



THE FEMALE EXPERIENCE IN THE AUTOBIOGRAPHIES  
OF SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR AND VIOLETTE LEDUC.

by

Hazel Joan Rowley (B.A. Hons).

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

DEPARTMENT OF FRENCH

UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE

AUGUST, 1981.

© Hazel J. Rowley 1981.

CONTENTS

<u>INTRODUCTION.</u>	5
 <u>PART ONE: SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR (1908).</u>	
 <u>CHAPTER I.</u>	
THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL PROJECT	20
I.    Simone de Beauvoir in the 1950s	20
II.   Approaching the Autobiography. Theoretical Guidelines	26
1.  Marxism	28
2.  Psychoanalysis	32
3.  Existentialism	37
4.  Feminism	41
III.  The Autobiography: Beauvoir's Personal Motivation	50
1.  Narrative as "Salvation" - The Portrait of the Self	52
2.  The Need for Self-Justification	56
3.  The Will to Guide Others	65
 <u>CHAPTER II.</u>	
"LA JEUNE FILLE RANGEE"	70
I.    "L'Unique"	71
II.   The Original Crisis	73
III.  "Une Petite Fille Modèle"	87
 <u>CHAPTER III.</u>	
BECOMING A WOMAN	106
I.    Changes in the Family	107
II.   Simone's Adolescent Crisis	111
III.  Nature and Literature: A Confirmation of the Original Choice	127
IV.   Love: Justification of Self and Radicalization of Ideas	135

CHAPTER IV

	SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR AS A PHYSICAL BEING	156
I.	Childhood	159
II.	Adolescence	162
III.	Maturity	174
	1. Sexuality	176
	2. Maternity	210
	3. Menopause	220
IV.	Old Age	231

CHAPTER V

	THE THREE IMAGES OF WOMEN	235
I.	"La D�vou�e"	238
	1. "D�vouement"	238
	2. The Formation of the <u>D�vou�e</u>	244
	3. The Situation of the <u>D�vou�e</u>	256
	a. The <u>D�vou�e</u> as Victim	257
	b. The <u>D�vou�e</u> as Oppressor	265
II.	"La Narcissiste"	272
	1. Narcissism	273
	2. The Formation of the Narcissist	276
	3. The Situation of the Narcissist	288
III.	"La Femme Ind�pendante"	308
	1. The Model Independant Woman: Simone de Beauvoir	325

PART TWO: VIOLETTE LEDUC (1907-1972).CHAPTER I

	THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL PROJECT	343
I.	Violette Leduc: A Brief Sketch of her Life	344
II.	Writing about Personal Experience: Leduc's Models	349
III.	The Autobiography: Leduc's Personal Motivation	363

CHAPTER II

"LA JEUNE FILLE DERANGEE"	370
I. The Resentful Mother	371
II. "L'Ange Fidéline"	375
III. An Outcast	377
IV. The Accursed Sex	384

CHAPTER III

BECOMING A WOMAN	389
I. The Choice of Self	389
II. The Choice of Solitude	404

CHAPTER IV

VIOLETTE LEDUC AS A PHYSICAL BEING	413
I. Childhood	414
II. The Mother-Fixation	420
III. Sexuality	429
IV. Maternity	448

CHAPTER V

THE THREE IMAGES OF WOMEN	455
I. "La Dévouée"	457
II. "La Narcissiste"	470
III. "La Femme Indépendante"	482

<u>CONCLUSION</u>	493
-------------------	-----

<u>BIBLIOGRAPHY</u>	498
---------------------	-----

SUMMARY

This study examines what the autobiographies of Simone de Beauvoir and Violette Leduc reveal about the female experience. It aims to evaluate the impact of their cultural and personal situation as women on the way in which they lived their lives and on the way in which they presented themselves and other women in their writing.

"The female experience" refers to the social and psychological situation of women in society. This study focuses on the way in which two particular women - Simone de Beauvoir and Violette Leduc - perceive and portray this situation.

The thesis argues firstly that the picture which Beauvoir and Leduc present of the female experience is inevitably limited, and that this is because women's capacity to understand and to portray their female experience is restricted by patriarchal culture.

Secondly, the thesis argues that being a woman in patriarchal society is a source of constant tension and conflict, whether or not the struggle is positive, as Beauvoir's is, or negative, as Leduc's is. As this study makes clear, both Beauvoir's triumph and Leduc's defeat entailed certain losses to the individual women.

The dissertation demonstrates this last argument by analysing the conflicts and crises depicted in the autobiographies of Beauvoir and Leduc, with occasional reference to their fiction, or, in the case of Beauvoir, to her essays.

The second method used to argue the same point is to trace Beauvoir's and Leduc's response to their female situation to an original choice of self.

Their choix originel is shown to be the means by which each writer originally came to terms with her image in the eyes of others, and it is shown that this choice influenced the way in which they come to terms with the broader issue of being a woman in society. It is interesting that Beauvoir portrays her life as a success and herself as an exemplary woman, whereas Leduc portrays her life as a failure and herself as a narcissist, obsessed with her own negative image and her own woes. In fact, the thesis points out, both these choices of being involved a degree of mutilation to the self on the part of each writer. In order to "transcend" the vulnerable and dependent situation in which she saw most women, Beauvoir was often obliged to ignore or deny certain obstacles facing her as a woman. Leduc, on the other hand, found that being a woman gave welcome reinforcement to her negative identity and provided her with a useful alibi. She complains about the female lot, but in actual fact she embraced it willingly because of its negative implications.

The thesis is divided into two parts. The first and longer part discusses Simone de Beauvoir and sets up the framework for approaching the experience of both women. The second part deals with Violette Leduc. Each part is composed of five parallel chapters.

Chapter One in each part examines the autobiographical project itself, analysing the writer's assumptions about herself and the world at the time of writing, and her motives for writing about her own experience. It shows that Beauvoir's view of experience was influenced by her interest in Marxism, psychoanalysis, existentialism and feminism. It also argues that she had three basic motives for recording her life: firstly, to save her experience from oblivion, secondly, to justify her actions, and thirdly, to provide an example to others.

The first chapter on Leduc reveals that she was not an intellectual; however, meeting Simone de Beauvoir, in 1945, just as she was beginning to write, was of major importance to her writing. She was greatly influenced by

Beauvoir and the ideas she encountered through her. Leduc's primary motivation for undertaking her autobiography was her narcissism.

Chapter Two and Three look at the childhood and adolescence of the two writers, examining their different personal situations and the effect of these on their conditioning as females. The thesis argues that each writer, within the limits of her situation, chose her attitude to her self, and that this affected the way in which she responded to becoming a woman.

Chapter Four is concerned with Simone de Beauvoir and Violette Leduc as physical beings. The thesis demonstrates that cultural factors made sexuality an area of major conflict for both women. Beauvoir, who aimed for reciprocity in relationship with others, rebelled against the status of object to which her female sexuality reduced her in the eyes of society. Leduc was ambivalent about her sexuality, but since she did not aim for reciprocity, she enjoyed the power struggle which sexuality represented to her and others. She chose to be defined and diminished by her sexuality.

Chapter Five examines the way in which Beauvoir and Leduc portray other women in their autobiography. Both depict women in three basic roles: that of dévouée, narcissist or independent woman. Both respect the last choice and show other choices to be based on a large degree of self-deception. Beauvoir is seen by both writers as a positive example of female independence, whereas Leduc is seen by both as a somewhat negative example of womankind, whose great redeeming feature is the perseverance and sincerity with which she wrote about her experience.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except when due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Hazel Joan Rowley

Sydney, July 1981.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

There are a number of people whom I would like to thank for their encouragement during the years in which I was working on this project.

My greatest debt is undoubtedly to Simone de Beauvoir herself. In the last ten years, since I first came across Beauvoir's work and her account of her life, she has been a major influence on my own life and thinking. My admiration for her courage and determination has only grown as, in the course of this work, I have become more aware of the obstacles - both external and within herself - with which she struggled. I am very grateful to her for consenting to be interviewed by myself and a colleague, Renate Reismann, in Paris in November 1976.

My supervisor, Dr. Peter Hambly, has been generous with his time and patience, and his criticism has been extremely helpful.

For their critical readings and suggestions and for their much needed understanding and encouragement at times when I was close to despair, I would particularly like to thank Bruce Talbot-Coram and Dr. Maria Shevtsova. Both helped me to find the perspective towards my subject which I had lacked. I am also grateful to Lilette Maurer, Rudi Mayer, Jill Matthews and Jean Fornasiero for their help and moral support.

I am indebted to Claude Renoud for his goodwill and generosity in procuring and sending me a number of books from Paris which were no longer readily available. I also want to thank Professor Brian Coghlan for his support and understanding in the early stages of the thesis.

I also thank my parents for their understanding, and Ziza Lester, who typed parts of the thesis, for her helpfulness.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the Commonwealth Postgraduate Scholarship, which enabled me to undertake this project.

"Si je veux me définir, je suis obligée  
d'abord de déclarer: "Je suis une femme";  
cette vérité constitue le fond sur lequel  
s'enlèvera tout autre affirmation."

- Simone de Beauvoir,

Le Deuxième Sexe I, pp. 13-14.

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

This study examines what the autobiographies of Simone de Beauvoir and Violette Leduc reveal about the female experience. It aims to evaluate the impact of their cultural and personal situation as women on the way in which they lived their lives and on the way in which they present themselves and other women in their writing.

The term "the female experience" refers to certain social and psychological conditions. It is clear that, despite the fact that they live in the same social environment and are members of the same economic classes, the experience of men and women is disparate in fundamental respects. Their conditioning, the expectations which society places on them, the way in which their bodies are perceived is radically different. Consequently, the interests, desires, and responses of these two groups diverge. It is in the nature of these experiences that they cannot all be subsumed under a precise definition. Hence, in this study, I am primarily concerned with the way in which two particular women perceive the experience of being a woman.

The study of autobiography allows us to explore the specific experience of individual women, and in so doing, to attain a better understanding of female experience generally. It is possible to make generalizations about women's lives, as Simone de Beauvoir does in Le Deuxième Sexe, but this approach inevitably categorizes and arranges experience, rather than giving us the insight into the complexity of human existence that accounts of individual existence can offer. As Beauvoir herself commented, in her autobiography:

L'étude d'un cas particulier renseigne mieux que des réponses abstraites et générales: c'est ce qui m'encourage à examiner le mien. (1)

The picture of the female experience presented by Simone de Beauvoir and Violette Leduc is particularly interesting for, as contemporaries, many of their

(1) La Force de l'âge, p. 10.

premises about women are shared, and yet the way in which they respond to being a woman in society is completely different. This study examines the female experience at these two levels. It is concerned with the way in which Simone de Beauvoir and Violette Leduc portray the experience of women generally: what the assumptions of the two authors are, and why they are so. As well as this, it analyses their personal reaction to their situation as women, and attempts to determine the origin of this reaction.

The picture which Simone de Beauvoir and Violette Leduc present of female experience must be seen in relation to society's attitude towards this subject. This broader perspective is essential in order to understand what the two writers faced when they set out to portray their lives.

One of the problems with studying female experience is that, historically, experience has always been expressed in terms of patriarchal culture.<sup>(2)</sup> Patriarchy is a governing ideology which, as Kate Millett argues in Sexual Politics, is the "most pervasive ideology of our culture and provides its most fundamental concept of power."<sup>(3)</sup> At a cultural level this means that "the ethics and values, the philosophy and art of our culture - its very civilization-  
[...]  
] is of male manufacture."<sup>(4)</sup>

Patriarchal culture has affected women writers in numerous ways. It has meant that members of the "second sex" have not been able to see themselves culturally through their own eyes, for the dominant culture has prevented them from understanding or expressing their experience as women. Because the tool for

---

(2) No matriarchal societies are known to exist at present. To hypothesize that they existed before recorded history is pure speculation.

(3) Kate Millett. Sexual Politics. London: Rupert Hart-Davis Ltd, 1971. (Abacus ed., p. 25).

(4) *ibid.*

representing experience, culture, is "saturated with male bias";<sup>(5)</sup> it has acted as a barrier, a distorting mechanism, for those women who have attempted to write about their existence. Thus, women have been unable to portray their reality authentically.

Another problem for women writers in patriarchal culture is that the norms which have been applied to them have been the norms which pertain to male writers, so that critics have consistently either found that women did not come up to "standard" or they have been scornful and patronizing. For example, in Pierre de Boisdeffre's anthology of modern French literature, we find the following uninformative and condescending appraisal of the first volume of Beauvoir's autobiography:

cette oeuvre d'une ambition toute masculine suscite plus de curiosité qu'elle n'exerce d'influence vraie. (6)

Leduc, on the other hand, has often been accused of a "féminité extrême".<sup>(7)</sup>

As one critic exclaimed, on reading her work:

Ce que ça peut être femelle une femme!<sup>(8)</sup>

Women writers have met with particular resistance when they have attempted to write about sexuality from a female point of view. The increasing sexual freedom of women in the fifties and sixties and the new frankness in their writing on the subject of sexuality frequently shocked male and female readers alike. An article entitled "La Littérature féminine", written in 1957, (whilst Beauvoir was writing Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée), claimed:

A côté de confessions de style sentimental et romantique apparaissent des autobiographies qui, pour un peu, constitueraient des annexes au rapport Kinsey.<sup>(9)</sup>

(5) Shulamith Firestone. The Dialectic of Sex. The Case for Feminist Revolution. N.Y.: William Morrow & Co., 1970. (Bantam ed., p. 157).

