in order for reciprocal recognition to be achieved.’ (Bauer, 2001, 186) The need to see the self and other as both subject and object is not novel to Beauvoir’s work but is found within Hegel’s account of the dialectic.

⁶⁵⁴ TSS2 159 -160, DS1 231 – 232.

⁶⁵⁵ TSS2 470, DS2 230.

⁶⁵⁶ Williams, 1992, 149.

There is, as Scarth notes, a new kind of risk at hand in the struggle for this kind of recognition. No longer is it merely one's freedom that is on the line, the risk of "self-assertion But there is also risk involved in accepting the ambiguity of our embodied condition, in risking self-abandon in generous bodily communication with the other."⁶⁵⁷ Such experiences last at best for a moment.⁶⁵⁸ As Atak makes clear

The subject/object dynamic is precisely that, a dynamic which is in constant flux, demands constant reaffirmation both collectively and individually, has to be continually reinvented because it can ultimately never satisfy, never be established once and for all (which is why the process of identification and belief are so important).⁶⁵⁹

Love⁶⁶⁰ can readily be transformed into a will to dominate -- into violence and sadism, or, alternatively, into passivity, subordination and masochism, as Beauvoir acknowledges.⁶⁶¹ Mutual recognition is not won once and for all but must be won time and again.

Friendship and generosity, along with love

. . . alone permit in actuality this recognition of free beings, are not facile virtues; they are assuredly man's highest achievement, and through that achievement he is to be found in his true nature. But this true nature is that of a struggle unceasingly begun, unceasingly abolished; it requires man to outdo himself at every moment. We might put it in other words and say that man attains an authentically moral attitude when he renounces mere being to assume his position as an existent; through this transformation also he renounces all possession, for possession is one way of seeking mere being; but the transformation through which he attains true wisdom is never done, it is necessary to make it without ceasing, it demands a constant tension. And so, quite unable to fulfill himself in solitude, man is

⁶⁵⁷ Scarth, 2004, 111.

⁶⁵⁸ For more on Beauvoir and the erotic see Bergoffen, 1997, Scarth, 2004 and Diagle, 2009.

⁶⁵⁹ Atack, 1998, 41.

⁶⁶⁰ The experience of maternity likewise holds the opportunity to experience at this kind of recognition. See, for example, TSS2 538, DS2 307. What is interesting is that while these are simultaneously the two sites of women's potential liberation into the realm of mutual recognition and they are also the sites of her greatest subjugation.

⁶⁶¹ TSS2 588 – 598, DS1363 -375; TSS2 683 -708, DS1 477 – 507.

incessantly in danger in his relations with his fellows: his life is a difficult enterprise with success never assured.⁶⁶²

Yet she dreams. She dreams of “the day when it will be possible for the woman to love in her strength and not in her weakness not to escape herself but to find herself, not out of resignation but to affirm herself, love will become for her as for man the source of life and not a mortal danger.”⁶⁶³

But can such love be realized? Can such relations between self and other, between men and women materialize? Beauvoir is clear that “Women’s success in living their condition completely does not come easily.”⁶⁶⁴ She struggles to reconcile her subjectivity with her feminine destiny. She struggles to acknowledge both her transcendence and her immanence, to reconcile the two.⁶⁶⁵ She is torn.⁶⁶⁶ She dares to speculate that “Perhaps the myth of woman will be phased out one day: the more women assert themselves as human beings, the more the marvelous quality of other dies in them. But today it still exists in the hearts of all men.”⁶⁶⁷

A life, Beauvoir notes in this work, “is a relation with the world; the individual defines himself by choosing himself through the world.” In outlining how women have been constructed as the Absolute Other, in showing how they have been complicit in this process, and in bearing witness to the other forms of recognition open to her, identifying the means through which they may be won, exploring the conditions for the possibility of their achievement, she offers up *The Second Sex* as an appeal. Women have been defined and have defined themselves by accepting a particular relation with the world. Could they dare to redefine this relationship and in so doing find themselves for the first time in their freedom and their facticity?

⁶⁶² TSS2 159 – 160, DS1 231 -232.

⁶⁶³ TSS2 707, DS2 507.

⁶⁶⁴ TSS2 279, DS2 9.

⁶⁶⁵ TSS2 180, DS1 262.

⁶⁶⁶ TSS2 274, DS1 395.

⁶⁶⁷ TSS2 162, DS1 235.

In writing *The Second Sex*, in taking up this study of the problem of the other's consciousness, Beauvoir shadows Hegel's *Phenomenology*. What she maps out in her work is the journey, not the journey of spirit towards Absolute Knowledge, but the journey of an embodied subject, of a woman, across history and across her lifetime from the experience of Absolute Otherness towards the possibility of mutual recognition. It is a journey undertaken at both the interpersonal and the social level, travelled by individuals and collectives alike.⁶⁶⁸ It is a journey Beauvoir recognizes is full of both risk and promise.⁶⁶⁹

This reading of Beauvoir's work challenges those translations and interpretations of Beauvoir's work that readily equate these three experiences.⁶⁷⁰ What she recounts herein is closely in line with Hegel's *Phenomenology*. It is not recognition but different stages or phases of recognition that women experience across history and across their lifetimes. Mirroring his account of these gradations of recognition, she thus develops a more refined understanding of the nature and possible solutions to the problem of the other's consciousness than has heretofore been acknowledged.

The Second Sex has been criticized on many counts. Many question her choice of Hegel as a model for her study of the problem of woman given his clear misogyny.⁶⁷¹ Some consider her too ready and willing to accept Hegel's ideas on his own terms.⁶⁷² Others regard her study as failed for it subtly and insidiously endorses a masculinist account of subjectivity,⁶⁷³ for grounding not only her ontology but also her account of the body on a masculine, and for the most part, Cartesian model,⁶⁷⁴

⁶⁶⁸ Fullbrook and Fullbrook note how Beauvoir's discussion in *The Second Sex* conflates two conceptions of the other: The Individual Other and the Social Other. (Fullbrook and Fullbrook, 1995, 103)

⁶⁶⁹ TSS2 261, DS1 377.

⁶⁷⁰ See, for example, Ward, 2005, and Deutscher, 2008.

⁶⁷¹ See, for example, Hegel's discussion in *The Philosophy of Right*, Part 3 § 1, 105 - 121. Therein he outlines the reasons for the necessary inferiority of women in the family, the state and civil society. Beauvoir was clearly aware of his views, citing . . . and associating him with the kind of essentialist stance adopted by Aristotle.

⁶⁷² Hutchings and Pulkkinen, 2010, 12.

⁶⁷³ See, for example, Scarth 2004, 31 -32.

⁶⁷⁴ See, for example, O'Brien 1981, Moi, 1986, Le Doeuff, 1991 and Butler 1986.

as most clearly evidenced in her account of female sexuality and maternity.⁶⁷⁵ Yet at the same time, others praise her work on these very same grounds noting how she advances, in anticipation of post-structural and post-modern accounts of subjectivity, by turning Hegel against himself⁶⁷⁶ and offering up a “non-dualistic conception of selfhood as embodied subjectivity. The ambiguity of transcendence and immanence at one.”⁶⁷⁷ Does she accept and reproduce the masculine model of subjectivity endorsed in Cartesian thought, or does she dare to transform it?

Beauvoir herself wondered if her reliance on what seemed to be upon reflection a priori categories of male-female and subject-object was too idealist. And, in hindsight she notes how she should have relied more heavily on materialist arguments to account for the subjugation of women – discussing in greater detail how need and scarcity framed their experience.⁶⁷⁸ What these criticisms seem to point towards is a deeper underlying problem best articulated by Gauthier. He questions whether Beauvoir employed Hegel’s account of the dialectic to full advantage in this text. Had she backed down from the implications of her own analysis failing to see the consequences of adopting Hegel’s notion of recognition in her analysis of women’s situation? Consideration of this problem seemed to already be on Beauvoir’s mind as she turned once more to considerations of the relation between self and other as she took up the writing of *The Mandarins*.

5.4 The Mandarins

“Existence – others have said it and I have already repeated it more than once myself --- cannot be reduced to ideas, it cannot be stated in words: it can only be evoked through the medium of an imaginary object; to achieve this, one must recapture the surge or backwash and the contradiction of life itself.”⁶⁷⁹

- Beauvoir

⁶⁷⁵ See Scarth, 2004, 37.

⁶⁷⁶ Simons, 1995, 248-449.

⁶⁷⁷ Scarth, 2004, 40.

⁶⁷⁸ See, for example, ASD 491 and TCF 504.

⁶⁷⁹ FC 332, LFC 342.

While none of Beauvoir's works garners as much attention as *The Second Sex*, and while none of her other works draws more attention to her interest in Hegel's *Phenomenology*, it is not this study, but rather her subsequent work, her novel, *The Mandarins*, which Simons notes, Beauvoir believes offers her most satisfactory resolution to the problem of the other's consciousness.⁶⁸⁰ This is an intriguing comment on which Beauvoir does not elaborate. She leaves it for her readers to speculate as to how in this story and through its telling, she succeeds in resolving the problem of the other's consciousness. Far from an oversight on her part, this failure to provide her readers with this answer seems to serve as her response.

The Mandarins recounts the relationships that develop and that dissolve amongst a group of intellectuals in post-war Paris. Faced with the challenges of how to respond to the political and personal failures experienced during the war, struggling with what Beauvoir describes as "the death of hope,"⁶⁸¹ that marked that time but which is not often recalled, the book explores the political decisions that this generation faced regarding collaborators, the failed Leftist movement, and the start of the Cold War while simultaneously, asking how one lives with one's self and with others in the wake of so much horror.⁶⁸²

Lacing together autobiography, political history and literary theory, this story is told by two narrators. Henri, whose account is written in third person and composes the larger part of the text, is a well-regarded journalist and resistance hero. Anne, whose story is told in first person, is a middle-aged psychiatrist treating post-war trauma. The two serve throughout the novel as counterpoints, "each reinforcing, diversifying and destroying the other," as Beauvoir explains.⁶⁸³ She thinks; he

⁶⁸⁰ Simons, 1990, 488.

⁶⁸¹ FC 275, LFC 283.

⁶⁸² Indeed, remarking on this novel in her autobiography she notes that one of its great strengths lies in her addressing the horror of war, something she says she tried to protect herself from in writing *She Came to Stay* and *The Blood of Others*. FC 282, LFC 290.

⁶⁸³ FC 277, LFC 285.

writes. She is pessimistic; he is optimistic. She seeks solitude; he is social. What links these narratives is the relationship each has with the writer and political activist, Robert Dubreuilh. Henri's mentor and Anne's husband, Dubreuilh, unites these two narratives. Bridging the political and the personal, the objective and the subjective, Beauvoir in this work draws together her reflections on the problem of the other's consciousness from across her career, putting them in context, and enacting them in her very construction of this story.

“Surviving one's own life,” as Anne tells the reader, is more difficult than expected.⁶⁸⁴ Questions about the inevitability of hostility in framing encounters with others – questions raised by Beauvoir in student journals and in *She Came To Stay* -- are explored once more in this novel as all the characters struggle to understand what it is to live in peace time. “This is a struggle experienced particularly by Vincent. In his search for collaborators and his need to exact on them his own punishment, he makes evident the difficulty in leaving conflict behind, in envisioning anything but a battle to the death arising between self-consciousnesses.”⁶⁸⁵ Despite the horrors, despite the consequences, Vincent like Nadine is seeking to extend the hostilities of the war, “taking refuge in the past and in the name of the past,” as Henri describes it, assuming “a superior attitude to everything that happens to you.”⁶⁸⁶

To a great extent Vincent's struggle and the struggle of all the characters in this novel, is a struggle with history. Where does the past finish and the present begin? When will the war finally end? While the battles have ended and peace been declared, it seems that the past persists. The deportees start returning to Paris. Anne treats Holocaust survivors. She describes them as returning ghosts.⁶⁸⁷ And there are the memories of those who died – of Rosa and Diego that haunt these

⁶⁸⁴ M 210, LM.

⁶⁸⁵ M 196, LM 150; M 259, LM 199; M 713, LM 559.

⁶⁸⁶ M 723, LM 569.

⁶⁸⁷ M 211, LM 161.

characters' lives.⁶⁸⁸ They struggle with regret.⁶⁸⁹ In all these manners, the past lingers in the present, never fully taking form and never really letting go. It leaves them all with "shapeless futures."⁶⁹⁰ They are spectators, specters in their own lives, taking refuge in a past that they cannot leave behind.⁶⁹¹ Described by Beauvoir as being trapped between past and present, between the present and the future, it is the manner in which Beauvoir captures something of the opacity of life in her this work that marks its success.

"A novel is about bringing existence to light in its ambiguities, in its contradictions."⁶⁹² This is Beauvoir's goal in writing her novels, a goal not easily achieved. The temptation for the novelist is to resolve ambiguities in the text for fear of being read as indecisive, unclear or of having lost their narrative. The temptation is to write a roman à thèse – for the words to embody a theory, make a statement and thus to turn the novel into a morality lesson, or a means for salvation.⁶⁹³ Beauvoir herself worries that too often in her early writings, particularly in *The Blood of Others*, she had succumbed to this temptation.⁶⁹⁴ But this is not the case in *The Mandarins*. Herein she claims to have "showed some people, at grips with doubts and hopes, groping in the dark to find their way; I cannot

⁶⁸⁸ M 713, LM 559.

⁶⁸⁹ M 57, LM 43.

⁶⁹⁰ M 40, LM 30.

⁶⁹¹ M 210, LM 160. Note that there is an interesting addition in the English translation in this passage. The word "spectator" does not appear in the original French that reads "Suivre, habiter de l'autre côté de sa vie: après tout, c'est très confortable; on n'attend plus rien, on ne craint plus rien, et toutes les heures ressemblent à des souvenirs." LM 60 Friedman translates this passage as "Surviving one's own life, living on the other side of it like a spectator, is quite comfortable after all. You no longer expect anything, no longer fear anything, and every hour is like a memory." LM 210 The inclusion of the word "spectator" herein echoes the external perspective Anne has taken on her life in the postwar years. It as well reflects the many references to ghosts that haunt the pages of this novel.

⁶⁹² "Mon expérience d'écrivain" in LW285 – 285.

⁶⁹³ FC 276, LFC 284.

⁶⁹⁴ PL 544, FA 558.

think I proved anything.”⁶⁹⁵ Like Henri in his novel, Beauvoir in *The Mandarins* “neither demonstrates nor exhorts but bears witness.”⁶⁹⁶

She bears witness to the conflicting pulls that define life. Like Vincent in his search for justice via violence, all of the characters in this story are divided within and against each other. Henri constantly feels the pull in opposite directions as he tries to negotiate between opposing political interest groups hoping to have sway with his weekly magazine, *L'Espoir*. Lambert tries to reconcile himself to the love he feels for his father and the hatred towards him for collaborating with the Nazis. Anne, as Beauvoir describes her, is struggling, in her relation with Dubreuilh, with Nadine, with Lewis to find some “possible reconciliation between facticity and freedom.”⁶⁹⁷ Capturing these contradictions, in this novel Beauvoir makes

. . . manifest the equivocal, separate, contradictory truths that no one moment represents in their totality, either inside or outside myself, grouping them all together by inscribing them within the unity of an imaginary object. Only a novel could reveal the multiple and intricately spun meanings of . . . a changing world.⁶⁹⁸

That is, she fulfills “the essential purpose of literature.”⁶⁹⁹

Her success at weaving together these elements of her study of the possibility of mutual recognition, in great part derives from grounding her investigation in a specific time and in a specific place. This point deserves pause for the novelty of her approach as well her facility in accomplishing it. In this work, as Kruks makes clear,

Beauvoir does not invite her readers to sit in judgment of Henri but rather invites us to enter Henri’s world and to discover that – from the perspective of lived experience, judgment, action, responsibility, bad faith have become much more relative matter. . . (Rather) they

⁶⁹⁵ FC 283, LFC 291.

⁶⁹⁶ M 331, LM 256.

⁶⁹⁷ FC 133, LFC 139.

⁶⁹⁸ FC 275, LFC 283.

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid.

admit of gradations and must be qualified by the fact that we so often act in between-zone, a place of neither liberty nor of determination tout court.⁷⁰⁰

Set “in a definite place and definite time,” this work “meant something.”⁷⁰¹ Not a response to an abstract question but a study of lived experience, not an attempt to eschew ambiguity but an effort to embrace it, *The Mandarin* portrays the lived experience of complex characters – characters for whom the boundary between self and other is never clear and never settled.

Or perhaps more accurately, for these characters the boundaries between self and other are never clear and never settled. What becomes evident in this novel is that the problem that Beauvoir is occupied with across her lifetime is not the problem of the other’s consciousness but the problem of the others’ consciousnesses. For what Beauvoir describes is the multitudinous and varied ways that relationships between self and other are simultaneously negotiated. Each decision to end or to begin a relationship in this novel is influenced by and influences relationships with others. Henri tells Dubreuilh that he has lied about his actions in the Resistance and in so doing put in question the testimony of two Holocaust survivors in order to save Josette, his lover, from being denounced as a collaborator. His options are shaped by others and his choices affect those he does not know. The ripple effects of this decision, effects that move both backward and forward in time, lead Dubreuilh to conclude that there “can be no personal morality.”⁷⁰² That is, there can be no making of decisions for the self that have not already been shaped by others. And whatever decisions are made will likewise affect others in ways unanticipated and unintended. Dubreuilh determines fate as Lewis decides Anne’s future. Nadine determines Sézenac holds Henri’s future in his hand but Nadine, Henri’s wife, determines Sézenac’s fate. The self is always already caught up and implicated in the lives of others.

⁷⁰⁰ Kruks, 2009, 176.

⁷⁰¹ M 331, LM 256.

⁷⁰² M 624, LM 487.

In this regard, Beauvoir returns in *The Mandarins* to a theme she explored in *The Blood of Others*. Individuals are caught up in the lives of others, they make decisions for the other and there is no escape.⁷⁰³

McWeeny argues that it is in the manner in which she casts these intertwining relationships that Beauvoir offers up an alternative to the logic of hostility and opposition that seemed to prevail in her attempts to resolve the problem of consciousness.⁷⁰⁴ In developing amongst and amidst the characters not dyads but rather triads, McWeeny sees Beauvoir providing the conditions for the possibility of creating relationships between self and other that are not dualistic and grounded as such in conflict.⁷⁰⁵ What Beauvoir offers instead is “a new theory of relationality” that does not have opposition at its center but rather is based on and in the logic of the gift, of withdrawal and of solitude.⁷⁰⁶ This argument seems to extract this novel from the philosophic development of Beauvoir's views. Conflict, as is she maintains throughout her career, is a necessary moment in the dialectic, in process of recognition. Moreover, it is unclear how triadic relationships would necessarily undermine the development of opposition. Indeed, it is not evident why these triangles would not compound rather than dissipate the hostilities that develop between subjects.

What McWeeny's argument does identify, however, are the pairs of relations that mirror each other in this novel. That is, it draws attention to the contrasting couples whose stories fuel this dialogue. It illuminates how Beauvoir structures this work in order to contrast the various forms of recognition presented therein. In this regard, McWeeny points towards the reason why Beauvoir might regard this novel as her best account of the problem of the other's consciousness.

⁷⁰³ For a discussion of this theme in *The Blood of Others*, see page 142 of this study.

⁷⁰⁴ McWeeny, 2005, 161.

⁷⁰⁵ McWeeny, 2005, 161.

⁷⁰⁶ McWeeny, 2005, 172.

The success of *The Mandarins*, in terms of its addressing questions concerning the possible relations between self and other, lies in her elucidation of the variety of ways that individuals live and reconcile themselves to the divisions they find in the world and within themselves. In this novel, she catalogues the various relationships that develop between self and other. And she notes the strengths and weaknesses that each garner. Consider in this regard her portrayal of the triangle that develops between Henri, Paule and Nadine. Paule, Henri's long time lover whom he has recently left, is cast in the role of the Absolute Other in relation to Henri. She models the account of the woman as complicit in her total subjugation. Her history -- her relationship with Henri, her failed career, trace how she becomes inessential, how, more specifically, she becomes what Beauvoir describes in *The Second Sex* as "an amoureuse."⁷⁰⁷ The price she pays for adopting and adapting to this role is made evident in her breakdown, in her both psychological and also physical loss of herself. The consequences of her choices are brought further to light when her relationship with Henri is contrasted with that he enters into with Nadine.

Nadine is far from willing to be "the inessential other" in relation to Henri. She maintains that she will not append her life to that of Henri. Indeed, her relationships with Henri, with Lambert, with her mother, Anne, all are defined by hostility. She will not become the slave to any other. She will not risk that possibility so she is in constant battle, constant combat. Yet despite her militancy and her persistence, it is unclear that she is master over those who populate her life, whether she is master over her self. She is alone and lonely. She tricks Henri into getting her pregnant - a strange act for one who considers herself subject in and of her own life.⁷⁰⁸ Similarly Anne's relationship with Lewis and with Dubreuilh likewise reveals this contrast. It is not the trinity formed amongst the characters but

⁷⁰⁷ TSS2 683, DS2 477.

⁷⁰⁸ M 723, LM 569.

the set of contrasting pairs that contextualize and contrast Beauvoir's account of the stages of recognition discussed in *The Second Sex*.

The success of *The Mandarins* lies not only in the portraits Beauvoir draws of the various kinds of relationship that develop between self and other, but also in the form or style she employs in addressing the problem of the other's consciousness therein. As noted before, Beauvoir is clear that this is not a roman à clef, nor is this a roman à thèse.⁷⁰⁹ Her ending as such offers up no final conclusion, no statement, and no judgment of these characters. Rather, this novel is an "evocation," as Beauvoir describes it.⁷¹⁰ It offers no answers but rather serves as a means for elucidating and holding in place the complexities and ambiguities that mark a life, that structure relationships between self and other. It offers no prescriptions but rather catalogues her description of the various ways, stages or phases of recognition. It serves as such as an evocation or perhaps more accurately an invitation for the reader to decide, to write for him or herself the fate of these characters, to determine their successes or their failures. A novel, Beauvoir recognizes, is "a collective object. Readers contribute as much as the author to its creation."⁷¹¹ Hence in this work she provides no solutions to the problems the characters face. Rather, she writes in such a way that demands of her readers that they approach the work "Full of curiosity and questions . . . like one of the mandarins who must come to terms with what it means to be a thinker and an actor, a citizen and a critic, an individual and a member of the collective."⁷¹² Thus she stages a demonstration of her resolution to the problem of the other's consciousness.

⁷⁰⁹ FC 279, FCH 289.

⁷¹⁰ FC 274, FCH 282.

⁷¹¹ FC 38, FCH 60.

⁷¹² Scholz and Mussett, 2006, 23.

5.5 A Matter of Practice

*“If the desire to write a novel became imperative for me, it was because I felt situated at a point in space and time at which each of the sounds that I could draw from myself had a chance to awaken echoes in a great many other hearts.”*⁷¹³

- *Beauvoir*

Through her construction of her characters and in the style and structure she employs in telling their stories, Beauvoir in *The Mandarins* intimates what she would further explore in later writings – a resolution to the problem of the other’s consciousness. In writing, in transposing his life onto the page, Henri tells the reader that he finally succeeds in discovering himself.⁷¹⁴ Consider this admission in relation to Dubreuilh recognition that we, “all have our own little personal stories which don’t interest anyone . . . that’s why we’re always discovering ourselves in our neighbour’s. And if we know how to tell them well, in the end we wind up interesting everyone.”⁷¹⁵ In the act of writing and of reading, Beauvoir demonstrates how the self finds itself in the other and the other finds within the self.⁷¹⁶ While love may fail and friendships falter and generosity may be hard to find on the pages of this novel, there is exhibited in its very reading, an act of mutual recognition. However, before Beauvoir would develop this model further, she would turn back one final time to reading Hegel’s *Phenomenology*. And she would find therein an aspect of the dialectic that would help her to develop this theory of literature in her late works. *The Mandarins*, as such, would prove not to be the conclusion to her study of the problem of the other’s consciousness but rather a new beginning.

⁷¹³ FC 276, FCH 283.

⁷¹⁴ M 152, LM 112. See as well M 156, LM 120; M 172, LM 132 – 133; M 179, LM 137; and, M 707, LM 556 on the relationship between life and literature.

⁷¹⁵ M 292, LM 280.

⁷¹⁶ M 152, LM 112.

Chapter 6

Recognition

6.1 The Later Works

“Art, literature, philosophy are attempts to found the world anew on a human liberty: that of the individual creator; to enter such a pretension, one must first unequivocally assume the status of a being who has liberty.”⁷¹⁷

- Beauvoir

While Beauvoir considered *The Second Sex* and *The Mandarins* to be her most successful works, while Simons notes that Beauvoir considered the latter to offer up her best solution to the problem of the other’s consciousness, to render such a verdict is to fail to appreciate how she resolves this problem in the her late writings. It is to overlook how, in her autobiographies, her studies of aging and her final works of fiction, she “evokes”⁷¹⁸ the problem through their content and their style. And it is to overlook how Beauvoir makes the reader complicit in solving her problem. For in these works, Beauvoir realizes that in the very act of writing she has always already been solving her problem. Her readers assure her that there is not just the possibility of moving beyond reciprocity to experience mutual recognition, but that it is a reality enacted in the simple act of picking up her books and allowing her words to transport them into her life and into her world. However, before she could fully develop this model, she would return a final time to Hegel and to his *Phenomenology*.

6.2 A Final Return

“the life of the Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastations, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it. It wins its truth only when in utter dismemberment, it finds itself. It is this power, not as something positive, which close its eyes to the negative, as when we say of something that is nothing or is false, and then, having done with it, turn away and pass on to something else; on the contrary, Spirit is this power only by looking the negative in the face, and tarrying with it.”⁷¹⁹

- Hegel

⁷¹⁷ TSS2 748; DS2 555.