(6) Pierre de Boisdeffre. Une Histoire vivante de la littérature d'aujourd'hui. 1939-1960. Paris: Livre contemporain, 1959, p. 121.

(7) Jacqueline Piatier. "Violette Leduc est morte. Le beau cri d'une jeune fille dérangée". Le Monde Hebdomadaire, 1232, (1-7 juin, 1972).

(8) Georges Piroué. "Le Roman revendicatif féminin". La Table Ronde, 99, (mars 1956). He was commenting on Ravages, an autobiographical novel.

(9) Janine Rattaud. "La Littérature féminine". La Classe de français, 5, septembre-octobre 1957), p. 264.

Beauvoir writes, in her autobiography, of the shocked reaction to her earlier writing: to L'Invitée (10) and particularly, to Le Deuxième Sexe, (11) both published in the forties. However, even as late as 1970, we find a conservative reviewer complaining:

Notre littérature féminine devient volontiers du striptease à la fois physique et moral. (12)

The same critic further demonstrates his chauvinism when he comments that Leduc's

vocabulaire amoureux est souvent celui des soldats en chambrée, propre à satisfaire nos contemporaines dans le vent qui entendent ne négliger aucun moyen de conquérir l'égalité avec l'homme. (13)

Similar examples of the overall tendency to undervalue female experience are found when one examines the way in which critics have judged autobiographies. Since the nineteen-sixties, academic interest in the autobiographical mode has expanded rapidly, so that this literary genre no longer represents "the dark continent of literature."<sup>(14)</sup> Nevertheless, despite this reappraisal, autobiographical works by women were not given much attention until the feminist movement in the seventies placed new emphasis on women's experiential writing. It is clear that the worth attributed to the autobiography is confused, by the conventional critic, with the worth imputed to the actual experience of the autobiographer, and it is male experience which is held up as the universal model. Thus, Roy Pascal writes in his book, Design and Truth in Autobiography:

Many autobiographers fail to be significant because of triviality or lack of shape in the personality. They may be insignificant too when the personality is not in itself trivial, but for some reason has decided to avoid serious issues in his autobiography. (15)

---

(10) Beauvoir writes that even Marcel Arland, upon reading L'Invitée, expressed his regret that the characters were "obsédés par des histoires de lit." (La Force de l'âge, p. 571) At the time Arland was chief editor of La Nouvelle Revue Française, and an established literary critic. (Ironically, Simone's father had stopped her reading his novels when she was in her teens).

(11) For the reaction to Le Deuxième Sexe, see La Force des choses, pp. 205-211.

(12) Yves Gandon. "La Revue littéraire." La Revue des Deux Mondes, (octobre 1970), p. 165.

(13) *ibid.*

(14) Stephen A. Shapiro. "The Dark Continent of Literature: Autobiography." Comparative Literature Studies, 5, (1968).

(15) Roy Pascal. Design and Truth in Autobiography. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. 1960. p. 19. (*Italics mine*).

This statement may appear objective; however women's lives have been traditionally regarded as "trivial" and "insignificant" and devoid of any "serious issues". By prescribing, in this way, what constitutes a "significant" autobiography, Pascal is depriving women of the means to represent their experience. Indeed, the standards by which Roy Pascal proposes to evaluate autobiography may as well have been designed to exclude women from the genre. He adds that the "best autobiographies seem to suggest a certain power of the personality over circumstance" and are thus by "men and women of outstanding achievement in life."<sup>(16)</sup> In their autobiographies, there is a "consistency in the character described" and also "an echoing consistency in the outward circumstances of life".<sup>(17)</sup>

Pascal does not seem to consider that autobiographies which are disconnected and fragmentary, rather than unified by a powerful and consistent personality, may reflect the powerlessness of the writer and the vicissitudes of the writer's circumstances. This would appear to apply particularly to women, for whom the very discovery of an authentic self is a major problem in patriarchal society. In a collection of essays entitled Women's Autobiography, the editor, Estelle Jelinek, makes the obvious point that the form women autobiographers choose reflects the shape of their lives:

The multidimensionality of women's socially conditioned roles seems to have established a pattern of diffusion and diversity when they write their autobiographies as well. (18)

Even when women have been sufficiently privileged to be able to depict themselves with strength of character and their lives as having a coherency, Pascal still pays them little attention. Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée, which appeared two years before the publication of his book, meets these criteria, but he does not mention it in his actual text, and merely includes it in his

---

(16) *ibid.*, p. 10.

(17) *ibid.*

(18) Estelle C. Jelinek. Ed. Women's Autobiography. Indiana Uni. Press, 1960, p. 17.



bibliography. Beauvoir's famous predecessor, George Sand, who was also a woman of "outstanding achievement in life", fares no better. His only comment about her autobiography, Histoire de ma Vie, is that it is "substantially true".<sup>(19)</sup> Pascal does express admiration for The Life of Saint Teresa,<sup>(20)</sup> and this is because he claims it was written with an "assured conviction"<sup>(21)</sup> and because she is "persuasive" and "purposeful".<sup>(22)</sup> However, Saint Teresa, isolated from social interaction in a cloister, faced completely different dilemmas from women in secular society. Pascal has no patience with those lives in which "experience" and "personality" do not form "a continuous entity".<sup>(23)</sup> He condemns Madame de Guyon, who recounted her life over a century after Saint Teresa, for being what he terms "hysterically uncertain about herself and her situations".<sup>(24)</sup> Roy Pascal does indeed seem to have a very elitist and male view of experience, and it is with this bias that he authoritatively condemns women autobiographers.

Philippe Lejeune, the French specialist on autobiography,<sup>(25)</sup> following Pascal, stresses that the best autobiographers are those which show "l'unité profonde d'une vie".<sup>(26)</sup> In L'Autobiographie en France, he also maintains that public figures write the most worthwhile autobiographies, and not "des personnalités de second plan".<sup>(27)</sup> It is unfortunate, too, that Lejeune, in his eagerness to define the characteristics of autobiography, ends up, like Pascal, excluding a number of women from the genre. Although he does include twenty

---

(19) Roy Pascal, p. 189. (Pascal's bibliography, which includes 126 autobiographies, some translated into English and some not, does not include George Sand.)

(20) Saint Teresa. The Life. Trans. Cohen. Penguin Classics, 1957. (It was written between 1563 and 1565.)

(21) Roy Pascal, p. 31.

(22) *ibid.*, p. 32.

(23) *ibid.*, p. 98.

(24) *ibid.*, p. 33. (Italics mine.)

(25) Lejeune is author of L'Autobiographie en France. Paris: Armand Colin, 1971; Le Pacte autobiographique. Paris: Le Seuil, 1975; Lire Leiris. Paris: Klincksieck, 1976; Je est un autre. L'Autobiographie, de la littérature, aux média. Paris: Le Seuil, 1980.

(26) L'Autobiographie en France, p. 21.

(27) *ibid.*, p. 69.

women in his bibliography,<sup>(28)</sup> there are significant omissions, such as the autobiographies of Thyde Monnier<sup>(29)</sup> and Françoise d'Eaubonne,<sup>(30)</sup> and no reason is given for this. It is not because he did not know about them, for, elsewhere in the book, he makes fleeting mention of the last two works as examples of the new frankness in what he refers to, unhelpfully, as the "autobiographie féminine".<sup>(31)</sup> Because he defines autobiography as a category apart from memoirs or journals, which is quite legitimate, he omits several important autobiographical works by women, such as the journals of Eugénie de Guérin<sup>(32)</sup> and Marie Bashkirtseff.<sup>(33)</sup> This is a general trend amongst critics of autobiography and a shame because it means these works are neglected simply by not falling into a category which the cultural establishment chooses to take seriously.

Lejeune does not rate either Beauvoir's or Leduc's autobiography highly. He includes Beauvoir, without further comment, in a category of autobiographies which he deems "de qualité moyenne, de facture honnête".<sup>(34)</sup> As for Leduc, he merely observes that her autobiography, along with that of Maurice Sachs, shows that "l'homosexualité n'est plus une chose dont on doit parler à la troisième personne."<sup>(35)</sup>

Another problem with women writing in a patriarchal culture, is that because they have always written knowing that they faced criticism, the stance

---

(28) The twenty women Lejeune lists as French autobiographers are: Soeur Jeanne des Anges (1602-1665), Antoinette Bourignon (1616-1680), Mme Guyon (1648-1717), Marcelline Pauper (1663-1708), Mme de Staal (1684-1750), Claire Clairon (1723-1803), Mme Roland (1754-1793), Mme Vigée-Lebrun (1755-1842), George Sand (1804-1876), Daniel Stern (1805-1876), Marie-Eustelle Harpain (1814-1842), Mme Michelet (1826-1899), Thérèse de Jésus (1828-1884), Juliette Adam (1836-1936), Marie de L'Enfant-Jésus (died 1908), Judith Gautier (1846-1917), Thérèse de L'Enfant-Jésus (1873-1897), Clara Malraux (1901-), Violette Leduc, (1907-1972), Simone de Beauvoir. (See bibliography for details.)

(29) Thyde Monnier. Moi. 4 vols. Monaco: Le Rocher, 1949, 1950, 1951 and 1955.

(30) Françoise d'Eaubonne. Chienne de jeunesse and Les Monstres de l'été. Paris: Juillard, 1965 and 1966.

(31) L'Autobiographie en France, p. 103.

(32) Eugénie de Guérin. Journal et fragments. Paris: Didier, 1868.

(33) Marie Bashkirtseff. Journal. (1890). Paris: Charpentier, 1922.

(34) L'Autobiographie en France, p. 7. (The other autobiographies in this category are those by Julien Green and Claude Roy.)

(35) L'Autobiographie en France, p. 103.

and the tone of their writing has been affected. As Virginia Woolf commented, in A Room of One's Own, the woman writer:

was saying this by way of aggression, or that by way of conciliation. She was admitting that she was "only a woman" or protesting that she was "as good as a man."<sup>(36)</sup>

Leduc is an example of the "only a woman" syndrome; Beauvoir shows herself to be "as good as a man".

Beauvoir and Leduc reacted to the devaluation of female experience in different ways - and their response reflects a fundamental disparity in their attitude towards themselves. Not surprisingly, given the cultural climate in which they lived, both accepted the idea of the overall inferiority of women in society. However, Beauvoir, who argued in Le Deuxième Sexe that this was due to the limitations of woman's social situation, set out to show in her autobiography that she was able to transcend the demeaning situation in which most women find themselves, and that she was able to lead an existence as rich as any man's. Leduc, on the other hand, internalized, accepted and even flaunted her position as a member of the "second sex".

Both autobiographies were influenced, in their attitude to female experience, by Le Deuxième Sexe, published in 1949. Beauvoir tells us that writing this essay had changed her consciousness and made her more aware of the stereotypes, myths and roles associated with women. It made her, as well as her readers, such as Violette Leduc, more conscious of the extent to which the social conditioning of women was different to that of men, and that this was a subject which needed to be examined. It reinforced Beauvoir's views, and formed Leduc's views, on the mauvaise foi prevalent amongst women: the idea that women all too easily flee from the burden and anguish of freedom, and responsibility

---

(36) Virginia Woolf: A Room of One's Own. London: The Hogarth Press, 1927. (Penguin Ed., p. 74).

for themselves. (37) However, it is important to bear in mind that Leduc never considered herself a feminist, and Beauvoir claims today that she did not develop a true feminist consciousness until the seventies, under the influence of the modern feminist movement (which, in turn, had been greatly influenced by Le Deuxième Sexe). Beauvoir and Leduc completed their autobiographies in the early seventies, before the new feminism had made much impact on the social attitudes of women in France, or on the two writers.

Before the seventies had modified her views on this, Beauvoir was anxious not to be considered a "femme écrivain". (38) Describing the viewpoint she had held whilst she wrote the autobiography, she writes that, like most of her contemporaries, she had rebelled against the idea of "feminine literature" and its narrow subject matter:

maison, foyer, enfants, avec quelques échappées sur  
la nature et le culte de l'Amour. (39)

She explains:

Nous rejetions la notion de littérature féminine parce que nous  
voulions parler à égalité avec les hommes de l'univers tout entier. (40)

In practice, as she willingly admits herself today, this meant that she tended to ignore and deny aspects of her female experience, and she certainly did not feel inclined to dwell on these in her writing:

Ce qui était féminin je le gardais pour moi. (41)

(37) For a discussion of mauvaise foi, see p. 37.

(38) Beauvoir told Madeleine Chapsal, in 1960: "je ne pense pas que je suis une femme écrivain". (Les Ecrivains en personne. Paris: Juillard, 1960, p.17-37).

(39) Simone de Beauvoir. Preface to a section of La Femme rompue in Régards féminins by Anne Ophir. Paris: Denoël-Gonthier, 1976.

(40) Ibid.

(41) "Simone de Beauvoir. The Second Sex 25 years later". Interview with John Gerassi in Society, (Jan-Feb. 1976). Translated back into French and reprinted in Les Ecrits de Simone de Beauvoir. Ed. Claude Francis and Fernande Gontier. Paris: Gallimard, 1979, p. 548.