⁷¹⁸ FC 274, FCH 282 – 283.

⁷¹⁹ Hegel, PS § 32, 19.

In or around 1954, Beauvoir would return once more turn to reading Hegel's *Phenomenology* as she continued her study of the problem of the other's consciousness. Or so it can be reasonably supposed. While there is no direct evidence of her once more picking up her study of this work, this speculation seems well founded. In 1955 Sartre would deliver his paper "The Singular Universal," at the centenary of Kierkegaard's death.⁷²⁰ Therein he considers the relationship between the particular and the universal drawing heavily on Hegel's ideas from the *Phenomenology*. As well, it was in this year that he began work on *A Search for a Method*, another of his essays highly indebted to Hegel's ideas. It can be reasonably assumed given their daily meetings that Beauvoir in the context of their discussions would have returned to this text. Moreover, it was in this year that Beauvoir began work on what, upon completion, would be her four-volume autobiography. As she theorized its form and reflected on her career, as she in many ways retraces the ways in which the problem of the other's consciousness had propelled her thinking, there are references and allusions to Hegelian concepts and reliance on his structuring of the *Phenomenology*. In particular three concepts reappear in and across the pages of later works: his concept of becoming, his discussion of the relationship between the particular and the universal, and his exploration of the manner in which the concept of mutual recognition necessitates recognition not only of the self that lies in the other but of the other comes to reside in the self.

Hegel's philosophy can be characterized as the philosophy of becoming. That he intended his work and particularly the *Phenomenology* to be read in this manner is evident from the many references to the concept in his outline of his project in the "Preface."⁷²¹ The *Phenomenology* bears witness to this process insofar as it traces the movement of spirit towards Absolute Knowledge. As he elaborates in *The Philosophy of Mind*, "Mind is not an inert being but, on the contrary, absolutely

⁷²⁰ Sartre, 1972.

⁷²¹ See, for example, Hegel PS § 18, 10; Hegel PS § 21, 11; Hegel PS § 26, 18; Hegel PS § 36, 21; Hegel PS § 42, 24; Hegel PS § 47, 52; Hegel PS § 61, 38; Hegel PS § 87, 56.

restless being, pure activity, the negating or ideality of every fixed category of the abstractive intellect."⁷²² Thus, self-consciousness is always in the process of becoming. For, as Hegel notes "'to become' is the true expression for the resultant of 'to be' and 'not to be.'"⁷²³ That is, "Becoming is the unity of Being and Nothing."⁷²⁴ As such, for self-consciousnesses

Their truth is therefore this movement, this immediate disappearance of the one into the other, in a word, becoming; a movement wherein both are distinct, but in virtue of a distinction which has immediately dissolved itself.⁷²⁵

Becoming thus is the process of self-creation, whereby contingency and universality, hostility and unity, are reconciled with the identification of the self in the other, and the other in the self.

Importantly, for this study, there is in becoming as well the reconciliation of the particular and the universal. Hegel claims that in the process of becoming there is "precisely this identity of subjectivity and objectivity that constitutes the universality now attained by self-consciousness, a universality that overarches these two sides or particularities and into which they dissolve."⁷²⁶ Indeed his own recounting of the movement of the dialectic bears witness to this union. For, as he makes evident in both the content and the structure of his work, each moment of the dialectic, while distinct, nonetheless remains part of the development of Absolute Spirit. As such each moment reflects within it the totality.⁷²⁷

Hegel describes this relationship in the preface to his *Phenomenology*. He asks his readers to consider how

The bud disappears when the blossom breaks through, and we might say that the former is refuted by the latter; in the same way when the

⁷²² Hegel, PM § 384, 18 – 19. See as well Hegel, PM § 440, 165.

⁷²³ Hegel, PM, 131.

⁷²⁴ Hegel, SL2 § 21.93, 80.

⁷²⁵ Hegel, SL1.

⁷²⁶ Hegel, PM § 437, 163.

⁷²⁷ Hegel, PR § 270, 164 – 174.

fruit comes, the blossom may be explained to be a false form of the plant's existence, for the fruit appears as its true nature in place of the blossom. The ceaseless activity of their own inherent nature makes these stages moments of an organic unity, where they not merely do not contradict one another, but where one is as necessary as the other; and constitutes thereby the life of the whole.⁷²⁸

Already in the bud there is evidence for the flower. Indeed, at each particular moment in the growth cycle there is the actualization of that potentiality. Royce probably best captures this idea when he notes,

The true universal, namely, or as Hegel calls it, the *Begriff*, whose highest expression is to be the absolute *Idee*, is the organic union of the universal truth and the individual facts, an union determined by the principle that every truth is a truth constructed by the thought of the world-self, and that as such it will exemplify just that multiplicity of individual facts in the all-embracing and so universal unity of self-consciousness.⁷²⁹

Royce's interpretation is particularly useful for it not only elucidates the manner in which the particular and universal are reconciled by Hegel but it as well points toward the ways in which this provides the foundation for the reconciliation of the self and the other.

In Hegel's *Phenomenology* Beauvoir had found a model for her own understanding of the problem of the other's consciousness. She had found therein an account of the importance of history, of the various forms or phases of recognition between self and other may be envisioned. But it was not until she turns to Hegel's text one final time, that she would find the foundation for a resolution to the problem of the other's consciousness in his discussion of language and of literature.

There is a growing body of research exploring both the literary structure and the use of literature in Hegel's writing. The structure of the *Phenomenology*, upon reflection, clearly resembles that of the quest or the coming of age novel, which in the end, is perhaps a variation on the former. The journey of Spirit towards Absolute Knowledge across the various stages and strands of the

⁷²⁸ Hegel, PS § 2, 2.

⁷²⁹ Royce, 1919, 224.

dialectic seems mirrored in both historic works such as *Don Quixote*, which Hegel himself discusses, and in more contemporary writings such as *Cloud Atlas* by David Mitchell.⁷³⁰ As Butler aptly recognizes, there is something to the very structure of Hegel's narrative that "is designed to seduce the reader, it exploits his need to find himself in the text he is reading. The *Phenomenology* requires and effects the imaginative identification of the reader with the traveling subject so that reading becomes a philosophically instructive form of travel."⁷³¹ That is, he not only mirrors his *Phenomenology* on art but in art he finds the working of spirit mirrored. Thus, it is not only the literary structure of the *Phenomenology* that warrants consideration of Hegel's relationship to literature, it is also his inclusion of references to novels in this text that warrants consideration in light of his exploration of the possibility of mutual recognition.

In part three of the *Phenomenology*, having completed telling the story of the development of self-consciousness through to the rise of the unhappy consciousness, Hegel turns his attention to tracing both a new and always already present aspect of the journey of Spirit focusing on the development of Reason. While mirroring the previous two "strands" of the dialectic, differences arise in the presentation of the ideas herein. A new form of thinking and thus a new form of agency arises and with it Hegel takes what Speight describes as his "literary turn." There appear thereafter references in the *Phenomenology* to literary works including Sophocles' *Antigone*, Goethe's *Faust*, Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and Diderot's *Rameau's Nephew*.

Speight's argument reinforces an often-overlooked aspect of the *Phenomenology* taken up during the Hegelian Renaissance in France. It is a return, as such, to an idea that was identified but seemingly forgotten in the recounting of the history of French Hegelianism. Hyppolite recognizes in

⁷³⁰ Indeed, Mitchell models his novel after Hegel's placing it in different times and places in order to emphasize the interdependence of self and other, the particular and the universal, the temporal and the atemporal. (Private Correspondence)

⁷³¹ Butler, 1999, 20.

the process of translating the *Phenomenology* that Hegel saw literature, saw language as facilitating intersubjectivity. He notes that "Language says things, but it also says the 'I' who speaks and it establishes communication among the diverse 'is'. It is the universal instrument of mutual recognition."⁷³²

This view seems to reflect Hegel's claim that

. . . thinking means that, the other, one meets with one's self. It means a liberation, which is not the flight of abstraction, but consists in that which is actual having itself not as something else, but as its own being and creation, in the other actuality with which it is bound up by the force of necessity.⁷³³

In thought, and in its presentation in language and in text, there is the meeting of the self and the other. As such, the dialectic is being both described by Hegel in the *Phenomenology* and it is being enacted therein. As others read the words he has written, as they try to understand them, as they discuss and debate them, and, hence, are transformed by them, the boundaries between self and other blur. Theorized by Hyppolite, it is a view that Beauvoir, adhering to her project of contextualizing and historicizing the problem of the other's consciousness, in her later works would transform into a practice.

6.3 Writing and Recognition

*"Writing has remained the great concern of my life."*⁷³⁴

- *Beauvoir*

In the final volume to her autobiography, *All Said And Done*, Beauvoir recognizes that "Writing has remained the great concern of my life."⁷³⁵ Her works are filled with writers. François in *She Came to Stay* is a playwright, Henri, Dubreuilh, and Lambert in *The Mandarins* are journalists, and Laurence

⁷³² Hyppolite, 1997, 10.

⁷³³ Hegel, PM 222.

⁷³⁴ Ibid.

⁷³⁵ Ibid.

in *Les Belles Images* is a copywriter for an advertising agency. Then there are the many diarists and letter writers who write their stories and narrate their lives throughout her works.⁷³⁶ This includes the unnamed narrator, Monique and Murielle in *The Woman Destroyed*, Blomart in *The Blood of Others* and Fosca in *All Men Are Mortal*. Her stories are stories of stories. Moreover, she uses literary examples in her studies to illustrate her ideas. From Woolf to Chaucer, from Leduc to Stendhal, from Hemingway to Eliot, she refers to more than one hundred authors in *The Second Sex. Old Age* likewise draws on literary sources in describing the lived experience of the elderly. This later text along with her essays including "Literature and Metaphysics," and "My Experience as a Writer," she more directly outlines her theory of literature. And finally, there are her own stories she tells in her autobiographies.

The number of lectures, essays and introductions written during her later period that reflect on this subject matter attest to her growing interest in her process and its ties to her "problem" – the problem of the other's consciousness. In her reflections on writing and on reading, Beauvoir picks up on themes and relationships explored in Hegel's *Phenomenology*. Cuing her readers to consider these works in parallel, she echoes Hegel's account of becoming noting how a novel "is a way of embodying in something this everything which one wants to express starting from a nothingness."⁷³⁷ Literally taking up the task of self-creation, that is, of communicating "the lived sense of being-in-the-world,"⁷³⁸ she explores how literature reconciles the particular and the universal and how ultimately it provides the point of intersection at which if the work is successful self and other mutually recognize each other.

Beauvoir's account of writing is perhaps best summarized in her lecture, "My Experience of a Writer Today." Therein she notes that

⁷³⁶ This includes the unnamed narrator, Monique and Murielle in WD, Blomart in BO and Fosca in AMM.

⁷³⁷ "Mon expérience d'écrivain" in LW 283, LS 440.

⁷³⁸ "Mon expérience d'écrivain" in LW 285, LS 442.

I read a novel . . . (and) Insofar as I am captivated, suddenly it is no longer I who says "I." I am in another world. Of course I remain myself but I forget myself: I identify with the hero of the novel or with the author of the autobiography; his world with its values and its colours, becomes my own world. I still live in mind, but I leave it; there is a perpetual movement back and forth that results in the world of others becoming mine even while I am still in my world. And not only that, but insofar as there are other readers who read this book, who like this book, who make Proust's world their own, for example, I communicate with them through Proust. I am thinking of Proust because it is he who said that the literary work, the literary world is the privileged space of intersubjectivity; that is to say that it is the place where consciousnesses communicate with one another, inasmuch as they are separated from one another. That is a very important thing because the ambiguity of our condition is that we are linked precisely by that which separates us. I mean that I am *I* for myself alone. But each of you is *I* for yourselves alone. It is our shared condition that we are radically separated from one another as subjects. So much so that Descartes can base on the intuition of the *I* the most universal philosophy there is. When he discovers by a completely singular intuition "I think, therefore I am" it is an absolutely singular existential truth which is universalized. Likewise, our life has a flavor which is only ours; but this is true for everyone; it is true for each one of us. We are alone to die our own death. No one will die for us. But this is true for everyone. There is therefore a generality in what is the most singular in us. I think that one of the writer's task is to break down the separation at the point where they are the most separate, at the point where we are the most singular. This is one of my most comforting, most interesting experiences as a writer; it is in speaking of what is the most singular that I have arrived at what is the most general and that I have touched my readers most deeply.⁷³⁹

As this passage makes clear, for Beauvoir, not only does literature allow for the union of particular and universal, it as well allows for the meeting of the self and other. Echoing Hegel and Proust after him, she claims that literature is "the privileged realm of intersubjectivity."⁷⁴⁰ In order to see how literature provides the solution to the problem of the other's consciousness for Beauvoir, it is necessary to explore these aspects of her work in relation to her discussion of writing and of reading.

⁷³⁹ "Mon expérience d'écrivain" in LW 296, LE 455 – 456. Thanks to Torin Vigerstad for his commentary on this passage.