Thus, Beauvoir emphasized those aspects of her experience which were "universal", so that her subject matter was acceptable to the male-oriented cultural establishment. She wrote about her reaction to historical events, about ideas, work, people, travels, books, films. She portrayed not only a full and substantive existence but also the social and cultural dimension of an epoch. What she did not explore as thoroughly as she, the author of Le Deuxième Sexe, could well have done, was the female reality. In this respect, hers was not a truly "feminist" autobiography, for it is surely only by confronting and exploring female experience and incorporating it into human experience that cultural distortions will eventually be eliminated. (42)

Leduc, on the other hand, who advertises herself as a failure, wrote willingly about her experience as a woman, concentrating above all else on its emotional and physical aspects - the very areas which have been most undervalued by patriarchal society. It seems that being a woman gave welcome reinforcement to her negative identity. Leduc was not aiming for cultural respectability, and had no intellectual pretensions. Whereas Beauvoir struggled against the obstacles which faced women, Leduc used them as an alibi. Whereas the independent woman, Beauvoir, pointed out the injustice of social taboos, Leduc the narcissist took advantage of being able to be seen breaking them.

---

(42) Shulamith Firestone writes in The Dialectic of Sex:

"The incorporation of the neglected half of human experience - the female experience - into the body of culture, to create an all-encompassing culture, is only the first step, a precondition; but the schism of reality itself must be overthrown before there can be a true cultural revolution. (p. 169).

It is by now apparent that both writers present us with a picture of their reality, which is, ultimately, limited. In order to be an independent woman, Beauvoir felt the need to deny aspects of her female experience - both in her life and in her writing. As an extreme narcissist, Leduc is oblivious to anything happening outside the realm of her immediate experience. It is apparent that, as women living in patriarchal society, their choices - their means of responding to their social situation - were limited.

The attitude of Beauvoir and Leduc towards female experience is linked to their particular experience as individuals and to their attitude towards themselves. Their self-portraits reflect a very different sense of identity and represent two diametrically opposed autobiographical traditions. Beauvoir, who, in an early philosophical essay, described life as "une partie que l'on peut gagner ou perdre",<sup>(43)</sup> portrays her life as an overall success. Leduc, on the other hand, produced what Beauvoir calls an "essai-martyr",<sup>(44)</sup> portraying her life as "une vie de ratée".<sup>(45)</sup> The following assertions show the contrast between their approach to their lives. Beauvoir claims:

Dans l'ensemble, mon destin a été faste. [...] J'ai connu mes manques et mes limites, mais je m'en suis accommodée. Quand les événements qui se passaient dans le monde me déchiraient, c'est le monde que je souhaitais changer, et non la place que j'y occupais. (46)

Leduc introduces herself quite differently:

j'ai peur de mourir et je suis navrée d'être au monde.  
[...] Je m'en irai comme je suis arrivée. Intacte,  
chargée de mes défauts qui m'ont torturée. J'aurais voulu  
naître statue, je suis une limace sous mon fumier. (47)

---

(43) Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté. Paris: Gallimard, 1957, pp. 32-33.

(44) La Force des choses, p. 108.

(45) La Folie en tête, p. 331.

(46) Tout compte fait, p. 39.

(47) La Bâtarde, p. 19.

What is also interesting about the above statements is that they indicate that each writer determined her fate to some degree. Within the limits set by socio-economic, cultural and psychological factors, the two women were able to make certain choices about themselves. This is a fundamental point in understanding the way Simone de Beauvoir and Violette Leduc came to terms with patriarchal culture.

If my method of approach to the female experience gives a great deal of emphasis to the existentialist concept of a choix originel, it is because Beauvoir, in particular, but also Leduc, stressed the element of choice in the life of an individual. Beauvoir explicitly interprets both her own life and Leduc's in terms of "un projet originel, incessamment repris et fortifié", which she writes:

s'est ramifié en projets secondaires, en multiples attitudes à l'égard du monde et des gens: mais qui avaient la même source et le même sens. (48)

In Tout compte fait, she looks at her own life in this light, and in her excellent preface to La Bâtarde, Beauvoir claims that Leduc's book:

montre avec une exceptionnelle clarté qu'une vie, c'est la reprise d'un destin par une liberté. (49)

Beauvoir believes that her own projet originel was to "savoir et exprimer", (50) and that Leduc chose "le narcissisme, l'égocentrisme, la solitude." (51)

Leduc is not explicit about the idea of an original choice of being, but she does imply that she feels a degree of responsibility for her own destiny. Likewise, she suggests, in her autobiography, that other women choose their fate, either by consenting to or rebelling against the behaviour expected of them by others.

---

(48) Tout compte fait, p. 22.  
 (49) Preface to La Bâtarde, p. 8.  
 (50) Tout compte fait, p. 22.  
 (51) Preface to La Bâtarde, p. 8.

It is certainly the case that Beauvoir chose to be positive and to communicate with others, whereas Leduc chose to be a negative, unlovable figure. Naturally, their choices influenced the way in which they experienced, and presented in their writing, their female lot.

The second important aspect of the method I use is the concept of crises. This, again, is taken from Beauvoir's own approach to experience. The crises she describes in her own life occurred whenever there was a conflict between the image of herself which was presented to her by her "entourage" and her "évidence intime".<sup>(52)</sup> In particular, Beauvoir saw female experience as a series of crises, and she demonstrates this in Le Deuxième Sexe. She maintained that certain physiological changes abruptly modify a woman's social identity and her position vis à vis others. From puberty onwards, a woman experiences a number of crises, associated with her biological constitution, in which her body makes her, in the eyes of others, into something she does not feel herself to be. Consequently, her sexuality is her greatest area of conflict and ambivalence.

In the case of Beauvoir and Leduc, I show that certain personal crises influenced their choix originel. In turn, their choix originel affected the way in which they came to terms with female sexuality. Despite their different reactions, neither could avoid feeling to some extent diminished by her female body.

The third aspect of my method likewise makes use of Beauvoir's observations in Le Deuxième Sexe. In the volume entitled "l'Expérience vécue", Beauvoir analysed the various roles which women assume. They amount to three basic choices open to women: dévouement, narcissism and independence. The

---

(52) Tout compte fait, p. 15.



dévouée lives for others and believes that she is sacrificing herself; the narcissist is completely preoccupied with her image in the eyes of others. The independent woman tries to lead an authentic existence, neither looking to someone else to justify her existence, nor using her femininity as an alibi.

Beauvoir's depiction of these roles is permeated with moralism. She makes it quite clear that, in her judgement, independent women have chosen the difficult but admirable path, whereas the dévouée and narcissist figures are flagrant examples of existential mauvaise foi. This moralism unfortunately prevents Beauvoir from exploring these roles in all their complexity.

Leduc, obviously influenced in this by Le Deuxième Sexe, likewise shows how women choose one of these three roles. She, too, admires independent women and she portrays other women with savage irony. Just as Beauvoir does, she portrays the latter as an admirable independent woman and herself as an extreme narcissist. Unlike Beauvoir, she does not expect, or exhort, women to act any differently. Although she depicts herself as an almost wholly negative figure, she feels neither shame nor blame.

The first part of this study is concerned with Simone de Beauvoir. In it, I examine her assumptions about the female experience and why they are so. The second part of the thesis, presenting Violette Leduc's understanding of the female experience, is shorter because many of the general arguments used are developed in the first part, in relation to Simone de Beauvoir. The section on Leduc is more comparative, and examines in what way Leduc's picture reinforces, or differs from, Beauvoir's view of the female experience.

What emerges most clearly from this analysis of two major women autobiographers is that being a woman in patriarchal society is a constant struggle - whether or not the struggle is positive, as Beauvoir's is, or negative, as Leduc's is. It is apparent that both Beauvoir's triumph, and Leduc's defeat entailed

PART ONE

SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR.



SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR

CHAPTER ONE

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL PROJECT.

In order to be able to analyse Simone de Beauvoir's attitude to female experience in her autobiography, we have to ascertain her motives and assumptions at the time she was planning to write. At the age of fifty, what was her conception of individuals and society, and what had shaped this?

Having examined her circumstances and her vision of herself and the world, and having analysed her aims in writing her autobiography, we will turn to the young Simone, and will see that the autobiographical impulse was already apparent in childhood.

I. Simone de Beauvoir in the 1950s.

Simone de Beauvoir's assumptions about herself and the world at the time of writing obviously determined the way in which she saw her past. As Roquentin aptly puts it in La Nausée, when one writes about one's life:

On a l'air de débiter par le commencement. [...] Mais la fin est là, qui transforme tout. [...] Les événements se produisent dans un sens et nous racontons en sens inverse.(1)

And, in a similar vein, Philippe Lejeune, in his book L'Autobiographie en France, remarks that an autobiography "n'est qu'une fiction produite dans des conditions particulières."<sup>(2)</sup>

At forty-eight, when Beauvoir began her autobiography, she was a well-known name in France and abroad. She had acquired a controversial reputation as an "existentialist" and as the companion to Jean-Paul Sartre; more recently she had also become known as a "feminist" and as the author of Le Deuxième Sexe. A more respectable sort of prestige (and wealth) had come with the Prix Goncourt, which she had won in October 1954 for her novel Les Mandarins.

Her private life, too, was exceptional, and she must have felt, in 1956, that it was successful. Still seeing Sartre as much as before, she was living with Claude Lanzmann, throughout the writing of Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée. She tells us that in the past few years:

j'avais beaucoup accordé à ma vie privée. Je ne regrettais rien. (FC, 349)<sup>(3)</sup>

The relationship with Lanzmann must have reinforced her feeling that her life as an independent woman was not only unusual but also well-justified and worth writing about. In the summer of 1957, on holiday in Capri with Sartre, she writes that she felt, with a sudden thrill, that:

notre vie avait la plénitude et l'arigueur des histoires qu'on raconte. (FC, 400).

(1) J-P Sartre. La Nausée. Paris: Gallimard, 1938. (Livre de poche, p.62).

(2) Philippe Lejeune. L'Autobiographe en France, p. 30.

(3) Henceforth I shall abbreviate the autobiographical volumes in the text as follows: Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée: MJFR; La Force de l'âge: FA; La Force des choses: FC; Tout compte fait: TCF.

Beauvoir had first thought of writing an autobiography in 1946. However, the fact that she did not begin it until 1956 is important; it is obviously a very different work from the autobiography she would have written a decade earlier.

It is clear from reading La Force des choses, which covers this period of Beauvoir's life, that during the decade since 1946 she had been taking what she felt was her responsibility as a left-wing intellectual seriously. The first issue of Les Temps Modernes appeared in October 1945, with Sartre and Beauvoir both on the editorial committee. From its beginning, it assumed a political role. As Beauvoir wrote in L'Existentialisme et la Sagesse des nations, which appeared in the revue in November of that year:

se placer sur le plan politique, c'est s'arracher à sa situation individuelle, c'est se transcender vers les autres et transcender le présent vers l'avenir.(4)

Particularly after 1952 she and Sartre became committed to left-wing politics. This was the era of McCarthyism in America and French intervention in Indochina - increasingly supported by the USA. The war in Algeria was to preoccupy Simone de Beauvoir during the writing of the first three volumes of the autobiography - indeed, until 1962.

As one of the few voices to denounce the war in Indochina - along with Les Temps Modernes - the French Communist Party was cautiously supported by Beauvoir and Sartre. When she won the Prix Goncourt, in 1954, Beauvoir took pains to show that Les Mandarins was not meant to be seen as an attack on the communists. She granted only one interview to the press, after winning the prize, and, significantly, this was to L'Humanité-Dimanche. In this she declared:

Les intellectuels de gauche doivent se tenir aux côtés des communistes et travailler avec eux.(5)

(4) "Idéalisme moral et réalisme politique" in L'Existentialisme et la Sagesse des nations, Paris: Nagel, 1948, p. 66-67. Appeared in Les Temps Modernes, 2, (novembre, 1945).

(5) L'Humanité-Dimanche, 19 décembre 1954.

In the same interview, she also took the opportunity to speak out against "l'attitude criminelle du gouvernement en face des problèmes nord-africains".

In the autumn of 1955, Beauvoir spent six weeks in China, and in La Longue Marche, written in 1956, she presented a picture of China which belied what she called "la propagande de Hong Kong". (FC, 367). Impressed with what the revolution had achieved, she commented that this was a:

révolution passionnée et raisonnable qui avait non seulement délivré de l'exploitation paysans et ouvriers, mais libéré de l'étranger toute la Chine. (6)

The same year saw the publication of Privilèges, which comprised three contentious essays. (7) In this book, Beauvoir considered the way in which privileged individuals attempted to justify their position. She described the way that conservative ideology tried to confuse "l'intérêt général" with "l'intérêt bourgeois" and concluded that this was only possible by resorting to "l'étourderie et la mauvaise foi". (8)

Despite their common hatred of the right, relations were difficult between the two existentialists and the French Communist Party. In the French legislative elections, held in January, 1956, the left gained a majority. (9) The process of de-stalinization and Krushchev's secret report on Stalin's crimes in February of 1956 were further grounds for optimism amongst the left. However, Beauvoir tells us, the French communists resisted any attempt - whether internal or external to the party - to make their official doctrine less dogmatic and to democratize the party. Beauvoir and Sartre remained firmly outside the ranks, from which position they retained the freedom to criticize.

---

(6) La Longue Marche, essai sur la Chine. Paris: Gallimard, 1957, p.8.

(7) "Faut-il brûler Sade?", "La Pensée de droite aujourd'hui" and "Merleau-Ponty et le pseudo-sartrisme".

(8) Privilèges. Paris: Gallimard. "Les Essais", LXXVI, 1955. (Avant-propos).