⁷⁴⁰ "Mon expérience d'écrivain" in LW 296, LE 455 – 456. See as well ASD 156, TCF 158. Beauvoir's relationship to Proust whose works are quoted throughout her text is yet to be examined but warrants careful consideration.

Consider, in light of the description of the process of writing offered above, how Beauvoir starts to write each day. Consider what it means for her to write. As Beauvoir sits down to recount the story of Françoise or Blomart or Anne, she must for a moment leave herself behind. She must for at least a few seconds, allow this character to enter into her. She must have a sense of what they feel and how they walk. She must know what it is they think and how they love. And as she turns to writing those words on the page, it is as if she has left herself behind and been inhabited by another. She thinks their thoughts and loves what they love, hates what they hate. She does this despite her own preferences. She does this in order to capture an experience that others will comprehend and that will allow them to understand the particularities of this character's life.

But why would the reader care about this character who is not real and who lives a life far removed from her own? Her concern about what it is that ties together the writer and the reader, a concern that in the end raises questions about the purpose of writing, is found already in Beauvoir's journal as she takes up her writing her first novel.⁷⁴¹ It is a problem that continued to vex her. Her worry is perhaps best articulated in *The Mandarins*. In this novel, Henri, troubled that telling his own personal story will be of little value to others, is told by Dubreuilh that we "all have our own little personal stories which don't interest anyone . . . that's why we're always discovering ourselves in our neighbour's. And if we know how to tell them well, in the end we wind up interesting everyone."⁷⁴²

That the singular experience of an individual or character is picked up by readers and taken forward evidences, for Beauvoir, the success of the author in undertaking what she describes as "actual artistic work." The writer's task is to take up "a singular experience" and "move on to a universal one. When I succeeded in finding a form which gave this universal dimension to my

⁷⁴¹ LS 335, LAS2 181.

⁷⁴² M 292, LM 280.

experience, then the book was conceived.”⁷⁴³ To do so, the writer must recount the particularities of her character’s life, identifying what makes her laugh and what she wears to sleep and whom she loves and whom she does not. These “banalities” of life are taken up by the author who transforms them into something more “either in giving a universal dimension to what you have lived singularly, or in finding a way to singularize a conceptually impoverished knowledge.”⁷⁴⁴ These banalities are essential for only by “Beginning with the singularity which is of necessity at the root of creation” is it possible “to find the universality of a situation.”⁷⁴⁵ In telling the story from a particular perspective, by placing it in context and thus revealing the ambiguities, the conflicts in emotions, interpretations and values that it entails, the story comes to bridge the writer and the reader after her with the world. And it does so in ways that resonate with other readers and with the other people who populate the world around her. While there is something unique to the character’s story or the tale told by the autobiographer, there is at the same time something familiar. The story, as such, “goes infinitely beyond my singularity.”⁷⁴⁶ As Beauvoir makes clear, in telling her story, her stories she at one and the same time reveals the details of her life and “bears witness” to the era and the lives of those with whom she shared it.⁷⁴⁷ In this regard in telling the story of her character’s life, she is always already telling the story of other characters and of the readers that will pick up this novel and read her story across Beauvoir’s lifetime and after it. That is, it is a story that is at once both singular and universal. Hence it is that “By means of language I transcend my particular case and enter into communication with the whole of mankind.”⁷⁴⁸

This is no easy task as she makes evident when describing how

⁷⁴³ “Mon expérience d’écrivain” in LW 284, LE 441.

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁵ “Mon expérience d’écrivain” in LW 287, LE 445.

⁷⁴⁶ “Mon expérience d’écrivain” in LW 292, LE 451.

⁷⁴⁷ “Mon expérience d’écrivain” in LW 291, LE 450.

⁷⁴⁸ ASD 135, TCF 137.

Every moment reflects my past, my body, my relations with others, the tasks I have undertaken, the society I live in, the whole of this earth; linked together, and independent, these realities sometimes reinforce each other and descant together, sometimes they interfere with, contradict, or neutralize each other. If their totality does not remain always present, I shall say nothing exact. Even if I surmount this difficulty, I stumble over others. A life is such a strange object, at one moment translucent, at another utterly opaque, an object I make with my own hands, an object imposed on me, an object for me again, pulverized by events, scattered, broken, scored yet retaining its unity; how heavy it is and how inconsistent: this contradiction breeds many misunderstandings.⁷⁴⁹

Beauvoir echoes in this context Hegel's account of the particular and the universal that he both describes and enacts in the dialectic as described above. However, the universal that she appeals to herein is not the Absolute in which he saw all the moments of the dialectic coalescing.

Indeed, her use of the term “universal” is misleading given the many ways in which her choice of language and the structuring of her text, beckon to Hegelian interpretations. Beauvoir reinterprets the idea of the universal, detotalizing it, and hence she concludes that

Every moment reflects my past, my body, my relations with others, the tasks I have undertaken, the society I live in, the whole of this earth; linked together, and independent, these realities sometimes reinforce each other and descant together, sometimes they interfere with, contradict, or neutralize each other.⁷⁵⁰

To write the history of a fictional character or to tell the story of one's life, is always to tell simultaneously the stories of her readers and of those who have never heard the author's name nor will ever read the pages of her work. That is, "if any individual...reveals himself honestly, everyone, more or less, becomes involved. It is impossible for him to shed light on his own life without at some point illuminating the lives of others."⁷⁵¹ In writing, the singular becomes the medium for expressing the universal and in the process self and other are reconciled. The manner in which this later goal is achieved through literature, that is, the way that literature for Beauvoir as for Proust and Hegel before

⁷⁴⁹ FC 287, LFC 296.

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁵¹ PL 8, FA 10.

her becomes considered “the site of intersubjectivity,” is best evidenced by turning away from the investigation of the creation of the work of art to reflecting on its appreciation. That is, to step back from exploring writing to reflect on reading.

6.4 On Reading

“I bring into being a bookish world that overlies and overflows with the real world, lighting it up and enriching it; and in some cases this superimposed universe has greater depth and brilliance – Emma Bovary or Monsieur de Charlus exist more sharply for me than many people do that I have actually met. They also exist for other people, who see them from different angles but who communicate with me by means of them. It has been said, and very truly that literature is the field of intersubjectivity. Alone in my room with a book, I feel in contact not only with the writer of it, but also, through time and space, with its readers.”⁷⁵²

- Beauvoir

The number of references to reading found in Beauvoir’s autobiographies, novels and essays it is remarkable. Characters pick up newspapers and novels. In her autobiographies, she recounts the works she herself read and loved, and those she read and hated. And Beauvoir provides a descriptions of what it is to read. In *All Is Said and Done*, she devotes a chapter to reading and writes therein her phenomenology of reading, one that reveals how in this often underappreciated and overlooked action, readers seek and discover the lines between self and other are blurred – that they have been recognized just as they are recognizing the other in their facticity and in their freedom.

In the process of reading, Beauvoir notes that the barrier between self and other, a barrier created out of fear and hostility, must necessarily be lowered. Describing this process she notes that "for a text to have a meaning the reader must commit his freedom to it, silence his inner voice and install another's within his own mind."⁷⁵³ That is, while I read, "I live in another man's skin, and this

⁷⁵² ASD 194 -195, TCF 196 – 197.

⁷⁵³ ASD 170, TCF 172.

may deeply alter my vision of the human state, of the world, and of the place I occupy in it."⁷⁵⁴ To flush out Beauvoir's account, consider what happens when one sits down to read.

As the reader opens the book, from the very first sentence she reads, the lines between self and other begins to dissolve. From that very moment, the reader must grant the writer the freedom to inhabit her thoughts, allow him to lead her at will. Reading her consciousness is drawn away from the room in which she sits, the cat at the door, and the list of endless tasks to be completed before the end of the day that keep running through her head. As the story draws her in these concerns fall away, she reads on. And, while she knows that she there in this chair in this house with these demands, with this life, yet she forgets all this as she is absorbed into another world and begins to inhabit another's life. It might be a life far removed from her own – one distant from her in space and time. And yet, there is something familiar that she recognizes in the experience despite those differences. While the story is unique, particular to the characters at hand, it nonetheless resonates. Particular yet universal, she is able "enter a world that is other" and "become part of a subject other than (her) self."⁷⁵⁵

The "miracle" of this experience warrants a pause for further reflection. Describing what it is to read, she notes how it is that

Speaking of the most personal experiences that we can have like loneliness, anguish, the death of the people we love, our own death, is . . . a way of bringing us together, of helping each other and of making the world less somber. I believe that this is one of the absolutely irreplaceable and essential tasks of literature: helping us to communicate with each other through that which is the most solitary in ourselves and by which we are bound the most intimately to one another.⁷⁵⁶

⁷⁵⁴ ASD 156, TCF 159.

⁷⁵⁵ OA 445, V 422 – 423.

⁷⁵⁶ "Mon expérience d'écrivain" in LW 297, LE 457.

In this moment self and other become so intertwined that it is difficult to know where one begins and the other ends. The self, the reader, is “transported” into another life. And she wants to be so transported.⁷⁵⁷

The reader wants to know what it is to be the other -- to feel what the other feels, to know what it is like to see the world through their eyes. This is perhaps the most remarkable aspect of this experience. Not only is the reader transported into the life of the other, she wishes to find herself therein. That is, while she becomes the other for the author, she simultaneously takes up and acts on her freedom. She must read the words, follow the story, and interpret the novel. She must turn the page. So it is that Proust claims that it is in the act of reading that “*consciousnesses* communicate one with the other, with all the ambiguity of our condition for we do so when we are actually all alone.”⁷⁵⁸ The reader has been subject to what Beauvoir describes as some “magical operation of bewitchment.”⁷⁵⁹ In the experience of reading, there is a necessary recognition of the other in the self and of the self in the other.

And in those moments, the reader, the self, is not alone. This is what Beauvoir identifies what is the “function of literature.” Considering why it is that tragedies so often are the subject matter of novels, she recognizes that

It is not out of morose delectation, nor out of exhibitionism, nor out of provocation that writers often tell of hideous or deeply saddening experiences: through the medium of words they render these experiences universal and allow their readers, deep in their private unhappiness, to know the consolation of brotherhood. In my opinion one of the essential functions of literature, a function which means that nothing else can take its place, is the overcoming of the isolation which is common to us all and which nevertheless makes us strangers to each other.⁷⁶⁰

⁷⁵⁷ Gerrig, 1993.

⁷⁵⁸ “Mon expérience d’écrivain” in LW 296, LE 456.

⁷⁵⁹ “Literature and Metaphysics” in PW 270.

⁷⁶⁰ “Women and Creativity” in *Moi*, 1987, 30.

Hence it is that "Alone in my room with a book, I feel in contact not only with the writer of it, but also, through time and space, with its readers."⁷⁶¹ In the act of reading, the self is no longer alone. No longer a stranger to the other, she is no longer to a stranger unto herself. In the act of reading, she has experienced mutual recognition. It is as she describes it, "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 favour of the speaker: and yet I remain myself."⁷⁶² This 'miracle' is perhaps no place better evidenced in Beauvoir's work than in her autobiographies.

6.5 The Autobiographies

*"this is how I see my life: thousands of possibilities"*⁷⁶³

- *Beauvoir*

Taking to heart Hegel's account of self-consciousness as self creation, it is perhaps unsurprising that Beauvoir in her study of the problem of the other's consciousness would eventually turn to writing her autobiography. The four volumes and two studies that result place this philosophy in a time and in a place, in a body, amidst a life and offer up what Tidd describes as a "testimony" to both Beauvoir's life and to an era.⁷⁶⁴ In Hegelian terms, these works bears witness to Beauvoir's own becoming and to the becoming of her age.

"Word, self and language, belong inseparably together and develop together."⁷⁶⁵ Perhaps no quote better captures Beauvoir's project as she takes up the task of writing her life story. Underlying and guiding the four volumes that compose her life story, she asks a question echoed by many of

⁷⁶¹ ASD 194 -195, TCF 196 – 197.

⁷⁶² As cited in Moi, 2009, 193, from Hallier's *Que peut la littérature?*

⁷⁶³ DPS 247, CJ 332.

⁷⁶⁴ Tidd, 1999, 10.