(9) The socialist Guy Mollet, supported by the centre and the P.C.F., formed the government.

The insurrection in Budapest in October of the same year dampened the mood of optimism amongst the left. The soviet invasion of Hungary and the P.C.F.'s approval of Russian policy appalled Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. Along with various other writers, both signed a protest which appeared in L'Observateur.<sup>(10)</sup>

The invasion of Hungary caused some communists to defect from the party and others to protest publicly. They swelled the ranks of critical "fellow-travellers", such as Beauvoir and Sartre. In so doing, they seemed to further justify the position which these two had held with some courage since the early fifties.<sup>(11)</sup> In "Le fantôme de Staline", which appeared in Les Temps Modernes at the end of 1956,<sup>(12)</sup> Sartre wrote:

Avec nos ressources d'intellectuels, lus par des intellectuels,<sup>(13)</sup> nous essaierons d'aider à la déstalinisation du Parti français.

Despite this reinforcement of their position, Sartre and Beauvoir became increasingly isolated in France in the late fifties. In 1958, Sartre, who had supported and participated in the anti-gaullist demonstrations, was surprised and horrified when De Gaulle swept into power, founding the Fifth Republic, with overwhelming support from the population. With an authoritarian government at home, the left defeated and dispirited, and de Gaulle regarded as a popular hero, Simone de Beauvoir writes that she felt "en exil" in her own country. (FC, 470)

(10) The "Manifeste contre l'Intervention Soviétique" appeared in France-Observateur on November 8th, 1956. It was also signed by the communists Claude Roy and Roger Vailland - among others.

(11) In Les Staliniens, 1944-1956, (Paris: Fayard, 1975) Dominique Desanti, member of the P.C.F. during these years, writes about Beauvoir and Sartre with great respect. She writes it not only as a "document historique" but also as an "autocritique", for she shows how it was possible, as a well-intentioned and intelligent person, to be a "Stalinist" for as long as she was. She and her husband, Jean-Toussaint Desanti, were among those who left the P.C.F. after Hungary.

(12) J-P Sartre. "Le Fantôme de Staline", Les Temps Modernes. no<sup>s</sup> 129-130-131, (novembre-décembre 1956 - janvier 1957).

(13) J-P Sartre. "Le Fantôme de Staline", Situations VII, p. 307.

Hated by the right and centre, Sartre and Beauvoir only enjoyed partial support from what they referred to as "une gauche déplorablement respectueuse". (FC, 531). Their support for the Algerian Front de Libération National, (F.L.N.) was received with hostility by the Communist Party, which was tending to reinforce the anti-Moslem feeling amongst the working class. Indeed, the Algerian War, which preoccupied Beauvoir between 1956 and 1962, revealed to her "le chauvinisme" and "le racisme" of her compatriots who "ne voulaient rien savoir", (FC, 389) remaining silent in the face of repression and torture in Algeria. Michel-Antoine Burnier describes the way in which Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir were isolated in French society at the time.

Les gens, jusque dans les restaurants, manifestaient leur hostilité aux deux écrivains et à leurs positions politiques.<sup>(14)</sup>

This brief account of Simone de Beauvoir's position in French society in the 1950s certainly explains why she felt that she was rather out of the ordinary and that an account of her experience would be of interest to others. The independent political stance taken by Sartre and herself made her a controversial figure, and this was both exhilarating and frustrating. Conscious of both admiration and hostility, she was eager to portray her life as she saw it, and to defend her position to her friends and foes alike.

Strongly conscious of the significance of the historical moment and of the way in which social forces shaped the individual, Beauvoir believed in the power and responsibility of individuals to alter the course of history. The autobiography was also an ideal opportunity to explore this interaction with reference to her own experience.

---

(14) Michel-Antoine Burnier. Les Existentialistes et la politique. Paris: Gallimard, coll. "Idées", 1966, p. 145 .



## II. Approaching the Autobiography. Theoretical Guidelines.

When Simone de Beauvoir started making notes for her autobiography in October 1956, Sartre had already written a first version of Les Mots and André Gorz had just completed his autobiography, Le Traître, for which Sartre wrote a preface in the summer of 1957.<sup>(15)</sup> The theoretical perspective of the three autobiographies is similar; both Gorz and Beauvoir were heavily influenced by Sartre's ideas, which were crystallizing at this time, on the process by which an individual was formed.

In Questions de méthode, which he wrote while Beauvoir was writing Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée,<sup>(16)</sup> Sartre attempted to outline "une méthode d'investigation et d'exploration"<sup>(17)</sup> aimed at understanding the individual in her or his "totalité". Sartre intended his method to constitute nothing less than "la totalisation du Savoir contemporain".<sup>(18)</sup> His attempt to "situer"<sup>(19)</sup> the individual took much from Marxism, which Sartre called:

la tentative la plus radicale pour éclairer le processus historique dans sa totalité. <sup>(20)</sup>

Claiming that Marxism was "la philosophie de notre temps",<sup>(21)</sup> Sartre insisted that it could not be surpassed: it could only be developed. This was the expressed aim of Sartre's existential approach, which took account of American empirical sociology and psychoanalysis.

By American sociology, Sartre meant the study of "groupes définis"<sup>(22)</sup>

---

(15) Gorz joined the editorial board of Les Temps Modernes in February 1961. Le Traître was published, in parts, in Les Temps Modernes from October 1957 to March 1958.

(16) Sartre wrote Questions de méthode in 1957. It was published in Les Temps Modernes in September and October 1957.

(17) Questions de méthode. Paris: Gallimard, coll. "Idées", 1967, p. 9.

(18) *ibid.*, p. 8.

(19) *ibid.*, p. 52.

(20) *ibid.*

(21) *ibid.*, p. 12.

(22) *ibid.*, p. 104.

and the individual's "appartenance à des groupes".<sup>(23)</sup> By psychoanalysis, Sartre meant a Sartrean rather than a Freudian understanding of psychoanalysis. He wrote:

La psychanalyse, à l'intérieur d'une totalisation dialectique, renvoie d'un côté aux structures objectives, aux conditions matérielles et, de l'autre à l'action de notre indépassable enfance sur notre vie adulte.<sup>(24)</sup>

The impact of Marxism and psychoanalysis on Simone de Beauvoir was largely mediated by Sartre. The emphases and biases in Questions de méthode are reflected in Beauvoir's autobiography. It was this Sartrean existentialism - which stressed certain aspects of Marxism and orthodox psychoanalysis and rejected others - which most influenced Beauvoir. As well as these perspectives, there was Beauvoir's feminism - ideas which had developed during the writing of Le Deuxième Sexe and which remained more or less constant until the impact of the feminist movement in France in the 1970's. The last volume of the autobiography - Tout compte fait - hints at the possibility of a new direction in Beauvoir's feminism which, however, was to postdate the autobiography.

In the following section, I will look at the development of Beauvoir's ideas, in order to clarify the impact of Marxism, psychoanalysis, existentialism and feminism on her approach to experience.

---

(23) Questions de méthode, p. 94.

Simone de Beauvoir records reading, in the course of 1957, Riesman's The Lonely Crowd, Wright Mills' essays, Whyte's The Organization Man and Spector'sky's The Exurbanites (\*) - all examples of American sociology. Extracts from all these appeared in Les Temps Modernes, in translation. Extracts from Riesman and Spector'sky appeared in no. 135, (mai 1957). A passage from The Organization Man and more from The Exurbanites were printed in no. 152, (septembre 1958). Extracts from C. Wright Mills' The Power Elite were in the May and June numbers, in 1957.

(\*) Beauvoir wrongly quotes this title as The Exurbanist.

(24) *ibid.*, p. 90.

1) Marxism

Simone de Beauvoir tells us that when she was at the Sorbonne, in 1928-1929, the philosophy lectures "ignoraient systématiquement" Hegel and Marx. (MJFR, 227). Her own philosophy professor, Léon Brunschvicg, had written a book on the subject of "le progrès de la conscience en Occident".<sup>(25)</sup> However, Beauvoir writes:

c'est à peine si Brunschvicg avait consacré trois pages à Marx, qu'il mettait en parallèle avec un penseur réactionnaire des plus obscurs. (MJFR, 228).

Sartre also reinforces this in Questions de méthode:

sans tradition hégélienne et sans maîtres marxistes, sans programme, sans instruments de pensée, notre génération comme les précédentes et comme la suivante ignorait tout du matérialisme historique.<sup>(26)</sup>

This meant that when Beauvoir did read Das Kapital, in 1930, although the theory of surplus value was a "révélation", she did not grasp the significance of Marxism:

je ne faisais pas de différence entre le marxisme et les philosophies auxquelles j'étais habituée, si bien qu'il me parut très facile à comprendre et que je n'en saisis, en fait, presque rien. (FA, 56)<sup>(27)</sup>

The marxist emphasis on social forces left virtually no impact on Beauvoir and Sartre right up until the war. During the thirties, they liked to think of themselves as "pure conscience et pure volonté". (FA, 20). They also liked to think that "l'esprit ne s'isolait pas du corps", (FA, 68). However, whereas Sartre regarded tears, sea-sickness and attacks of nerves as signs of "complaisance", Beauvoir conceded that "l'estomac, les glandes lacrymales et la tête elle-même obéissent parfois à des forces irrépressibles." (FA, 135). With the illusions they were able to harbour as "jeunes intellectuels petits bourgeois", (FA, 25), they believed - writes Beauvoir - that:

nos liens avec le monde, c'est nous qui les créons; la liberté était notre substance même. (FA, 22)

(25) Léon Brunschvicg. Le Progrès de la conscience dans la philosophie occidentale. Paris: Alcan, 1927.

(26) Questions de méthode, p. 26.

(27) In Questions de méthode, Sartre comments on his own reading of Marx in much the same way: "je comprenais tout lumineusement et je n'y comprenais"

It was when world war was declared, in 1939, that Beauvoir's consciousness changed. Suddenly she was no longer able to delude herself that Paris was "le centre de la terre" (FA, 32) or that she controlled her own life. Her first reaction to this realization of individual powerlessness was to seek to immerse herself in "le cours du monde". (FA, 472). She set herself the task of reading Hegel's La Phénoménologie de l'esprit<sup>(28)</sup> in order not only to gain understanding but also to acquire a certain detachment from the present moment. The stress Hegel placed on the subordination of the individual to the logic of history and on the historicity of reason - in conjunction with the world crisis - caused a shift in Beauvoir's thinking. Her old individualism and her new historicism deepened into a sense of the mutual interaction between the individual and society.

In the forties, Sartre and Beauvoir's previously individualistic idea of "liberté" became "liberté et responsabilité".<sup>(29)</sup> In L'Etre et le néant, which he wrote in 1941-1942, Sartre described freedom as a moral issue.

Although it was not until the fifties that Beauvoir took a serious interest in Marxism, she owed certain valuable insights to Marx and Engels before this. In Le Deuxième Sexe, for example, written in the late forties, she wrote:

La théorie du matérialisme historique a mis en lumière de très importantes vérités. L'humanité n'est pas une espèce animale: c'est une réalité historique.<sup>(30)</sup>

---

(28) Beauvoir probably read Jean Hyppolite's translation - the first complete translation of The Phenomenology of Spirit, which he published between 1939 and 1941. Hyppolite had been a fellow-student of Beauvoir's at the Sorbonne. (See Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée, p. 295).

(29) J-P Sartre. L'Etre et le néant. Paris: Gallimard, coll. "Tel", 1943, p. 612.

(30) Le Deuxième Sexe I, p. 95.

Applied to women, this meant - as Beauvoir wrote - that biological facts "prennent une valeur tout à fait différente selon le contexte économique et social". (31)

La femme ne saurait être considérée simplement comme un organisme sexué: parmi les données biologiques, seules ont une importance celles qui prennent dans l'action une valeur concrète. (32)

Sartre started to re-read Marx in the early fifties and by 1956 he was, Beauvoir tells us, "converti à la dialectique". (FC, 369). In the summer of that year, just before embarking on the autobiography, Simone, in Greece with Claude Lanzmann (a committed Marxist), chose her holiday reading with the aim of extending her knowledge of cultural history written from a Marxist standpoint:

je m'absorbai cet été-là dans La Morale du grand siècle<sup>(33)</sup> de Bénichou, Le Dieu caché de Goldmann, l'étude de Desanti sur Spinoza. (34) Etablissant avec précision les liaisons d'une oeuvre avec la société dont elle émane, c'était des essais qui faisaient avancer le marxisme. J'aurais souhaité pouvoir réviser en ce sens toute ma culture. (FC, 374)

The heuristic value of the Marxist argument that individuals cannot be understood apart from their relations with other members of the society was clear to Simone de Beauvoir; this approach enabled her to see her life much more in terms of factors which were external to her consciousness and which exercised an influence on it. In order to fulfil her expressed aim - "me faire une idée de ma situation dans le monde", (TCF, 48) she proceeded to examine the socio-political, cultural conditions of her existence.

It was her deepening interest in Marxism in the fifties which made Beauvoir realize the extent to which her own formative years resembled those

(31) Le Deuxième Sexe I, p. 95.

(32) ibid.

(33) The correct title is: Morales du grand siècle.