⁷⁶⁵ Kerby, 1991, 61.

characters in her novels ⁷⁶⁶a question that she seems to address indirectly in many of her essays and studies.⁷⁶⁷ "Why am I myself?..My life it is both intimately known and remote; it is Yet she is the me and yet I stand outside it. Just what, precisely, is this curious object,"⁷⁶⁸ she asks. And she dares to address this question in the four volumes of her autobiography that she produces.. W

Autobiography, as Tidd notes,

. . . is a privileged literary genre for ethical exchange of experience between self and other. The act of reading autobiography involves a readiness to be open to the experience of the other in the real – not merely open to experiences that are similar to mine but also those that are potentially unknown to me.⁷⁶⁹

The act of writing autobiography thus requires the creation of the conditions for the possibility of such readiness. Hence it is to Beauvoir's method of writing her life story, and not to the content of her answer that entails an account of her resolution to the problem of the other's consciousness. It is not what she says about her life but how she recounts and reconstructs that life that is of interest in considering the development of her ideas on the relationship between self and other.⁷⁷⁰ For as she clearly recognizes in "My Experience As A Writer," autobiography unlike fiction, deals with the contingencies and facticity of the singular experience, yet also involves recognition that takes place between self and other dealing with situations that concern not an other but many others.⁷⁷¹

Beauvoir noted that her goal in telling her story was to "unveil reality,"⁷⁷² to "find the truth and speak it,"⁷⁷³ "to dispel mystification."⁷⁷⁴ Yet in other accounts she offers of her autobiography she

⁷⁶⁶ This includes Françoise in *She Came to Stay*, Helene in *The Blood of Others*, Murielle in "The Woman Destroyed," and Henri in *The Mandarins*.

⁷⁶⁷ See, for example, "An Eye for an Eye" and *America, Day by Day*.

⁷⁶⁸ ASD 9 -10, TCF 11.

⁷⁶⁹ Tidd, 2006, 237.

⁷⁷⁰ As noted by Moi (1999), there is in Beauvoir studies a tendency to equate the woman with her ideas. It is a tendency that this study has consciously avoided recognizing the value of studying Beauvoir's work in its own right, and on its own.

⁷⁷¹ "Mon expérience d'écrivain" in LW 291, LE 450.

⁷⁷² MDD 158, MJFR 219.

notes, "By writing a work based on my own experience, I would re-create myself and justify my existence."⁷⁷⁵ Francis and Gontier explain these contradictory claims concerning the writing of autobiography as revealing that "Beauvoir gave a certain order to the story of her life: she structured her narrative and restructured her life."⁷⁷⁶ How to reconcile these views? It seems that in telling her readers that she would unveil reality she clearly veils another self, and in dispelling mystification she mystifies.

She begins to write her own life story, she tells her readers in *The Prime of Life*, when she takes "that child and that adolescent girl, both so long given up for lost in the depths of the unrecalled past, and endowed them with my adult awareness. I gave them a new existence – in black and white, on sheets of paper."⁷⁷⁷ Looking back, she takes the person she once was and sees at her as if she was another. Or perhaps more accurately, she sees her as if she was the other. But as she so envisions her self as an object, she writes her story. She chooses the scenes, the characters and the events to recount. She develops her project as she takes up herself as its object.

She sits down to write. Now she must choose the scenes to recount. She must choose the words to use. There are paragraphs that she writes and writes again. She writes in such a way as to move her readers and to do this she must for a minute understand something of what makes them laugh and what gives them pause. And then, she offers up her story knowing that there is much that they will not understand. Her words will betray her just as she will betray her readers. "Self-representation is always a form of self-fictionalization."⁷⁷⁸ For neither can the words capture the whole of her life, nor can she retell it in its completeness to those who would read her works.

⁷⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁴ FC 633.

⁷⁷⁵ MDD 142, MJFR 142.

⁷⁷⁶ Francis and Gontier, 1987, xv.

⁷⁷⁷ PL 7, FA 9.

⁷⁷⁸ Basinee, 1997, 166.

The volumes of the autobiography construct Beauvoir as a unified subject continuous over time, place and occupation. Yet she is in the very act of writing choosing her the events to include, filling in the gaps, throwing light on some events while letting others slip into the shadows. What in effect Beauvoir is doing in her autobiographies is pulling together the scattered pieces of what she knows of herself, trying to render them a continuous, polished and whole. As such Beauvoir joins MacIntyre and Arendt maintaining that "one's identity is that of a character in a narrative and the self-understanding is accordingly a matter of the employment of one's experiences."⁷⁷⁹

Indeed, in writing her autobiography, Beauvoir simultaneously has written her biography. The two projects are necessarily intertwined, for, as Blanchard notes, Beauvoir

. . . sees herself as having made her life an interpersonal project . . . which others validate. This project, however, Beauvoir can describe as her own only because the truth-value of that description lies in others being made its guarantors. The fact that Beauvoir insists on making her readers equally responsible for what she now, towards the end of her life, sees as a project fulfilled, seals her covenant with her readers and thereby confirms, by reciprocity, that which she couldn't have established by herself alone.⁷⁸⁰

As she writes the story of her life, her story simultaneously is written by others. And what is more, the story she writes of herself is always the story of others.

No where does Beauvoir make more evident the ways in which Hegel's account of becoming frame her last works than in her autobiographies for therein she puts theory into practice using the life she knows most intimately, her own, to explore his account of consciousness as self-creation. She traces the movement of a restless being. She bears witness to the multi-various ways that self-consciousness shows itself to be self-creation. She enacts this process, this transformation on the page. And in so doing she reconciles the self and other, particular and universal, the contingent and

⁷⁷⁹ Kerby, 1991, 12.

⁷⁸⁰ Blanchard, 2004, 698.

the eternal. However, Beauvoir does not simply adopt Hegel's model to her own life circumstances. She also problematizes his ideas.

In *All Said and Done*, Beauvoir compares and contrasts her autobiography with other's popular in her time. Anais Nin's *Journals*, she claims to be "inauthentic." Reading them Beauvoir notes that she was, "embarrassed by her aestheticism, her narcissism, the narrowness of the world she artificially creates for herself, her immoderate indulgence in myth and her silly passion and astrology."⁷⁸¹ Malraux's autobiography is disappointing as well.⁷⁸² She notes that he never questions himself in his work, that he never problematizes his life. His life-writing serves as a form of self-justification rather than investigation.⁷⁸³ On the other hand, Beauvoir, admires Leiris, *Fibrils*. In his autobiography he dares to lay down the principles that he has tried to respect in his work as a writer

Not to lie nor to indulge in fine words; to refuse verbal inflation; to banish all purple patches; not to talk without rhyme or reason and turn writing into a meddlesome busybody art; to write like a man who understands and appreciated the language and to make use of that language only with the utmost rigor and fidelity.⁷⁸⁴

What distinguishes these examples of self-creation?

In categorizing the autobiographies that she read, and ultimately in outlining the philosophy of autobiography to which she believes that she has adhered in her own volumes, Beauvoir elucidates an aspect of Hegel's conception of becoming that can easily and quickly be overlooked. Self-consciousness, he argues is self-creation. It is not consciousnesses that can engage in this process. Those who remain at this moment in the dialectic, those who do not develop an understanding of their own ambiguity and hence do not become "self-consciousnesses," cannot engage in the process of becoming. Unwilling to see their own facticity and freedom – opting in Nin's case to reduce herself to

⁷⁸¹ ASD, 170, TCF 172.

⁷⁸² ASD, 171, TCF 174 – 175.

⁷⁸³ ASD, 171, TCF 175.

⁷⁸⁴ ASD 171, TCF 173 – 174.

the former and in Malraux's case to limit himself to the latter – these writers cannot tell the story of their self-creation. They cannot successfully write their autobiographies. Their stories do not move Beauvoir, do not transcend their own singularity for as noted before it is only if an individual "reveals himself honestly" that "everyone, more or less, becomes involved. It is impossible for him to shed light on his own life without at some point illuminating the lives of others."⁷⁸⁵

What Beauvoir points towards herein is that there are conditions for the possibility of self-creation that Hegel seemed to either too quickly gloss over or to overlook altogether as a result of his theorizing rather than contextualizing his account of becoming. It is this criterion that Beauvoir points her readers to considering as she in her last work of fiction, *The Woman Destroyed*.

6.6 Critical Perspectives: *The Woman Destroyed*

***"The novel is a problématique. One's life is a problématique."*⁷⁸⁶**

- Beauvoir

In the midst of completing her autobiography, Beauvoir turns to writing a series of short stories collected in the volume, *The Woman Destroyed*. That she interrupted the completion of her memoirs to write these stories in particular is telling. For in each of these short works, Beauvoir's main character offers up their own first person narrative recounting their life-story. That all three characters were women facing growing old, only further seems to suggest that Beauvoir meant for these works to be contrasted and read as a commentary on her autobiography and simultaneously as a critique of Hegel's account of self-creation.

Juxtaposing Beauvoir's telling of her life story with the first person narrations offered up by the three main characters in these stories, offers up an opportunity to reflect on the ways in which she

⁷⁸⁵ PL 8, FA 10.
⁷⁸⁶

problematizes and refines Hegel's account of becoming in her late works. This critique centers on Hegel's optimism concerning the dialectic. From Beauvoir's earliest readings of the *Phenomenology* she is critical of Hegel's view that all of Spirit was a movement towards Absolute Knowledge. She challenges the idea enacted in and through the text itself that the dialectic is always and necessarily progressing, moving towards Absolute Spirit. "Becoming" for Hegel, is synonymous with "becoming better." Beauvoir was skeptical of this equation. True, becoming could lead towards the mutual recognition of the self and the other. Indeed, this is the goal she herself tries to achieve in writing her life-story. It is a goal, however, and not a necessary outcome. The process of self-creation could just as easily result in encourage division and conflict between consciousnesses.

The Woman Destroyed calls for clear comparison with *Memories of a Dutiful Daughter*, *The Prime of Life* and *The Force of Circumstances*, for in these three stories like these three volumes of Beauvoir's autobiography, the reader is asked to bear witness to the telling of a life story. Moreover, it is the narrator, in each case a woman facing the affects of aging in a society that brands both women and the elderly the other, offers up own story, her own justification, of her life choices. The parallels are too clear and too evident to not see Beauvoir commenting in these works on her own life writing. Beauvoir fictionalizes herein the very process she herself is engaged in. And it seems she does so with an express purpose.

For, while these short stories share in common these features of the project that had preoccupied Beauvoir for over fifteen years, they also stand in stark contrast to her telling of her life-story. Or so she hopes. As Bjorsnos recognizes, these stories illuminate the ways in which these women, similar to Beauvoir in so many regards, construct their lives. And how those lives deconstruct.⁷⁸⁷ Each narrative is offered as a means for holding onto what is being lost and as a kind of self – decept. These serve as autobiographical interventions—the stories the main characters tell of

⁷⁸⁷ Bjnosros, 2005,158.

their lives seem to be the means that they resort to in order to maintain a view of them and deny their own ambiguity. The unnamed narrator of the first story and Monique will use their stories to deny their facticity – to try to perpetuate a view that they have of themselves which sees them in control, as pure freedom. Murielle’s story, on the other hand, is the of one she hopes her readers will see as a “victim.” Denying her freedom, her transcendence, she offers up an account of herself as pure facticity, the story of an object. The irony found in this claim, well represents the strategy that she employs to try to deny her own complicity in her objectification. These stories thus reveal that just as literature can facilitate mutual recognition, it can and readily does fall back into previous moments of the dialectic and in so doing be used as a means for perpetuating hostility and a method for instilling Absolute Otherness. They serve as such as cautionary tales pointing towards the ways the story, that literature might facilitate mutual recognition and how it might undermine its possibility.

The first of the series of stories composing *The Woman Destroyed*, "The Age of Discretion", takes up many of the issues surrounding aging that Beauvoir begins to consider in *The Prime of Life* and in *A Very Easy Death*, issues that she will go onto develop in greater detail in *Old Age*. It is the story of an older woman who has throughout her life seen herself as a confident scholar with a loving husband and devoted son. As the story unfolds, these three touchstones for her own construction of her identity are shown to have been illusions. She is not the person whose story she has told, not the image that she has tried to uphold in her own eyes, if in no one else’s. Her most recent work is simply a repetition of previous studies, her husband suddenly seems old and ambivalent - devoid of any commitments or principles and lacking the desire to act, and her son, whom she has considered her personal success, abandons the academic life she has set out for him and becomes a hated bureaucrat, married to a woman who encompasses all the traits she most despises in women. She describes this recognition as being "Like having been hit on the head, when one's sight is disordered and one sees two different images of the world at different weights, without being able to make out

which is above and which is below."⁷⁸⁸ The myths that have sustained her interpretation of her life have been exploded and she sinks into a deep depression. She must take up the task of putting the pieces of her life back together, of recreating herself. This is a daunting task for it does not fit with her view of retirement - that myth too is revealed in this text.

Yet, what is most troubling about this story is not the revelation that her life was not as she had thought it was, not how she had created it; rather, it is her willingness to repeat it in and through the new story which she constructs for herself. With the opportunity open to her for remaking herself, for self-realization and the creation of a more authentic self, she instead accepts the exact same life over again. She chooses once more to tell the story of her life in which she and Andre are one, a life where old age is unproblematic. To do so she must adjust her notion of time. She chooses to believe that "This present moment was a lie."⁷⁸⁹ The present Andre is not real. The past is what she considers real. She repeats the words of a poem: "Little Star that I see, Drawn by the moon, the old words, just as they were first written were there on my lips. There was a link joining me with the past centuries, when the stars, shone exactly as they do today. And this rebirth and this permanence gave me a feeling of eternity."⁷⁹⁰ Rebirth and permanence not recreation and reinvention are at hand. This view is best demonstrated in her changing attitudes towards writing.

Perhaps it is not surprising that Beauvoir leaves this character unnamed. She is without a present, living in a past that never was. She has no self only this character that she creates in and through the narrative she tells the readers and on the pages that she writes.

Fallaize notes that this is a story in which the question of communication is paramount.⁷⁹¹ The narrator begins the story noting that when it comes to her husband there is "nothing we do not

⁷⁸⁸ TWD 35, FR 43.

⁷⁸⁹ TWD 36, FR 43.

⁷⁹⁰ TWD 67, FR 80.

⁷⁹¹ Fallaize, 1988, 57.

know about one another."⁷⁹² In keeping with this view, the narrator first rejects a book she is reading which argues that communication is impossible. But over the course of the story, she comes to question both assertions. She does not know her husband. She does not know of his loss of commitment, does not know of his struggle with aging. Further, she comes to question whether in the end we are "condemned to silence and loneliness."⁷⁹³ She wonders whether communication is possible. She wonders as such, if mutual recognition is possible. But rather than following through with this question, instead of looking at the conditions for the possibility of communicating she returns again to the belief that communication is obviously a possibility. She talks with Andre and all their misunderstandings are eliminated. Or so she says. So she chooses to believe.

It is significant to note that the questions she raises and the beliefs she espouses are framed both within and by her discussion of stories. The story opens with the narrator reflecting on the important role that writing and reading has played in her life. Books, she confesses, "saved me from despair."⁷⁹⁴ She confesses that she could not live without writing.⁷⁹⁵ She describes how "from time to time it is fun to concentrate for a long while upon a set of squares where the words are potentially there although they cannot be seen: I use my brain as a photographic developer to make them appear - I have the impression of drawing them up from their hiding-places in the depth of the paper."⁷⁹⁶ Unlike pictures, that "lose their shape; their colours fade . . . words you carry away with you."⁷⁹⁷ This is for her the great advantage of writing. It makes literature "a privileged activity."⁷⁹⁸

Evoking Proust's famous quote in the very wording of this line, having used this quote in several of her writings and in her essays, Beauvoir seems to ask her reader to consider what this

⁷⁹² TWD 7, FR 9.

⁷⁹³ TWD 44, FR 52.

⁷⁹⁴ TWD 16, FR 20.

⁷⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁶ TWD 16 -17, FR 20.

⁷⁹⁷ TWD 68, FR 80.

⁷⁹⁸ Fallaize, 1988, 160.

privileged activity might be. Are the stories that this character reads and those she writes to be taken as the sites of true intersubjectivity or, alternatively, are they to be considered the sites at which the conflict between consciousnesses is enacted? Is it the means employed to communicate or to dominate? The second in the series of stories composing *The Woman Destroyed*, further problematizes language and the project of writing the story of one's life.

Murielle's prayer, which forms the second of the stories in this collection, "Monologue," is her attempt to write and hence to right the story of her life. And it is at one and the same time, as its epigraph makes clear, "Monologue is her form of revenge."⁷⁹⁹ While in her prayer Murielle is supposedly asking God for the opportunity to reconcile with her husband, a plea for mercy as such, in fact, what she offers up is an account of the wrongs he undertakes. Her prayer appears to be a rehearsal, a rehearsal of her argument to get her second husband, Tristan, to take her back and allow her to see her son. She practices her arguments before God, trying to build up her fortitude. However, very quickly the reader perceives her desperation.

This monologue is her way of justifying her actions, not only to her husbands, to her mother and son, but primarily to herself. And she has much to explain - her failed first marriage, her mother's rejection of her, her daughter's suicide, her failed second marriage, and her separation from her son. She must explain all these things first and foremost to herself. She is justifying her actions to herself. And in doing so, rather than clarifying who she was and what she had done, she builds continually more elaborate myths. She construes all events, all the actions of others, and all the words of others in light of her interpretation of her own life. As for others, she is uninterested in the story of their lives. Indeed, she must be. For if she were to listen she might hear a story that would challenge her own. She has written the story of her life following clear themes. She is Murielle the good mother, the

⁷⁹⁹ TWD 74, FR 83.

concerned mother. She is Murielle the good wife. And lastly, she is Murielle the victim. She tells her story to a God who cannot reply and with no interest in hearing the stories of others.

Throughout her monologue, Murielle makes reference to the fact that she tears masks off and reveals people for what they are rather than for how they appear.⁸⁰⁰ In describing the book she wishes to write of her life, her written monologue, she claims to have lived a life "without lies without sham."⁸⁰¹ As the story progresses, the duplicity of her claim becomes evident. Far from living without lies, her life is a lie. And while she might think she takes away the masks others use to hide themselves, in fact, she creates for them ever more intricate masks on the others around her, masks which she needs in order to sustain her view of herself. She cannot demystify others for if she did, she would risk the possibility of demystifying herself. So she imposes on the others in her life, her version of events, an image of herself. And her means for doing so is telling the story of her life, a monologue.

For via the monologue she can fulfill her goal encompassed in her claim that "I want to live I want to come to life again."⁸⁰² To come to life again she must look over her past roles and reinvent another. She must take up a new mask, the mask of a woman misunderstood, the mask of the victim. But wearing this mask Murielle ultimately is unrecognizable to herself.

Perhaps in none of her works does Beauvoir more clearly articulate the dangers of writing the story of one's life. Autobiography quickly turns self-investigation into self-justification. Writing alone does not guarantee that there is the recognition of the self in the other and the other in the self. Indeed, Murielle's story identifies the means by which it can be used to transform loved ones into the Absolute Other. A story cannot be conceived as a means for seeking revenge, as advancing a thesis, if not about the world, about the self, if it is to serve as the site for intersubjectivity. A story is not a

⁸⁰⁰ TWD 83, FR 97; TWD 88, FR 101.

⁸⁰¹ TWD 77, FR 89 -90.

⁸⁰² TWD 85, FR 99.

monologue even though a single author alone often writes it in a room and indeed, it often takes the form of a first person narrative. As Beauvoir made clear, a work of literature is a dialogue with the author and the others who read the work. As Beauvoir makes clear the story, "the book is a collective object. Readers contribute as much as the author to its creation"⁸⁰³ Without providing them with an entranceway into the narrative, without leaving them the opportunity to pick up the story and write their own ending, the story is transformed into dogma or diatribe. The potential for literature to serve as a site for recognition is undermined. The diary like the monologue will provide Beauvoir, in the last story in this collection to refine further the ways in which stories can facilitate intersubjectivity and the ways in which they can hinder it.

The final story in this volume, "A Woman Destroyed," is the diary that the main character, Monique, begins to keep after she discovers that her husband, Maurice, has taken a mistress. The diary, as noted by Fallaize, "inevitably brings to the fore the subject of the activity of writing, since the diarist is perceived by the reader - and perceives herself - as writer, as the source of the narrative as well as the subject."⁸⁰⁴ In this regard, the act of writing allows one to be self and other at one in the same moment. One writes the story of one's life. One is the writer and the object being written on. This is a possible but not a necessary outcome of writing the story of one's life. But for Monique, the diary provides no such self-realization.

Like the main character of the first of this series of stories, Monique has devoted herself to her family, but she has no job, no profession to fall back upon. She has seen herself through his eyes. It is in Maurice's perception of her that she has "recognized herself." Now with Maurice gone, she cannot recognize herself in the woman who stays indoors, who does not go out or see friends. She writes. And in her words she tries to regain that reflection of herself that she saw in Maurice's eyes.

⁸⁰³ FC 38, FCH 60.

⁸⁰⁴ Fallaize, 1988, 166.

She tries to regain an image of herself as one devoted to others, an authentic woman. But now, who is she? "I thought I knew what kind of person I was: what kind of person he was. And all at once I no longer recognize us, neither him nor me."⁸⁰⁵

How does she respond? Rather than looking at her own reflection, she seeks to know how others see her.⁸⁰⁶ She wants to know what she looks like from the outside. She looks for others to reflect for her that image.⁸⁰⁷ She looks for herself in the eyes of her friends, of her daughters, but she cannot trust what she sees, what they say. She has lost her own image and desperately seeks to find a new one, one that is not hideous.⁸⁰⁸ She concludes, "I do not know what kind of person I am but also I do not know what kind of a person I ought to be."⁸⁰⁹

In and through her words and the images she creates therein, she tries to capture her own image. Writing thus becomes for her a mirror. She notes that she began to write in her diary when she finds herself alone. Her daughters have both left home and now she has time to "live for myself a little."⁸¹⁰ But faced with such time, she finds she has little to do and begins to write. Soon her diary becomes necessary as she tries to explain to herself, for herself the circumstances of Maurice's affair with Noëlle. She writes to fill up time. She writes to escape. Not to escape the events in her life. She writes instead to escape herself. For on paper she can be the good wife, the victim, the good mother. On paper she can be anything, any one she so desires. She can sit back and re-read what she has written. She can rehearse her part.

She quickly learns the limitations of the medium. The story that she tells of herself, to herself and for herself proves to be inadequate. Words on the page prove to be inadequate reflections. There

⁸⁰⁵ TWD 167, FR 191.

⁸⁰⁶ TWD 188, FR 215.

⁸⁰⁷ Throughout her last novels there are references to mirrors and mirroring suggesting that while Beauvoir is critical of aspects of Lacanian psychoanalysis, she found virtue therein as well.

⁸⁰⁸ TWD 208 – 209, FR 237 – 238.

⁸⁰⁹ TWD 219, FR 249.

⁸¹⁰ TWD 107, FR 123.

is no distance to allow for refraction. The reflection as such is distorted. Moreover, they do not capture her life at all. As she comes to realize, in a diary "the things you omit are more important than those you put in."⁸¹¹ What does she fail to write in her diary? She recounts events, the traumas, the conversations associated with her finding herself more alone than she ever had imagined. It is not the events in her life that she fails to write. What is missing from her diary is her own self.

She realizes that there are parallels between her and a man in the story that once she heard:

There was once a man who lost his shadow. I forget what happened to him, but it was dreadful. As for me, I've lost my own image. I did not look at it often; but it was there, in the background, just as Maurice had drawn it for me. A straightforward, genuine, "authentic" woman, without mean-mindedness, uncompromising, but at the same time understanding, indulgent, sensitive, deeply feeling, intensely aware of things and of people, passionately devoted to those she loved and creating happiness for them. A fine life, serene, full, "harmonious." It is dark: I cannot see myself anymore. And what do the others see? Maybe something hideous.⁸¹²

Her diary is a mixture of insight and illusion. At times she recognizes that she has destroyed herself⁸¹³, that she has lived not only for others but through them,⁸¹⁴ but upon reading what she has written she comes to the conclusion that

. . . these pages lie so - they get things so wrong . . . There is not a single line in this diary that does not call for a correction or a denial... Yes, throughout these pages I meant what I was writing and I meant the opposite; reading them again I feel completely lost. . . I have always wanted the truth; and the reason why I have had it is that I desired it. Is it possible to be mistaken about one's life as all that? I was lying to myself. How I lied to myself... I have taken to my pen again not to go back over the same ground but because the emptiness within me, around me, is as vast that this movement of my hand is necessary to tell myself that I am still alive.⁸¹⁵

⁸¹¹ TWD 111, FR 128.

⁸¹² TWD 207, FR 236 -237.

⁸¹³ TWD 157, FR 179.

⁸¹⁴ TWD 176, FR 201. Note that the dates in the English translation of this text differ from that in the original.

⁸¹⁵ TWD 193 -194, FR 220 -221.

As with the unnamed character in “The Age of Discretion” and with Murielle in “Monologue,” Monique writes not as a means for introspection but as a means to escape all such reflection.

At any time, she can pick up her pen and write again. Indeed, the story concludes with her attempting to do so. Her therapist suggests she write again. She recognizes the tactic. By writing she will regain interest in herself she will "reconstruct" her identity for herself. She does not reject the idea out of hand, for at the end of the story she is still writing. Fallaize has characterized this as the more positive side of the story. The story ends with Monique recognizing that she is afraid -- a true sentiment. But in order for her to write herself, she must rethink her views of language. She must learn to trust words again - a difficult task given that even her own words have failed her in the past.

As in the other two stories that form this collection, questions are raised about the role of writing and about its potential to serve as means for reconciling self and other. Monique’s diary, perhaps more directly than the other two offerings, brings this issue to light. Monique seeks to tell the truth about her own life but writing on and for herself she ends up engaged in what the reader quickly recognizes is self-deception. In this instant, it is not as with Murielle that her narrative allows no other to exist and hence undermines any hope for mutual recognition. In this story, Monique has no self and so likewise cannot enter into the dialectic. The words cannot reconcile the distance between immanence and transcendence, cannot mediate the difference between self and other.