(34) J-T Desanti. Introduction à l'histoire de la philosophie, Recherches à propos de Spinoza. Paris: La Nouvelle Critique, 1957. The book was reviewed in Les Temps Modernes, 137-138, (juillet-août 1957) by Jean Pouillon.

of any other "jeune bourgeoise française de famille pauvre":

J'avais accès aux biens de consommation qu'offraient mon pays et mon époque, dans la mesure où ils convenaient au budget de mes parents. Mes études, mes lectures m'étaient imposées par la société. (TCF, 28).

It was, she continues, largely because of the atmosphere of security in the 1920's that she could afford to conceive of herself as an individual independent of society. Similarly, she now recognizes that certain decisions which she thought, at the time, reflected her own initiative were actually reflections of the contemporary social climate. For example, she decided, in 1934, to have a skiing holiday, and comments:

Les vacances de Noël furent marquées par une importante innovation; j'en pris l'initiative, ou du moins, je le crus: j'ai réalisé par la suite que souvent mes inventions ne faisaient que refléter un mouvement collectif. Depuis quelque temps, les sports d'hiver, autrefois réservés à de rares privilégiés, étaient devenus accessibles aux gens de condition modeste qui commençaient à s'y précipiter. (FA, 213-214).

As for buying a car in 1951:

Cette initiative n'avait rien d'original: l'industrie automobile reprenait et beaucoup de Français ont voulu avoir une voiture. (TCF, 35).

By the time she wrote the autobiography, Simone de Beauvoir clearly saw the individual as a social entity - socially constructed and socially maintained. Hence much of the richness of her autobiography: she realized that, to talk about herself, she needed to write about historical events, social forces, cultural influences and the groups she moved in.

2) Psychoanalysis

In Questions de méthode, Sartre had stressed the need to complement traditional Marxist theory with the understanding provided by psychoanalysis:

le matérialisme dialectique ne peut se priver plus longtemps de la médiation privilégiée qui lui permet de passer des déterminations générales et abstraites à certains traits de l'individu singulier. (35)

Despite this claim, and despite their life-long fascination with the process by which an individual is formed, Sartre and Beauvoir have always regarded orthodox psychoanalysis with a certain hostility.

Beauvoir tells us that when she met Sartre, in 1929, an interest in psychoanalysis was developing in certain circles in France. At this stage, she and Sartre had only read Freud's L'Interprétation des rêves and La Psychopathologie de la vie quotidienne and she writes that Freud's thinking conflicted with their idea of human freedom and was violently repudiated:

par le rôle qu'il accordait à l'inconscient, par la rigidité de ses explications mécanistes, le freudisme, tel que nous le concevions, écrasait la liberté humaine. (FA, 26).

Beauvoir criticized Freudian psychoanalysis for the same reasons twenty years later, in Le Deuxième Sexe:

Il y a chez tous les psychanalystes un refus systématique de choix et de la notion de valeur qui en est corrélative; c'est là ce qui constitue la faiblesse intrinsèque du système. (36)

Because of this, in 1929, they failed to see the relevance of psychoanalysis to the "normal" person.

---

(35) Questions de méthode, p. 87.

(36) Le Deuxième Sexe I, p. 85.

Nous accueillions avec faveur l'idée que les psychoses, les névroses et leurs symptômes ont une signification et que celle-ci renvoie à l'enfance du sujet. Mais nous nous arrêtons là; en tant que méthode d'exploration de l'homme normal, nous récusons la psychanalyse. (FA, 25).

It is significant that Sartre and Beauvoir readily accepted the idea that childhood played a prominent role in the life of an individual.<sup>(37)</sup> Fitted into their framework, this idea did not run counter to their concept of individual liberty, which was "rationaliste" and "volontariste":

chez un individu lucide, pensions-nous, la liberté triomphe des traumatismes, des complexes, des souvenirs, des influences. (FA, 26).

Another reason for their ready acceptance of the idea that an individual's childhood could provide a key to her or his adult behaviour was that they believed themselves to be free from the emotional debris of childhood. This conviction of Beauvoir's was never to change. In 1960, in La Force de l'âge, she somewhat naïvely attributed their lack of interest in psychoanalysis in the thirties to their emotionally privileged childhoods:

Affectivement dégagés de notre enfance, nous ignorâmes longtemps que cette indifférence s'expliquait par notre enfance même. (FA, 26).

A problem of a different order was that Freud's "pansexualisme"<sup>(38)</sup> clashed with their puritanical upbringing. (FA, 25).

During the thirties, Sartre and Beauvoir shared a common fascination in people. Beauvoir writes that the "principal sujet" of their conversations was the people they knew: (FA, 130) the hidden motives for their behaviour, the roles they played, their relationships with others. Unimpressed by the

---

(37) In Tout compte fait, Beauvoir writes:

"je me soucie beaucoup plus qu'autrefois des problèmes de l'enfance, car plus je vais plus je mesure l'importance qu'ont eue dans le développement d'un être humain ses toutes premières années. (p. 163).

(38) E. Régis and A. Hesnard, authors of the first book on psychoanalysis to appear in France, (La Psychoanalyse des névroses et des psychoses. Paris: Alcan, 1914) had already referred to Freud's "pansexualisme". However, their use of the word was positive. In fact they claimed that his emphasis on sexuality was his sole originality.



reductive analytical approach, Sartre was determined to formulate a concrete synthetical approach to individual behaviour. Beauvoir explains:

Nous reprochions aux psychanalystes de décomposer l'homme plutôt que de le comprendre. L'application quasi automatique de leurs "clés" leur servait à rationaliser fallacieusement des expériences qu'il aurait fallu appréhender dans leur singularité. (FA, 133).

L'Être et le néant, which Sartre did not actually start to write until 1941, was the result of reflections and philosophical research in the thirties. In this book, Sartre outlined a method for attempting to explain an individual. It differed radically from Freudian psychoanalysis: nevertheless Sartre paid tribute to Freud by calling this method "la psychanalyse existentielle". Ignoring Freud's emphasis on the unconscious and libidinal predominance, Sartre stressed those aspects which did not conflict with his own existentialist framework.

A few years later, in Le Deuxième Sexe, Beauvoir criticized Freud for making assertions about biology and sexuality without taking into account the historical context. She argued that such phenomena as "penis-envy" and the "castration complex" are manifestations of the social dominance symbolized by the phallus and tell us nothing about sexuality as such. She accused Freud of taking the body as it is perceived and interpreted in society to be "une donnée irréductible",<sup>(39)</sup> thus confusing the social and the biological.

Simone de Beauvoir made a similar objection to Freud's explanation of the young girl's Oedipus complex; she herself attributed the girl's tendency to deify her father to social rather than libidinal factors:

Ce n'est pas la libido féminine qui divinise le père [...]; le fait que le désir féminin se porte sur un être souverain lui donne un caractère original; mais elle n'est pas constitutive de son objet, elle le subit. La souveraineté du père est un fait d'ordre social: et Freud échoue à en rendre compte. (40)

---

(39) Le Deuxième Sexe I, p. 86.

Simone adhered to this explanation in the autobiography to elucidate the father-fixation which dominated a certain phase of her childhood. She told Francis Jeanson, in an interview in 1966, that her passion for her father seemed to her devoid of any "aspect physique". It was, indeed, accompanied by "une grande jalousie par rapport à la mère" and caused "une très grande déception" when her father appeared to betray her, but according to Simone de Beauvoir, it was "un amour de tête".<sup>(41)</sup> Thus Beauvoir, like Sartre, used parts of Freudian theory, but placed her emphasis where Freud did not.

Sartre and Beauvoir - and André Gorz - have always attacked psychoanalytical interpretations for lacking any notion of an "irréductible dialectique".<sup>(42)</sup> In 1960, Beauvoir wrote:

---

(41) Jeanson. Simone de Beauvoir ou l'Entreprise de vivre. p. 253.

Elsewhere, Beauvoir writes of "sublimation". (C.f. p. 25). However, she does not apply the idea to her relationship with her father.

(42) Sartre made this point as recently as 1972. (See "Sartre par Sartre" in Situations IX, Gallimard, 1972, p. 107). He continued:

"il y a différentes configurations de la réalité dialectique, et chacune de ces configurations est rigoureusement conditionnée par la précédente, qu'elle intègre et dépasse en même temps. [...] Un sentiment ou une passion entre deux personnes est sans doute fortement conditionné par leur relation à un "objet primitif"; on peut retrouver cet objet et s'en servir pour expliquer la relation nouvelle. Mais cette relation elle-même reste irréductible. "

André Gorz, summing up his attitude to psychoanalysis in Le Traître, written in 1956, makes much the same points. He writes about himself here in the third person: "Il se fout des interprétations freudiennes, de leur façon de fonder l'homme dans la libido prise pour irréductible; d'ailleurs il ne les connaît pas dans le détail et ne veut pas s'aventurer à en discuter. Ce qui l'intéresse, c'est qu'il y a une façon souvent valable de comprendre un homme à partir de son enfance, de sa première histoire, de sa situation familiale, de la manière dont, à partir de cette situation, il a assumé son corps, sa vie naturelle, son être pour les autres." (p. 71).

aux yeux de ces doctrinaires, il n'existe jamais de relations adultes; ils ignorent la dialectique qui de l'enfance à la maturité - à partir de racines dont je suis loin de méconnaître l'extrême importance - transforme les relations affectives: elle les conserve, mais en les dépassant, et dans ce dépassement est enveloppé l'objet que le sentiment vise à neuf. (FA, 376-377).

With this criticism in mind, Beauvoir is impatient with the suggestion, which others have made from time to time, that Sartre has been for her "un substitut de père" or that her friend Olga (and possibly other young friends of hers) has been "le succédané d'un enfant". (FA, 376). She calls this approach "simpliste à l'excès". (FA, 376).

In fact, psychoanalysis has had very little influence on Simone de Beauvoir's autobiography. Talking to Madeleine Chapsal, in 1960, about the first two volumes of the autobiography, Beauvoir told her:

Pour l'instant je me soucie uniquement de ma vie consciente, et non de ses soubassements. J'en indique des implications qui me demeurent obscures, j'essaye à l'occasion de les élucider. Mais pour moi ce n'est pas là l'essentiel.(43)

"L'essentiel", to Beauvoir, has always been her rational, conscious self. She goes to great lengths, in the autobiography, to rationalize and explain the apparently irrational, to gloss over and thus conceal those shadowy areas of her existence when she no longer felt in control.

In Tout compte fait, Beauvoir describes some of her dreams, declaring:

je n'essaierai pas d'en donner une interprétation freudienne.  
(TCF, 113)

Indeed, she makes no attempt of any sort to interpret the dreams; even here she avoids confronting her semi-conscious fears, phobias and personal neuroses. On the subject of sexuality, too, the autobiography is a picture of discretion. Despite the admiration she professed for Michel Leiris' autobiography, three volumes of which were published by the time she began writing her own, Beauvoir's

---

(43) Madeleine Chapsal. Les Ecrivains en personne. Paris: Juillard, 1960, p. 29.

self-portrait was unaffected by the emphasis he gave, influenced by psychoanalysis, to dreams and sexuality. (44)

Beauvoir's "existential psychoanalysis" - like Sartre's and Gorz's - remained much closer to existentialism than to psychoanalysis.

### 3) Existentialism

The basic difference between the existentialist approach to the individual and that of Marxism and psychoanalysis is that the last two "systems" consider the individual's decisions to be largely determined by circumstances external to the self, whereas existentialism emphasizes self-determination.

Beauvoir stresses that she saw her life as her own responsibility before she came into contact with Sartre:

déjà à dix-neuf ans, j'étais persuadée qu'il appartient à l'homme, à lui seul, de donner un sens à sa vie, et qu'il y suffit. (FA, 564).

It was during the decade before the war, when Beauvoir and Sartre spent a great deal of time discussing behaviour and personality, inventing "des schémas" to explain their observations, (FA, 134) that Sartre developed the idea of mauvaise foi which he elucidated, later, in L'Etre et le néant.

Mauvaise foi was seen as a conscious choice to deceive oneself about oneself. - the cowardly means of avoiding the burden of responsibility for one's actions. This became the existentialist equivalent of what Freud called the

---

(44) Michel Leiris. L'Age d'homme. Gallimard, 1939.  
Biffures. Gallimard, 1948.  
Fourbis. Gallimard, 1955.

In the introductory section to L'Age d'homme, entitled "De la littérature considérée comme une tauromachie", Leiris expressed his aim at the time of writing: "mettre à nu certaines obsessions d'ordre sentimental ou sexuel, confesser publiquement certaines des déficiences ou des lâchetés qui [ ... ] font le plus honte." (p.11)

unconscious. Beauvoir and Sartre saw manifestations of mauvaise foi wherever they looked:

Nous nous appliquions à la débusquer sous tous ses aspects: tricheries du langage, mensonges de la mémoire, fuites, compensations, sublimations. Nous nous réjouissions, chaque fois que nous découvrons une nouvelle grille, une nouvelle forme. (FA, 134).

The idea of mauvaise foi was both a cause and a consequence of their life-long fascination with roles and role-playing. It also explains the moralism which emerges in the autobiography - a moralism which affects Beauvoir's attitude to herself and to other women.

The scope Beauvoir gave to individual choice was quite extreme at this early stage. This emphasis was slightly modified after the war and over the years, but never fundamentally. In the last volume of the autobiography, Simone de Beauvoir still claims that:

aucun homme ne se veut autre qu'il est, puisque pour tout existant, être, c'est se faire être. (TCF, 46).