In *The Woman Destroyed*, exploring the relationship between literature, agency and intersubjectivity, Beauvoir puts under erasure her claim that narrative could serve as to reconcile self and other in a moment of mutual recognition. Exploring the manner in which the fictional devices employed in these stories – the confession, the prayer, and the diary -- could be employed to instill and entrench the differences between self and other and, indeed, to foster hostility between the two, she offers the reader the opportunity to consider the conditions for the possibility of literature serving as the site for intersubjectivity. She demonstrates in this regard the manner in which literature must be

constructed as a joint venture. Trying to control of their own story the narrators in these stories, provide no opportunity for the other to enter in, as Bjosnos emphasizes in her reading of this work. How the other must be given the opportunity to write with the author the story, and how it is necessary, as Monique discovers echoing a lesson learned by Henri in *The Mandarins*, that one must write both to create oneself but to find oneself. The self was not solely the product of his own narration.

6.7 Old Age

“All truth is 'that which has become.' The truth of the human state is accomplished only at the end of our own becoming.”⁸¹⁶

- Hegel

Old Age, like *The Second Sex*, is a study of how it is one becomes the other. It examines how the aged are rendered the other by society and become other unto themselves. "Thinking of myself as an old person when I am twenty or forty," Beauvoir tells us, "means thinking of myself as someone else as another than myself."⁸¹⁷ This inconceivable transformation that Beauvoir notes at one and the same time is a biological, an existential and a social phenomenon that remains hidden. In part because of bourgeois values and beliefs, and in part to ensure there is no risk of seeing the self reflected in their eyes, fearing a fate similar to their, the elderly are hidden away from society.⁸¹⁸ And yet it is a fate that cannot be escaped. Even if one has seen his way through all the temptations and traps of otherness set for him across his life time based on his class, his race, his religion, and his gender, in the end, when he becomes old, as he must, he is subjected to a phenomenon - biological, psychological and social – that almost without exception will erode his sense of self and subjectivity he has worked towards acquiring and maintaining over a lifetime of activity and projects. It is this

⁸¹⁶ OA 548, V 517 – 518.

⁸¹⁷ OA 11, V 11.

⁸¹⁸ OA 15, V 15.

transformation of the self into the other that marks not only this work but many of her writings from her late period.

Her interest in writing on old age centered on

. . . the idea of demystification, doing away with cant and humbug . . .
But the reason why I made up my mind to embark upon this book was that I needed to understand a state that is my own, and to understand it in its implication for mankind as a whole, I am a woman, and I wished to throw light upon the woman's lot; I was on the threshold of old age, and I wished to know the bounds and the nature of the aged state.⁸¹⁹

The lives of the elderly remain a mystery to many, a mystery structured and maintained by bourgeois conventions and values. The old person is seen as "someone who is different, as another being."⁸²⁰

What resulted was a series of studies on aging beginning with *A Very Easy Death*, and including *The Woman Destroyed*, *Old Age*, and *Adieux: A Farwell to Sartre*.

It is in *Old Age* however, that she undertakes her most comprehensive and extensive study of the lived experience of the elderly. Using the interdisciplinary approach forged in *The Second Sex*, that is incorporating insights from history, biology, sociology and literature, Beauvoir employs the method she employed in her earlier study combining it with a more rigorous Marxist analysis than she heretofore had employed. Reflecting on her study of women, she notes that while she considered it to be successful, had she had the chance she would have re-written the work including a discussion of the economic basis for women being considered the Absolute Other looking at the role of "scarcity" in this process.⁸²¹ Turning her attention to the problem of the other's consciousness as it was lived in

⁸¹⁹ ASD 146, TCF 148.

⁸²⁰ OA 10, V 10.

⁸²¹ Roudy, 1975, 68.

and through the experience of aging, she undertakes in *Old Age*, as Deutscher notes, an exploration of recognition and distribution.⁸²²

In a manner resonant of Bergson's notion of the two selves discussed earlier she traces this process from both an external and internal perspective.⁸²³ The first half of the text examines old age from an external perspective that is, from the standpoint of society at large, while the second half of the book looks at the lived experience of the elderly within society. More specifically, Beauvoir identifies how forces external to the individual - biology, history, culture, family, work, and government - render the old person the other. It is as such, a study of old age from an objective stance. She looks at the old person as "an object, an object from the scientific, historic and social point of view."⁸²⁴

Emphasizing the systemic manner in which the elderly are relegated to the role of the other, she looks at how, as a result of biological changes and the interpretation given to those changes by the society in which one lives, the old person loses standing within the family, is alienated from the world of work, is forced to live on limited resources, and is often institutionalized. Throughout this section Beauvoir's emphasis is on how "the meaning and the value attached to old age vary in different societies."⁸²⁵ Old age is not just or even primarily a biological phenomenon; it is moreover a social phenomenon.

There are two marked differences between this work on aging and Beauvoir's earlier phenomenological study of woman, two differences resulting from Beauvoir's new appreciation of Marx's theory of labour. In commenting on *The Second Sex* Beauvoir noted that her major criticism of

⁸²² Deutscher, 2009, 175.

⁸²³ OA 313, V 299.

⁸²⁴ Ibid.

⁸²⁵ OA 104, V 102. This perhaps points towards another difference seen between the studies of the problem of the other's consciousness taken up in *Old Age* and *The Second Sex*. In the former work, she seems to demonstrate an awareness of cultural differences that is not evident in the later.

the work was that it had not taken enough consideration of economics. More specifically, she stated that she wished that she had relied on the notion of scarcity developed by Sartre in *The Critique of Dialectical Reason* and focused more specifically on the role that economics and resources play in instituting and maintaining oppression. In the first section of *Old Age* Beauvoir is careful to articulate how the loss of resources, the loss of economic power, leads to and maintains the oppression of the elderly. She lists statistics on the loss of income for the elderly. She provides descriptions of lived experience of those who lack resources. This leads, to the second shift evidenced between this text and *The Second Sex*. There is a new emphasis on the role of labour in the lives of individuals

As she undertakes an ethnographic study of the elderly she emphasizes again and again that it is not the process of aging itself which leads to the devaluation of the elderly, but rather it is as a result of the interpretation of these changes associated with aging instilled in social structures and condoned in conventional beliefs that the elderly are deemed by society the other. That this is the case is revealed in her focus on the importance that the loss of work plays in contemporary society in the creation of the old man.

As women have traditionally not worked and have been used to living through others, Beauvoir notes that their lives change little as they age. The same, however, is not true for men. The loss of status within the family, the loss of the ability to compete within economic circles, and the lack of projects that typically define the life of the old person, lead him or her to be conceived as the other. She explains how this is the case:

Apart from some exceptions, the old man no longer does anything. He is defined by an exis, not by a praxis; a being, not a doing. That is why he looks to active members of the community like one of a 'different species', one in whom they do not recognize themselves.⁸²⁶

⁸²⁶ OA 244, V 231.

Beauvoir concurs with Burgess who notes that "the role of the retired person . . . is no longer to possess one. It therefore means losing one's place in society, one's dignity and almost one's reality."⁸²⁷ Through this account she emphasizes that "the human working stock is of interest only in so far as it is profitable. When it is no longer profitable it is tossed aside."⁸²⁸ This recognition has implications for how Beauvoir understands her project in *Old Age*

Beauvoir is clear that what she offers her readers in the first part of this work is not a history of aging. Given the analysis above, the reason why such a history would be impossible to write becomes evident. History, she argues,

. . . implies a certain circularity. The cause, which produces a given effect, is in its turn influenced by this same effect. The unity throughout time which thus evolves has some kind of meaning. The aged considered as social categories, have never influenced the progress of the world. When he loses his powers he takes on the appearance of another; he then becomes, and to a far more radical extent than a woman, a mere object. She is necessary to society whereas he is of no worth at all . . . It has been said that the Negro problem is a white problem; and that of women, a masculine problem: yet women are struggling for equality and the blacks are fighting against oppression; the aged have no weapons whatsoever, and their problem belongs strictly to the active adults.⁸²⁹

There can be no history, in other words, of those deemed the Absolute Other. Along with women the elderly thus cannot enter into the master-slave dialectic for they are unable to work, to labour.

While Beauvoir recounts how social forces, particularly material forces, construct the elderly as the other in society, to have explored the phenomenon of old age solely from an external perspective would be to provide an incomplete description of this lived experience. For it is not only that the elderly are seen as other by society. Like the women Beauvoir describes in *The Second Sex*, the elderly have become complicit in their own subjugation. They have become other unto

⁸²⁷ OA 299, V 283 – 284.

⁸²⁸ OA 13, V 13.

⁸²⁹ OA 100, V 97 – 98.

themselves. While in the first section of this study Beauvoir looks at how society transforms the aged into the other, in the second section of the book she turns her attention to exploring the interior, lived experience of being elderly.

Part Two of *Old Age* describes the phenomenon of aging from a subjective perspective. It begins with a discussion of the discovery of old age. Inevitably and usually without warning, one morning one arises and finds that they are old. And most often, they are the last to recognize this fact. There is nothing that is more expected and nothing that individuals are more surprised to discover about themselves. Beauvoir, in this the last of her major works, seeks to illuminate the lived experience of being old.⁸³⁰ Employing biographical resources she recounts how individuals come to acknowledge their own age, their experience of their own bodily decline, changes in the perception of time and history, and views towards death and dying. She describes herein the process of becoming other. Not of becoming other in the world, but of becoming other unto oneself.

The uniqueness of the experience of growing old should be sufficient to temper the affects of time on the body. Few escape growing old and dying. It is the only fate of which individuals can be assured. And yet there is this kind of a surprise at its occurrence and a revolt against the fragility and vulnerability it reveals. The response is perhaps surprising. Deutscher perhaps best captures this experience when she recounts how, a “young person should be able to recognize him/herself in an older person because old age will happen to us all, because we share the necessity of aging, and we encompass our ongoing metamorphosis, what is often to be taken to be other.”⁸³¹ The elderly embodying their future, the young should treat old people well, recognizing themselves in the other and the other in them. But in a manner all too often recorded in this study, faced with the other, who already resides within, the self transforms into the Absolute Other – refusing to recognize itself as

⁸³⁰ OA 313, V 299.

⁸³¹ Deutscher, 2008, 177.

anything more than an object amongst objects. The elderly are elderly – they lose their distinctness, their projects, their value as they no longer “contribute” to society, that as, as they come to no longer work. They are hidden away in “institutions,” treated like children when recognized, if recognized as all.

Perhaps it is no surprise, as such that while old age "is the general fate, and when it seizes upon our own personal life we are dumbfounded."⁸³² Others are old. But the self, the self clings to the belief that it has remained the same.⁸³³ It cannot see the passing of time.⁸³⁴ Beauvoir recounts in this regard a woman who sees her friends become old and then one day is astounded that she is a granny too. Beauvoir notes in this context that "It is significant that at this moment of awareness she spoke to herself as *tu*: it was the Other within her she was addressing, the Other that existed for the rest but of whom she herself had no immediate knowledge."⁸³⁵ She recognizes "in the old person that we must become, we refuse to recognize ourselves."⁸³⁶ But while they might not see the other that they have become, the rest of society is always already judging them as such.

Beauvoir notes that the revelation of our age comes to us from the outside.⁸³⁷ "I am treated as old. The outsider sees me as such . . . I try to picture myself in his eyes."⁸³⁸ A split occurs. It is a unique experience for in that moment the self is no longer for others what it is for itself.⁸³⁹ The elderly are no longer themselves. There is a kind of desperation in their aspiration to cling to this image of who they once were. No doubt this resistance comes from recognizing the social, political and economic challenges they will face if they are old. So, "In order to recapture a picture of themselves

⁸³² OA 315, V 299.

⁸³³ Ibid.

⁸³⁴ Beauvoir provides herein a remarkable account of the affect that aging has on the lived experience of time. See OA 402 – 498, V 383 – 471.

⁸³⁵ OA 327, V 312.

⁸³⁶ OA 10, V 10.

⁸³⁷ OA 320, V 306.

⁸³⁸ OA 324, V 309.

⁸³⁹ Deutscher, 2008, 177.

they are forced to use another's eyes - how does he see me? I ask this question of my looking-glass. The reply is vague,⁸⁴⁰ but it says you are old. "An alien eye has transformed her into another being."⁸⁴¹

In the end, Beauvoir makes clear,

Whether we like it or not in the end we submit to the outsider's point of view. . . We must assume a reality that is certainly ourselves although it reaches us from the outside and although we cannot grasp it. There is an insoluble contradiction between the obvious clarity of the inward feeling that guarantees our unchanging quality and the objective certainty of our transformation. All we can do is to waver from the one to the other.⁸⁴²

Inevitably, there is acquiescence. Despite not feeling old, despite not wanting to be old, and despite all attempts to resist being seen and seeing him or her self as old,

The elderly person conforms to the conventional ideal that is offered for his acceptance. He is afraid of scandal or quite simply of ridicule. He becomes the slave of what people might say. He inwardly accepts the watchwords of propriety and continence imposed by the community.⁸⁴³

And in that moment, the elderly person realizes that "I am myself and yet it is not me any longer."⁸⁴⁴

They become divided within and against themselves. The other has come to reside in the self but there is no hope of reciprocity given the old person has been deemed the Absolute Other and lacks the freedom or the resources to counter this portrayal. Denied their subjectivity they are seen and see themselves as an object, as and through their body. But, indeed, it was their own body that betrayed them.