This belief radically affects the tone of the autobiography. As Philippe Lejeune points out (in reference to Sartre), the traditional autobiographical approach: "je suis devenu moi" becomes, in the case of an Existentialist: "je me suis fait moi".<sup>(45)</sup>

Of course, the conviction of self-choice did not mean denying the determining power of socio-economic and psychological factors. Indeed, in the very first issue of Les Temps Modernes, Jean-Paul Sartre stressed the importance of the individual's situation:

Les hommes constituent des totalités indécomposables, dont les idées, les humeurs et les actes sont des structures secondaires et dépendantes, et dont le caractère essentiel est d'être situées et ils diffèrent entre eux comme leurs situations diffèrent entre elles.<sup>(46)</sup>

(45) Philippe Lejeune. Le Pacte autobiographique, p. 241.

(46) J-P Sartre. "Présentation des Temps Modernes", (octobre 1945) in Situations II. Paris: Gallimard, 1972.

A decade later, in Questions de méthode, Sartre was more specific about how the notion of choice could be reconciled with genuine limitations to a person's liberty in a specific situation. He explained that it is not the situation of the individual which is so important, but the way in which the individual transcends it:

Pour nous, l'homme se caractérise avant tout par le dépassement d'une situation, par ce qu'il parvient à faire de ce qu'on a fait de lui.(47)

Thus, "les conditions matérielles de son existence circonscrivent le champ de ses possibilités", (48) but the freedom of the individual lies in expanding the "champ de possibilités" to its maximum.

In L'Être et le néant, and in his studies of Baudelaire (1947) and Genet (1952), (49) Sartre developed the idea that each individual makes a fundamental choice of being which he called le choix originel. Admitting that it has many similarities with the "complex" in psychoanalysis, he described it as follows:

Ce choix originel s'opérant face au monde et étant choix de la position dans le monde est totalitaire [..] ; il est antérieur à la logique [..] ; c'est lui qui choisit l'attitude de la personne en face de la logique et des principes; il n'est donc pas question de l'interroger conformément à la logique. Il ramasse en une synthèse prélogique la totalité de l'existant et, comme tel, il est le centre de références d'une infinité de significations polyvalentes. (50)

In Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté, which was published in 1947, Beauvoir described "le drame du choix originel" (51) which she situated in an individual's adolescence:

(47) Questions de méthode, p. 127.

(48) ibid., p. 130.

(49) J-P Sartre. Baudelaire. Paris: Gallimard, 1947.

Saint-Genet, Comédien et Martyr. Paris: Gallimard, 1952.

(50) J-P Sartre. L'Être et le néant. Paris: Gallimard, coll. "TEL", 1943. p. 630.

(51) Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté. Paris: Gallimard, coll. "Les Essais", n. 26, 1947, p. 58.

C'est à ce moment qu'il se décide; si l'histoire qu'on pourrait appeler naturelle d'un individu: sa sensualité, ses complexes affectifs, etc., dépend surtout de son enfance, c'est l'adolescence qui apparaît comme le moment du choix moral: alors la liberté se révèle et il faut décider de son attitude en face d'elle. (52)

The idea of choice of self permeates Les Mots, Gorz's Le Traître<sup>(53)</sup> and Simone de Beauvoir's own autobiography. Assessing the extent of her liberty in later life, Beauvoir looks back on her choices and believes they were guided by a projet originel which, she deduces, was to "connaître et écrire". (TCF, 38).

Ma liberté s'est employée à soutenir mes projets originels; pour y rester fidèle, elle a eu recours, à travers les fluctuations des circonstances, à de constantes inventions; celles-ci ont pris parfois la figure d'une décision, mais qui toujours m'a paru aller de soi: touchant les choses importantes, je n'ai jamais eu à délibérer. Accomplissement d'un projet originel, ma vie a été en même temps le produit et l'expression du monde dans lequel elle se déroulait. (TCF, 39)

In her preface to Violette Leduc's La Bâtarde, written in 1964, Beauvoir sees Leduc's life, similarly, in terms of choices of self:

Par angoisse, par déception, par rancœur, elle a choisi le narcissisme, l'égoïsme, la solitude.<sup>(54)</sup>

In so doing, Simone de Beauvoir is placing the ultimate responsibility for her life, for Leduc's life, squarely upon their own shoulders. Beauvoir never actually came to give less importance to freedom and responsibility - (two interlocking terms) - but, in the course of her autobiography, she did give more weight to situation. In Tout compte fait, Beauvoir perceives the limits within which one chooses more clearly as limits, although the necessity of free choice is no less obvious. This attitude has both shaped and been shaped by her feminism.

---

(52) Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté, p. 58.

(53) Gorz explains his autobiographical method in Le Traître:

"Partir du choix personnel, c'est-à-dire comprendre comment on s'est fait à sa condition, comment on s'est choisi à partir d'elle, laissé infecter par elle, à demi victime, à demi complice, comment il a été possible qu'on accepte de la vivre". (p. 60)

(54) Préface to La Bâtarde, p. 8.

4) Feminism

Up until 1946, Simone de Beauvoir lacked any feminist consciousness whatsoever. She assumed that her own problems and those of other women were their individual concerns, rather than manifestations of a shared female condition. The question of women's oppression simply did not occur to her:

Hommes ou femmes, je pensais que chacun peut tirer sa propre épingle du jeu. (55)

At the time of the Liberation, Simone quite suddenly came into contact with a number of women over forty who had had, in a sense, "une expérience identique":

elles avaient vécu en "êtres relatifs". (FA, 587).

Beauvoir was gradually becoming aware that certain of the "difficultés", the "fausses facilités", the "embûches" and "obstacles" which women came across were "génériques" rather than "individuels". (FA, 586-587).

However, it was not until 1946, when Beauvoir first thought of writing her autobiography, that she seriously asked herself for the first time:

qu'est-ce que ça avait signifié pour moi d'être une femme? (FC, 109)

She intended to make some brief notes on this point, but became absorbed in the new discoveries she was making:

Je fus si intéressée que j'abandonnai le projet d'une confession personnelle pour m'occuper de la condition féminine dans sa généralité. (FC, 109).

It is significant that the impetus for writing Le Deuxième Sexe sprang from a projected autobiography. In turn, the study of women was to have a major impact on the autobiography.

---

(55) Chapsal. Les Ecrivains en personne, p. 22.



Just as Marxism had helped her understand her own bourgeois condition, her study of women revealed to Beauvoir "une condition féminine". (FA, 586). It was a revelation to her to discover the enormous difference in the social conditioning of males and females and to realize the extent to which she had been formed into "une jeune fille rangée":

Toute ma formation affective, intellectuelle, a été différente de celle d'un homme. (56)

When Beauvoir returned to the autobiographical project a decade later, she saw it - among other things - as a chance to extend her study of women, from the standpoint of her personal experience. By looking both at herself and at women she knew well, she intended to explore a question which had begun passionately to interest her:

Comment une femme s'arrange-t-elle de sa condition de femme?  
(TCF, 164).

In Le Deuxième Sexe, Simone de Beauvoir had used an existentialist perspective to analyse the situation of women. She saw women as a product both of "the ensemble of social relations" and of their early years and their emotional conditioning within the family. At the same time, they were free beings, able to transcend their situation - within a certain "champ de possibilités". Those who made no use of this liberty fell - using Existentialist jargon - from a state of "transcendance" to a state of "immanence". (57)

Beauvoir wrote emphatically:

---

(56) Chapsal. Les Ecrivains en personne, p. 23.

(57) "Immanence" and "transcendance" are defined as follows by H.M. Parshley, translator of Le Deuxième Sexe. Immanence, as used by Simone de Beauvoir, is "the opposite or negation of transcendence, such as confinement or restriction to a narrow round of uncreative and repetitious duties; it is in contrast to the freedom to engage in projects of ever widening scope that marks the untrammelled existent." (The Second Sex, Jonathan Cape, 1953, (Penguin, p. 94-95) ).

Cette chute est une faute morale si elle est consentie par le sujet; si elle lui est infligée, elle prend la figure d'une frustration et d'une oppression; elle est dans les deux cas un mal absolu. (58)

It is clear that, in Le Deuxième Sexe, Simone de Beauvoir was not only concerned with the oppression of women in patriarchal society, but also with women's own mauvaise foi, which is, as she shows, encouraged by their situation in society. She observed various roles in which women were able to flee from the anguish of freedom and responsibility with full social approval. Women playing the role of "narcissiste", "amoureuse" or "mystique" sought to justify their existence by the abdication of their liberty to another. This idea is also prominent in the autobiography. Without using the existentialist term, Simone de Beauvoir clearly judges certain of the women in her life to be guilty of mauvaise foi.

As far as she herself was concerned, Beauvoir was anxious to prove that it was possible to transcend the limitations of the female situation. She wrote in La Force de l'âge:

Je sais aujourd'hui que pour me décrire, je dois dire d'abord: "Je suis une femme"; mais ma féminité n'a pas constitué pour moi ni une gêne ni un alibi. De toute façon, elle est une des données de mon histoire, non une explication. (FA, 376).

Indeed, until very recently, she has denied having ever been oppressed as a female herself. In an interview in 1960, just before the publication of La Force de l'âge, Madeleine Chapsal's question:

Ne vous êtes-vous jamais sentie entravée par le fait d'être une femme?

brought an emphatic response from Simone de Beauvoir:

Je n'ai jamais eu à lutter. Non, tout a été facile.

---

(58) Le Deuxième Sexe I, p. 31.

When Chapsal pressed her again:

Et intérieurement, vous ne vous êtes jamais heurtée à certains obstacles?

Beauvoir replied with equal vigour:

Non, pas du tout. (59)

In the autobiography it is the influence of Marxism, rather than Beauvoir's feminism, which serves as a criterion for judging society. Furthermore, up until the early seventies, Beauvoir deemed any fundamental changes in the female condition to be contingent on a socialist revolution. In La Force des choses, Beauvoir reasserted the position she had held in Le Deuxième Sexe:

La condition féminine [...] ne changera sérieusement qu'au prix d'un bouleversement de la production. (FC, 210).

She added:

C'est pourquoi j'ai évité de m'enfermer dans ce qu'on appelle "le féminisme". (FC, 210)

The beginnings of the feminist movement in France caused Beauvoir to reappraise some of her positions, and the end of Tout compte fait gives the reader a glimpse of a new development in her thinking. On this last point, she has clearly changed at this stage:

Changer les rapports de production ne suffit pas à transformer les relations des individus entre eux [...] ; je pensais autrefois que la lutte des classes devait passer avant la lutte des sexes. J'estime maintenant qu'il faut mener les deux ensemble. (TCF, 503,505).

However, the autobiography was virtually completed before the feminist movement made any impact in France, giving new importance to the portrayal of female experience. Writing before this time, Beauvoir obviously deliberately avoided writing about certain aspects of women's lives. She rarely makes

---

(59) Chapsal. Les Ecrivains en personne, p. 29-30.

allusion to the historical struggles of women. There are two passing references to the question of women's suffrage;<sup>(60)</sup> there is a brief comment, in La Force des choses, about the controversy surrounding the law prohibiting contraception.<sup>(61)</sup> There is no mention of the attempts to improve the oppressive divorce laws<sup>(62)</sup> or of the long struggle for equal wages.

Writing Le Deuxième Sexe, obviously made Beauvoir's observations about women more astute; it is important to realize, however, that she did not set out to write a "feminist" autobiography. She writes very little about aspects of female experience which are today seen to be central to feminism. Although she touches on the subjects of contraception and abortion in her novels, they are not discussed in the autobiography.<sup>(63)</sup> Allusions to sexuality, after she reached puberty, are extremely scanty; so are any comments on emotional crises peculiar to the female experience.

Throughout the autobiography and, indeed, throughout her life, Beauvoir has tended to fall into the trap of equating human experience with male experience. The reason why she refuses the specificity of female experience is because she feels that to admit difference is tantamount to admitting inferiority. However, by attributing greater significance to dilemmas and choices faced by males in patriarchal society, she trivializes those which derive from a different way of life or human condition. The way in which she herself has "transcended" the female condition has been to deny the validity of any biological and associated

---

(60) Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée, p. 254. La Force des choses, p. 221.

(61) In 1959 and 1960, Beauvoir wrote prefaces for two books by Dr. Marie-Andrée Lagroua Weill-Hallé, advocating more widespread knowledge and practice of contraception. They were Le Planning familial and La Grand' Peur d'aimer, both published by Juillard-Sequana. (La Force des choses, p. 524).

(62) In 1974, Beauvoir prefaced Claire Cayron's book Divorce en France. (Paris: Denoël-Gonthier, 1974).

(63) Beauvoir writes about contraception in Les Mandarins, vol. I. (Gallimard, Folio) p. 119. and vol. II. p. 95.

There is an abortion scene in Le Sang des autres. (Paris: Gallimard, 1945).

psychological differences between men and women and to adopt for herself the patriarchal assumption that male experience is universal, whereas female experience is merely a lack of experience.

In interviews which post-date the autobiography - interviews recorded after 1972 - Beauvoir herself has become aware of this problem. It is clear from things she has said in the last decade that the autobiography represents a particular stage in her feminist consciousness - a stage which began with the writing of Le Deuxième Sexe and ended with Tout compte fait.

From her post-autobiographical perspective, Simone de Beauvoir makes various perspicacious comments about her former "feminism". She sees today that her stoic determination to transcend the female situation may well have given her great strength, but it also represented a stumbling block in that it meant deliberately making light of the obstacles. In 1974 she commented in Les Temps Modernes:

Il m'a longtemps semblé que certains inconvénients inhérents à la condition féminine devaient être simplement négligés ou surmontés, qu'il n'y avait pas besoin de s'y attaquer. (64)

Today Simone de Beauvoir mercilessly calls her role in the past that of a "femme-alibi",<sup>(65)</sup> and says that she managed to overcome certain obstacles by adopting patriarchal values and succeeding according to these values. Once she had shown herself able to do this, she had some advantages by being a female in a male world. For example, she had the added glory of being "une peu exceptionnelle".<sup>(66)</sup> However, the price she had to pay was to foster only those aspects

---

(64) Simone de Beauvoir in "Les femmes s'entêtent". Les Temps Modernes, 333-334, (avril-mai 1974). Republished as an introduction to Les Femmes s'entêtent. Paris: Gallimard, 1975)

(65) *ibid.*

(66) Chapsal. Les Ecrivains en personne, p. 22.

of her femininity which were acceptable - or expected of her - in her male peer group. In an interview with Jean Gérassi, in 1976, Beauvoir commented on this phenomenon at some length:

En écrivant Le Deuxième Sexe, je me rendis compte pour la première fois que, sans le réaliser, je profitais d'une société bâtie pour les hommes. Ce qui était arrivé, c'est que très tôt dans la vie j'avais accepté toutes les valeurs masculines et je m'y conformais. Il est vrai que je réussissais et cela renforçait ma conviction que la femme pouvait être l'égale de l'homme si elle voulait cette égalité. [...] Ce qui était féminin je le gardais pour moi. Mes succès m'encourageaient à continuer, au fur et à mesure que je voyais que je pouvais gagner ma vie aussi bien que n'importe quel intellectuel et qu'on me prenait au sérieux tout autant que mes collègues masculins. [...] Il me fut très facile d'oublier qu'une secrétaire ne jouissait aucunement des mêmes privilèges.

Ce qui était encore plus grave c'est que j'avais tendance à mépriser ces femmes qui étaient incapables, financièrement ou mentalement, de faire preuve d'indépendance vis-à-vis des hommes. En fait je pensais sans même me l'avouer: "Si je peux le faire, elles peuvent le faire aussi."

Si nous parlions en termes de classes économiques vous comprendriez tout de suite ce que je veux dire: j'étais devenue une collaboratrice de la classe privilégiée. C'est la même chose en termes de lutte des sexes. (67)

Although Beauvoir claims here that it was the writing of Le Deuxième Sexe which made her realise the extent to which she had been a "collaboratrice" it was more accurately "la nouvelle génération de femmes en révolte" which precipitated this change in her consciousness, and she says this herself elsewhere. (68)

---

(67) "Simone de Beauvoir. The Second Sex 25 years later". Interview with John Gerassi in Society, (Jan-Feb. 1976). Translated into French and reprinted in Les Ecrits de Simone de Beauvoir. Ed. Claude Francis and Fernande Gontier. Paris: Gallimard, 1979, p. 548.

Since 1978, as editor of the feminist periodical Questions Féministes, she has clearly aligned herself with Marxist feminists, as opposed to French feminists who advocate theories of the feminine, in the tradition of Lacanian and Derridian epistemologies.

(68) Simone de Beauvoir. "Les femmes s'entêtent".

As will become very clear from the present study, throughout the autobiography, as in Le Deuxième Sexe, Beauvoir's "feminism" remained subordinate to her existential moralism. It is the latter which shaped her attitude to her own experience and to female experience generally. Intending her autobiography to be both self-justificatory and edifying, Beauvoir had definite views as to what constituted an exemplary, independent woman and the extent to which she and other women fulfilled or failed to fulfil the demands of this role.

I suggest that this is both the strength and the weakness of Beauvoir's autobiography. The fact that Simone de Beauvoir presents us with a rich and detailed picture of her life as an independent woman - providing women with a much needed model, partly explains the great interest in her personal life, in France and elsewhere. That this is also its weakness is best explained by Beauvoir herself, in a passage she wrote in Le Deuxième Sexe, before she began writing her own autobiography. Attempting to explain why it is that, in her opinion, no "autobiographies féminines" equal Rousseau's Confessions or Stendhal's Souvenirs d'Egotisme, she maintained that women writers have lacked the "attitude désintéressée" which would lead them beyond certain horizons. Consequently, they stop short "au seuil de la réalité":

Quand elles ont écarté les voiles d'illusions et de mensonges, elles croient avoir assez fait: cependant cette audace négative nous laisse encore devant une énigme; car la vérité même est ambiguïté, abîme, mystère. (69)

In pursuit of a fuller picture of women's lives in patriarchal society, it is my intention, in this study of Beauvoir's presentation of female experience, to bring out the "ambiguïté" which is present but concealed in her account of her

---

(69) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 553.

life. When we look not only at what she herself emphasizes and de-emphasizes, but also at what she does not say and what she shows (perhaps unwittingly) without saying, the inadequacy of Beauvoir's rationalizations becomes apparent. We find ourselves confronted with the uncertainties, the ambiguities and contradictions which constitute the "vérité" of an individual's existence. In so doing, we are perhaps taking one step over the "seuil de la réalité", towards a greater understanding of the complexities of the female experience.



### III. The Autobiography: Beauvoir's Personal Motivation.

The motives which induce a writer to embark on an autobiography are usually both conscious and unconscious. There may well be motives which the writer is prepared to admit to herself or himself, but not to the reader. Determining Beauvoir's expressed, concealed or unacknowledged aims in writing the autobiography helps us shed light on her portrayal of female experience and, specifically, of her own experience.

Beauvoir prides herself on a "sincérité aussi éloignée de la vantardise que du masochisme". (FC, 9). However, she does warn the reader, at the beginning of the second and third volumes of the autobiography, that it is "impossible de dire tout". (FC, 8). She suggests that this is for reasons of discretion:

Si j'ai pu sans gêne, et sans trop d'indiscrétion, mettre à nu mon lointain passé, je n'éprouve pas à l'égard de mon âge adulte le même détachement et je ne dispose pas de la même liberté. (FA, 10).

It is interesting that, in reference to herself, she makes a distinction between omissions and lies:

J'ai consenti, dans ce livre, à des omissions: jamais à des mensonges,  
(FA, 11)

whereas she condemns Malraux's Antimémoires for its gaps, adding:

La forme la plus insidieuse du mensonge, c'est l'omission. (TCF, 175).

Indeed, it is clear that Beauvoir's unwillingness to be indiscreet about other people is not the sole reason for certain omissions in the autobiography. It is significant that Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée is a very frank and certainly not flattering picture of her childhood and her parents and yet it was nevertheless published in her mother's lifetime. I must agree with Francis Jeanson's comment on her omissions, that:

l'explication favorite de notre auteur me semble insuffisante.<sup>(70)</sup>

Her "souci de discrétion" has doubtless restrained her on occasion. However, what would appear to influence her more are - in Jeanson's words - "les questions que lui pose son propre rapport à soi".<sup>(71)</sup> Beauvoir is aware herself that it is her own wishes which are directing her writing:

Pourquoi y a-t-il des choses que je souhaite dire, d'autres ensevelir? Parce qu'elles sont trop précieuses (sacrées peut être), pour la littérature. Comme si la mort seule, seul l'oubli était à la hauteur de certaines réalités. (FC, 453).

Beauvoir may well declare:

j'avais du goût pous les essais-martyrs où on s'explique sans prétexte, (FC, 108)

the fact is that she herself was too concerned to justify herself and to provide a model of an exemplary independent woman to produce an "essai-martyr". Self-justification and edification were not a concern in her fiction and Beauvoir admits, in the course of the autobiography, that the protest of some friends - "vous vous livrez davantage dans vos romans". (FC, 7) - is not entirely unfounded. She might have admired Leiris' attempt to write about his "expérience déchirante", "conflit" and "drames" (TCF, 167) and Violette Leduc's intrepid exploration of "désespoir", "passion" and "haine".<sup>(72)</sup> However, Beauvoir rarely goes further than merely to hint at personal tension in the autobiography. It is in the fiction where she writes about intense emotional torment, love, jealousy, loneliness, hatred and despair. Her autobiography emphasizes the satisfying aspects of her life and avoids discussing the anguish of moments of personal crisis.

In order to understand Beauvoir's portrayal of experience, we need to look more closely at her aims in writing the autobiography. These were basically to have a loving audience, to justify herself and to guide others.

---

(70) Jeanson. Simone de Beauvoir ou L'Entreprise de vivre, p. 198.

(71) *ibid.*

(72) Beauvoir. Préface to La Bâtarde.

1) Narrative as "Salvation" - The Portrait of the Self.

Beauvoir herself is quite conscious and candid about her desire for immortality and for admiration. She makes it plain that one of the major continuities in her life has been what she calls: "mon désir de me raconter". (FC, 393). This was already apparent when Simone was a young girl. She explains why she thinks she liked to tell people about her life:

J'avais spontanément tendance à raconter tout ce qui m'arrivait: je parlais beaucoup, j'écrivais volontiers. Si je relatais dans une rédaction un épisode de ma vie, il échappait à l'oubli, il intéressait d'autres gens, il était définitivement sauvé. (MJFR, 71).

The young Simone seemed to need constantly to prove her own worth. For this, she found she needed to have a "témoin", (MJFR, 41) someone whose approval would validate her existence and "save" it from oblivion. The approbation and admiration of other people seemed to "sanctionner publiquement" her existence. (MJFR, 68)

As a young child, Simone did not lack an audience. Her mother, to whom she was exceedingly attached, shared all her confidences, watched and approved her. "Elle était mon témoin", declares Simone. (MJFR, 41). Likewise, her younger sister, "Poupette", her "associée", provided another significant witness. Deprived of her sister's company, all activities seemed "fades"; together with her sister, any project they undertook "échappait à la gratuité". (MJFR, 45).

Above all, God seemed to exist to reflect her glory - just as she seemed to reflect His. She writes:

Pas un instant son regard ne m'abandonnait, et tous les autres étaient exclus de notre tête-a-tête [...]. Il n'en laissait rien échapper: [...] mes actes, mes pensées, mes mérites s'inscrivaient en lui pour l'éternité [...]. Je ne me lassais pas de m'admirer dans ce pur miroir sans commencement ni fin". (MJFR, 74-75).

The extent to which Simone's very sense of identity depended on the presence of an attentive "témoin" is made apparent on several occasions. A striking example is when Simone realized that she no longer believed in God. The sudden void which enveloped her made her break out in panic:

Seule: pour la première fois je comprenais le sens terrible de ce mot. Seule: sans témoin [...]. Mon souffle dans ma poitrine, mon sang dans mes veines, et ce remue-ménage dans ma tête, cela n'existait pour personne. (MJFR, 139).

It is significant that it was soon after this episode that Simone decided she wanted to become a writer. She remembers writing in an album, at fifteen, that she wanted to be "un auteur célèbre". (MJFR, 142). By way of explanation, Beauvoir tells us:

Je redoutais la nuit, l'oubli; ce que j'avais vu, senti, aimé, c'était un déchirement de l'abandonner au silence. [...] [La littérature] m'assurerait une immortalité qui compenserait l'éternité perdue; il n'y avait plus de Dieu pour m'aimer, mais je brûlerais dans des millions de coeurs". (MJFR, 142-143).

It is clear that her future readers were assigned a similar role to the future partner Simone sometimes imagined. As an adolescent girl, she considered that this partner:

devait remplir [...] ce rôle d'exact témoin que jadis j'avais attribué à Dieu. (MJFR, 146).

Two major psychological needs emerge from Simone's protestations: the first is to "sauver" (MJFR, 71) the fugitive moments of her existence by relating them, recording them.<sup>(73)</sup> The second is equally important to her:

être aimée, être admirée, être nécessaire, être quelqu'un. (MJFR, 229).

---

(73) For Sartre, the choice of writing was not so much the means of saving his existence as the means of saving himself. In Les Mots he presents this choice as a means of salvation from an existence experienced as false and thus guilt-ridden. He writes:  
 "ma seule affaire était de me sauver [...] je me suis mis tout entier à l'oeuvre pour me sauver tout entier." (p. 214).

Writing about herself was the ideal way to replace the lost presence of God. Her new "témoin" - her reader - would be, like Him, both present and absent, real and imagined, contemporary and eternal. This left Simone de Beauvoir free to create her own image without the hindrance of a judgemental gaze.

At eighteen, when she felt ostracized by those around her, Simone started to keep a diary, and this was the one time in her life when she expressly wrote for herself.<sup>(74)</sup> At other times, and these were nearly always times when she felt lonely, she would take up a journal again. However, even in this most intimate form of writing, not intended for publication,<sup>(75)</sup> she seemed to have a specific "témoin" in mind. For example, in September 1939 she started a journal for Sartre to read when he returned from the war.<sup>(76)</sup> In May 1958, when Claude Lanzmann, who was then her lover, was away in North Korea, she kept a diary, with the intention of sharing her experiences with him on his return.

This desire to relate her life did not lessen in her maturity. Beauvoir was greatly excited when, in 1937, Sartre told her she should write more directly about her own experience. She remembers:

Le sang monta aux joues; il faisait chaud, il y avait comme d'habitude beaucoup de fumée et de bruit autour de nous et j'eus l'impression de recevoir un grand coup sur la tête, "Je n'oserai jamais!" dis-je. [...] Il me semblait que du jour où je la nourrirais de ma propre substance le littérature deviendrait quelque chose d'aussi grave que le bonheur et la mort. (FA, 324).