⁸⁴⁰ OA 330, V 315.

⁸⁴¹ OA 321, V 307.

⁸⁴² OA 323, V 308 – 309.

⁸⁴³ OA 357, V 340.

⁸⁴⁴ VED 57, MTD 99.

They are not even able to recover themselves in their memories. Beauvoir notes that "There are streets in Uzerche, Marseilles and Rouen where I can walk about, recognizing the houses, the stones; but I shall never find my plans again, my hopes and fears - I shall not find myself."⁸⁴⁵ In making this assertion she undermines the belief that the elderly can find comfort in their past. The past, she recognizes "is not a peaceful landscape lying there behind me, a country in which I can stroll wherever I please, and which will gradually show me all its secret hills and dales. As I was moving forward so it was crumbling."⁸⁴⁶ The past does not allow the elderly to revive the self that they once were. That self, indeed, the self is lost. There is no sidestepping this reality by escaping into a time that once was. Faced with a limited future and a frozen past, ultimately, there is the acceptance, the recognition that "Within me it is the Other. . .who is old: and that Other is myself."⁸⁴⁷

In what would be her final work, *Adieux: A Farwell to Sartre*, Beauvoir describes Sartre's final years providing her readers with a case study, a biographical sketch of how one, one who has asserted and held onto his subjectivity above all else, becomes, is transformed into the other. As noted by Idt,

Sartre's singular case also serves as experimental verification of the hypotheses of the essay on old age. It verifies the constants determined in the second and most phenomenological part, on "being-in-the-world": the confusion between old age and illness, indifference, resignation, old people's lack of curiosity, their taking refuge in habit, their moroseness, their incapability of invention, their harrowing feeling of physical, financial and emotional insecurity.⁸⁴⁸

Along with her study of her mother's dying and death in *A Very Easy Death*, this account of Sartre as the elderly serves as did so many of her studies and her novels, as a means for grounding her theories and ideas. Herein she brings to light how the time and the place,

⁸⁴⁵ OA 407, V 388.

⁸⁴⁶ OA 405, V 386.

⁸⁴⁷ OA 316, V 302.

⁸⁴⁸ Idt, 1983, 375.

shapes and informs both how the body is lived and the significance and meaning which it is ascribes. It makes evident once more that the problem of the other's consciousness is not a philosophical question but a challenge of lived experience. It grounds Hegel's *Phenomenology* once more in the lifeworld showing the dialectic at work in the ordinary experiences of day-to-day life. And it showed the potential for the problem to be resolved.

Even having identified and catalogued the multi-various institutions and social forces that contribute to the elderly being constructed by society and by themselves as the Absolute Other, Beauvoir is unwilling to consider their fate sealed. Recall that for Hegel self-consciousness is always "Becoming:"⁸⁴⁹ the possibility for self-creation persists even as hair grows thin and grey and legs move at a slower pace. That the elderly find themselves without projects, that they find themselves strangers to others and strangers to themselves, is not a necessary truth of their existence but rather only a historical moment in the history of aging and the life of the old woman or the old man. The possibility of transforming the present persists. As she notes

Hegelian philosophy puts forward a rational justification for this idea, according to which every past instant is enfolded in the present instant, which necessarily prepares a still more perfected future, even failures being put right in the end: old age, the final stage of a continual advance, is life's highest pitch of perfection. But in fact this is not how life progresses at all. Its line of advance is perpetually broken by the falling back of our projects into practico-inert reality. At every given moment it provides its own sum, but this summation is never completed: Human action amounts both to the whole and to the destruction of the whole. That is why our motion is not a firm advance, but rather that reeling staggering movement that Montaigne speaks of.⁸⁵⁰

Change remains open to the individual and to the collective. But Beauvoir, is not naïve. She knows that the transformations in social institutions to facilitate change will be hard won.

⁸⁴⁹ OA 465, V 465.

⁸⁵⁰ OA 424, V 403.

The series of works that Beauvoir completes on aging and the elderly is a remarkable study not of becoming the self but of becoming the other. Tidd aptly summarizes this agenda noting how

. . . in these body-oriented auto/biographical texts, written in the latter stages of her literary career, Beauvoir addresses the abject otherness of intersubjective relations. Through the representation of the other's decline and death, she is able both to confront certain aspects of her own subjectivity which remained opaque in the memoirs and explore possibilities of reciprocity at a time when the other is potentially most distinct from the self—at the end of his/her life.⁸⁵¹

This “abject otherness,” For Beauvoir, “Old age exposes the failure of our entire civilization. It is the whole man that must be re-made, it is the whole relationship between man and man that must be recast if we wish the old person's state to be acceptable.”⁸⁵² What this study makes evident is that for the elderly to shed the veneer of “abject otherness” which they have been ascribed, for them to be perceived as subjects “everything has to be reconsidered, recast from the very beginning.”⁸⁵³ With her new awareness of the manner in which material conditions shape and condition experiences of otherness, Beauvoir is clear that the economic situation of the elderly along with their health care must be reformed if society is to abandon the ideal of the elderly as the Absolute Other. But for this goal to be achieved there must be a radical transformation in the way the elderly see themselves. This is a difficult task for if the elderly are to be recognized they would always have to have been treated as “men” and not have been looked upon solely “as so much material.”⁸⁵⁴ His freedom must be recognized by society and by himself. And freedom, as Hegel made clear, is something never given but always won.

⁸⁵¹ Tidd, 1999, 174.

⁸⁵² OA 603, V 569.

⁸⁵³ OA 13-14, V 13.

⁸⁵⁴ OA 603, V 569.

Beauvoir remains optimistic. Indeed, in her conclusion to this study she returns to discuss experiences of mutual recognition described in other of her works. She seems to hold open the possibility that the elderly and the woman and the lesbian and the person of colour remain able to escape their oppression. They need not forever be relegated to the role of the Absolute Other in society or in their own lives. She holds open the possibility not only for reciprocity to develop – for these disenfranchised groups to enter into a battle to win their freedom and the right to be seen in turn over time as now self and then other. No. In her choice of examples she makes clear that she holds out the possibility for her problem to be resolved and for there to be mutual recognition. Mutual recognition not just in theory, not as an ideal but in the lived experiences of even those most marginalized in society.

In her conclusion to *Old Age* Beauvoir returns to her account of genuine love and eroticism in *The Second Sex* and dares to describe the love lives of the elderly. She does much herein to dispel the myth that the elderly are asexual. And in so doing, she returns to her discussion of reciprocal recognition, for

In the turmoil and desire of sexual activity the consciousness and the body become as one in order to reach the other as a body and in such a way as to enthrall and possess him; there is a twofold reciprocal embodiment, a transformation of the world, now a world of desire. The attempt at possession necessarily fails, since the other remains a subject; but before it reaches its end, the drama of reciprocity is experienced in the act of love in one of its most extreme and revealing forms. If it takes on the character of a struggle then it begets hostility; more often it implies a 'togetherness' that encourages tender affection. In a couple whose love does away with the distance between "I" and the other even failure is overcome.⁸⁵⁵

Beauvoir echoes herein Hegel who in *The Philosophy of Mind* notes that in sexual relations "each sex feels in the other not an alien externality but its own self, or the genus common to both."⁸⁵⁶In genuine

⁸⁵⁵ OA 355, V 338.

⁸⁵⁶ Hegel, PM 10.

love and in its expression through eroticism, the distinction between self and other disappears or rather it is manifold. The self sees the other as both subject and object and at one and the same time is recognizes as being similarly constituted. As Bergoffen notes, "It is from the erotic intoxicated experience of ourselves as simultaneously subject and object that we are able to experience the other as simultaneously subject and object with us."⁸⁵⁷ Individuals even in their old age have the potential to become, to find anew themselves in the other and to find the other resides within them.

The same kinds of relations are possible through writing. Beauvoir concludes her study of aging and in many ways concludes her literary career, with perhaps one of her most eloquent descriptions of writing. She begins by noting that

Philosophy considers man qua notion: it seeks to know his total relationship to the world. The writer too aims at the universal, but from the standpoint of his uniqueness. He does not claim to provide knowledge, but to communicate that which cannot be known - the inwardly experienced meaning of his being in the world. He conveys it by means of a unique universal, his work. The universal is not made unique nor has the work any literary dimension, unless the author's presence is revealed by a style, a tone, and an artistic power that bear his mark. Otherwise we are dealing with a document, something that conveys reality in its impersonal objectivity on the plane of exterior knowledge, and not as the inward experience of a subject. But how can my inward experience become that of another? In one way only, by means of the imagination. The reader of a document gathers information about one of the parts of his world without leaving that world: he remains in his place there - he does not move from the given spot of the given moment in his life. The reader of a literary work enters a world that is Other: he becomes part of a subject other than himself. This implies that he denies reality in order to plunge into the imaginary. This is possible to him only if the work he reads offers him an imaginary world. The communication of inward experience, of experience that has been lived through, does not consist of setting down words on paper directly designed to express it. That which has been lived does not assume a given form: for the writer it is a question of extracting clear and intelligible statements from the opaque confusion of the unsaid. He thus creates an object that interprets no reality and that exists in

⁸⁵⁷ Bergoffen, 1995, 187-188.

the imaginary mode; and for his own part he provides himself with a fictitious composition.⁸⁵⁸

At first glance perhaps it seems strange to find here at the end of her last major work, a study of the elderly, her to be discussing writing.⁸⁵⁹ Or, perhaps not.

In writing, as in genuine love, the self becomes the other at the same time as the other becomes the self. Harkening back once more to the problem that this study has shown frames her thinking across her life time, the problem of the other's consciousness, harkening back once more to her on-going conversation with Hegel on the possibility of recognition, Beauvoir seems here to be reminding her readers of the theme that pervades her late works – this idea of becoming – of self-consciousness as self-creation. The elderly are not destined but can be transformed. They can be transformed despite being deemed the Absolute Other. Taking into consideration their lifeworld, that is in light of the historical time period, the place, the bodies and the material circumstances, that frame their lived experience, they can see themselves anew and in so doing necessitate that others see them differently. They can take up new projects and write for themselves new stories. Here at the end of their lives still remain open the possibility for the development of mutual recognition.

6.8 Conclusion

“this problem of the other’s consciousness.”⁸⁶⁰

- Beauvoir

And coming to the conclusion of this study of Beauvoir's oeuvre, it seems that we simultaneously find ourselves at the end of Hegel's *Phenomenology*. For not only has his dialectic framed her work with each reading of it she undertakes, but moreover, it seems to have framed her study across her lifetime. For, in the early works she writes of the self that cannot see anything that is other, of the

⁸⁵⁸ OA 444 -445, V 422.

⁸⁵⁹ Following the publication of *Old Age*, Beauvoir would write only one other book, *Adieux: A Farewell to Sartre*, which as argued earlier, is in many ways a case study of the ideas she develops and explores herein.

⁸⁶⁰ Simons, 1999, 10.

kind of mastery assumed at the level of Absolute Consciousness. In her student diaries and *She Came To Stay*, she tells the story of those who see the other only in terms of themselves – of those who ultimately have no self, for without the other Françoise knows not who she is.

As she begins to see the limitations of this excessive individualism and of the consequences of such hostility as the war begins to change her life, and history falls upon her, her views are transformed. She does not abandon the idea that there is always the possibility for the individual to subsume the other in itself – to find itself the sole subject in a world of objects. However, she begins to recognize that there are other subjects in the world, or at least that there are those who have the potential for being subjects. She realizes that there are such risks at hand. It is a battle to the death that subjects find themselves amidst – a battle in which there will be a master and there will be a slave -- but just who is who will never be entirely clear. Acknowledging the necessary intertwining of self and other in *The Blood of Others* and in *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, she comes to realize that self and other are responsible for each other. There remains the possibility for hostility and conflict to flourish when self-consciousnesses encounter each other. But there also arises the possibility for something more. In her mature works she considers how some form of recognition might develop between self and other.

Beyond Absolute Otherness, she explores the conditions for the possibility of reciprocity and imagines mutual recognition as she explores the problem of women in *The Second Sex*. She pulls together these elements of the dialectic in *The Mandarins* and in the very act of writing it begins to draw faith in the possibility that mutual recognition could be something more than an ideal. She realizes through her characters and in their creation, that is, in writing and reading, that there is a moment when author and reader meet, a moment when the self is in the other and the other is in the self. True, such moments are hard to achieve, but in her later works she will explore, through the writing of her own life and in telling the story of the stories of the women in *The Woman Destroyed* how this might be achieved.

She will refine her theory and identify the many ways that are held open for one to write to see the self within the self or the other within the other. But in the end, in her last works on old age, she will still hold out hope. She will write of the institutions that work to transform one into the other, and she will write of how the self capitulates. But she will hold out hope that things can be otherwise. She retells a story once told to her, and as she comes towards it close, tells those who have followed her words, followed his words, that “This time I will not write a conclusion to my book. I leave the reader to draw any he may wish to choose.”⁸⁶¹

⁸⁶¹ ASD 500, TCF 513.

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