---

(74) It is possible that she would have liked to have shown her diary to her cousin Jacques, the object of her infatuation at the time. She may have written it with him in mind. However, their relations were such that the opportunity to confide in him never arose. Even when she once contemplated writing him a letter, she wondered anxiously: "Jugerait-il indiscrettes mes sobres effusions?" (MJFR, 204).

(75) It is true that she publishes extracts from her diary in the autobiography, but that was not her aim in writing the diary. Furthermore, the passages are obviously heavily edited.

(76) Simone de Beauvoir also kept a diary in April and May of 1946 - some of which she published in La Force des choses. It is not clear for whom it was primarily intended - whether for Sartre or herself only.

Less than a decade later, Beauvoir was already planning to write directly about her own experience. She writes:

J'avais envie de parler de moi. (FC, 108).

When she did eventually undertake her autobiography, in 1956, Beauvoir reminds us that she had harboured this desire for a long time:

C'était un vieux projet. [...] Quand deux ou trois fois, je m'étais laissé interviewer, j'avais toujours été déçue: j'aurais voulu faire les demandes et les réponses. Dans des notes que je n'ai pas publiées, je m'expliquais: "J'ai toujours sournoisement imaginé que ma vie se déposait dans son moindre détail sur le ruban de quelque magnétophone géant et qu'un jour je dévoilerais tout mon passé. [...] Je souhaitais à quinze ans que des gens, un jour, lisent ma biographie avec une curiosité émue; si je voulais devenir "un auteur connu", c'était dans cet espoir. Depuis j'ai souvent songé à l'écrire moi-même. L'exaltation avec laquelle jadis je caressais ce rêve m'est aujourd'hui bien étrangère; mais j'ai gardé au coeur l'envie de le réaliser... (FC, 393).

It seems that at the source of what Francis Jeanson calls Simone de Beauvoir's "autobiographisme"<sup>(77)</sup> there is a fundamental "besoin", an "appel" (FA, 64) which Beauvoir believes is at the root of every creative work. Recording her own experience has been a way of immortalizing herself. That Beauvoir has always felt this need is apparent from the ending of La Force des choses where, temporarily in a mood of despair and disillusionment, she wrote:

je déteste autant qu'autrefois m'anéantir. Je pense avec mélancolie à tous les livres lus, aux endroits visités, au savoir amassé et qui ne sera plus. [...] Au mieux, si on me lit, le lecteur pensera: elle en avait vu des choses! Mais cet ensemble unique, mon expérience à moi, [...] toutes ces choses dont j'ai parlé, d'autres dont je n'ai rien dit - nulle part cela ne ressuscitera. (FC, 686).

---

(77) Francis Jeanson. Simone de Beauvoir ou L'Entreprise de vivre. One chapter is entitled: "Autobiographisme, Narcissisme et Images de Soi."

## 2) The Need for Self-Justification

Beauvoir herself frequently comments on her need to justify herself. As an existentialist, a favourite theme of hers is her discomfort when other people project onto her what she believes to be a false image of herself. She admits her desire to use the autobiography to correct these images, by creating her own image of herself. However, she tends to forget that her own self-portrait is also only an image, which may not come closer to the truth than another portrait of her.

Beauvoir had always felt herself to be out of the ordinary. She writes that, as a baby:

une abondante famille me garantissait mon importance. (MJFR, 13).  
As well as this, there was the presence of "Jésus" and the "bon Dieu", "la Vierge" and "des anges". To little Simone, the sky seemed to be "étoilé d'une myriade d'yeux bienveillants". (MJFR, 13).

However, something seems to have occurred in Simone's early childhood which changed this attitude. Francis Jeanson, in his book on Beauvoir, points out that "l'assurance d'être justifiée" was transformed into "l'exigence de se justifier". (78)

Beauvoir needed to justify her existence as much to herself as to other people. She needed a "témoin", in order to be able to esteem herself through the esteem of others. And - she says this herself and it is a crucial point - :

J'avais besoin de mon estime pour vivre. (FC, 391).

Simone de Beauvoir admits that she is "sensible aux blâmes et aux louanges". (FC, 678). Worse for her than to be criticized, however, has been

---

(78) Francis Jeanson. Simone de Beauvoir ou l'Entreprise de vivre, p. 47.

to be misunderstood. There is a telling incident in La Force de l'âge, in which a series of unfortunate coincidences distorted the appearance of Simone's behaviour, making her look quite conniving. She comments, fervently:

il n'y a pas de pire malédiction, pensai-je, que d'être traité en coupable par des juges respectés; une condamnation sans appel devait définitivement pervertir les rapports qu'on entretient avec soi-même, avec autrui, avec le monde, et vous marquer pour toute la vie. (FA, 168).

When asked by Madeleine Chapsal what had been her main aim in her adolescence, Simone replied:

Avant tout j'essayais de me défendre contre mon entourage, de me justifier. (79)

It was with much the same aim that the fifty year old related her life in the autobiography. In the tradition of Rousseau's Confessions, Simone de Beauvoir used the autobiography as an opportunity for self-justification and counter-accusation. In La Force des choses, she tells us:

j'ai écrit ces mémoires en grande partie pour rétablir la vérité et beaucoup de lecteurs m'ont dit qu'en effet ils avaient sur moi les idées les plus fausses. (FC, 677).

As well as the fact that Beauvoir had made certain choices about herself which she wanted to defend, she also had a public image - in fact, several, often contradictory public images - which she felt obliged to justify, correct or belie. One of these was her image as a feminist.

When Beauvoir started work in the autobiography, only seven years had elapsed since the publication of Le Deuxième Sexe, which had caused a scandal in France. In La Force des choses, she describes the peculiarly French "chiennerie" of the critics of Le Deuxième Sexe. (FC, 206). Rather than

---

(79) Madeleine Chapsal. Les Ecrivains en personne, p. 21.



attacking the book on its own grounds, they had preferred to cast unpleasant aspersions on the character of its author. Comments by misogynist critics were designed to "dégrader sexuellement" the author of a book which they claimed was obscene. (FC, 206). Others considered the book the product of "ressentiment féminin".<sup>(80)</sup> Beauvoir tells us that she had received a flood of abusive letters and was made uncomfortable in public places:

dans les restaurants, les cafés [...] il arriva souvent qu'on ricanât en me désignant du regard ou même du doigt. (FC, 206).

Because of this, Beauvoir went out of her way, in the autobiography, to show that, in her own case, her female condition had neither been a reason for oppression nor a cause for embitterment. She told Chapsal, in an interview recorded during the writing of the autobiography:

Je voudrais qu'on sache que la femme qui a écrit Le Deuxième Sexe n'a pas fait cela à quarante ans pour se venger d'une vie qui aurait été totalement malheureuse et qui l'aurait aigrie. [...] Si je dis qui je suis, on se méprendra moins. <sup>(81)</sup>

If self-justification was an important motive for undertaking the autobiography in the first place, whilst actually writing the autobiography, Beauvoir became increasingly caught up in the endless and thankless task of trying to rectify negative images of herself.

In La Force des choses, Beauvoir took advantage of the opportunity to justify her political stance in the years between 1944 and 1962, to explain the course taken by Les Temps Modernes and to clarify her attitude towards the Algerian war. She was emphatic about the anger and shame she felt towards her compatriots and concerned to distinguish her own position from that of the majority of the French population. She who had not hesitated to condemn the

(80) Madeleine Chapsal. Les Ecrivains en personne, p. 36.

(81) ibid.

Soviets for their invasion of Hungary found herself, as a French woman, in a similar culpable position vis-à-vis Algeria. She wrote:

Ma propre situation dans mon pays, dans le monde, dans mes rapports à moi-même s'en trouva bouleversée. (FC, 387).

On the other hand, Beauvoir felt the need to defend herself against the accusation of being "anti-française" per se. (FC, 390). She writes:

Pourquoi aurions-nous été animés, Sartre et moi [...] d'une rage anti-française? Enfance, jeunesse, langage, culture, intérêts, tout nous rattachait à la France. Nous n'y étions ni méconnus, ni affamés, ni brimés d'aucune manière. [...] Notre isolement navré et impuissant [...] s'est imposé à nous parce que certaines évidences nous habitaient. (FC, 363) (82)

As well as clarifying her political stance, Beauvoir was anxious to correct a number of misconceptions about her life-style. She writes that two images of her prevailed: she was either portrayed as "une demi-folle, une excentrique" or else a "pur cerveau", leading "une vie exclusivement intellectuelle". (FC, 676).

Not "exclusivement intellectuelle", she nevertheless defines herself as "une intellectuelle". (FC, 387) and "une femme écrivain". (FC, 677). And the latter, she hastens to add, does not mean "une femme d'intérieur qui écrit" but rather:

quelqu'un dont toute l'existence est commandée par l'écriture. (FC, 677).

This, however, has not meant that she had not "lived". To this criticism she retorts scornfully:

---

(82) Beauvoir admits that she herself had been guilty, earlier, of suspecting the French members of the réseau de soutien who supported the F.L.N. of acting in order to "liquider des complexes". She describes her rationalizations for her own inaction thus:  
 "N'y avait-il chez ceux qui [...] l'avaient choisie [l'action clandestine] une volonté de se couper de la communauté française, liée à un ressentiment peut-être ou à quelque malaise? (La Force des choses, p. 392.)

Mon Dieu! je n'ai pas l'impression que mes contemporains s'amuse-  
tellement plus que moi sur cette terre ni que leur expérience  
soit plus vaste. En tout cas, me retournant vers mon passé, je  
n'envie personne. (FC, 677).

She also takes pains to correct various common illusions about writing:

Le public [...] s' imagine qu'un roman ou des souvenirs, ça  
s'écrit au courant de la plume. (FC, 293).

The truth, she tells us, is that writing demands immense discipline; it is  
more than a "métier": it is also "une passion" or "une manie". (FC, 294).

Simone de Beauvoir is also sensitive to criticisms of the "aisance" of  
her life-style. She agrees that she is economically "une privilégiée," but  
resents charges, by "des gens de droite", that her style of life is not in  
keeping with her political beliefs.

jamais à gauche on ne fait grief de sa fortune à un homme de  
gauche, fût-il milliardaire; on lui sait gré d'être à gauche.  
L'idéologie marxiste n'a rien à voir avec la morale évangélique,  
elle ne réclame à l'individu ni ascèse, ni dénuement: à vrai  
dire, elle se fout de sa vie privée. (FC, 680).

She points out, with understandable bitterness, that she would have been  
attacked whatever she had done:

Un manteau confortable, c'est une concession à la bourgeoisie:  
une tenue négligée serait considérée comme de l'affectation ou  
de l'indécence. On vous accusera ou de jeter l'argent par les  
fenêtres, ou d'être une avare. Ne croyez pas qu'il existe un  
juste milieu: on le baptiserait, par exemple, mesquinerie. (FC, 681).

Beauvoir is particularly angry about malicious comments concerning her  
relationship with Sartre. She finds it very unfair for certain people to claim  
that Sartre decided her life for her; worse still was the spiteful suggestion  
that with another man she would have committed herself to whatever causes he  
espoused.

Des gens ont raconté que Sartre écrivait mes livres. [...] On a prétendu aussi qu'il avait fait ma carrière [...]. A plus forte raison toutes mes convictions m'auraient été insufflées par Sartre. "Avec un autre, elle eût été mystique", a écrit Jean Guittou; et tout récemment un critique, belge si je ne me trompe, rêvait: "Si ç'avait été Brasillach qu'elle eût rencontré!" (FC, 673) (83)

She bursts out:

C'est qu'on admet chez nous que la femme pense avec son utérus: quelle chiennerie vraiment! (FC, 673).

Conceding that, in the case of herself and Sartre, "philosophiquement, politiquement, les initiatives sont venues de lui", (FC, 674) Beauvoir makes the point that what is important is not so much who had the intellectual initiative, but whether she was, in fact, intellectually dependent, accepting his ideas uncritically:

Mon indépendance, je l'ai sauvegardée car jamais je me suis déchargée sur Sartre de mes responsabilités: je n'ai adhéré à aucune idée, aucune résolution sans l'avoir critiquée et reprise à mon compte. (FC, 674).

The tragedy - for Simone de Beauvoir - of her autobiographical enterprise was the impossible nature of one of her aims: to make others see her as she wanted herself to be seen. She explains that none of the conclusions to her books seemed satisfactory to her afterwards; each seemed to need modifying or rectifying in the next, making "à l'intérieur de l'oeuvre, une espèce de dialectique". (FA, 622). The observation of a progression, a modification, from book to book, is strikingly true of the autobiographical sequence.

---

(83) Robert Brasillach (1909-1945) was a fascist French writer - considered one of the most talented writers of his generation. From 1936 until after the occupation, he was on the editorial board of the weekly newspaper Je suis partout which, writes Beauvoir, "dénonçait, réclamait des têtes, pressait Vichy d'instituer en zone libre le port de l'étoile jaune". (La Force des choses, p. 32). His trial was very controversial. He was condemned to death by firing squad in February 1945.

An example of this is the way in which the conclusion of La Force de l'âge modified La Force des choses. The former came out in 1960, in the atmosphere of political isolation for the left which I described above. Despite Simone de Beauvoir's claim, at the end of this volume, that she had come to realize "la pathétique ambiguïté de notre condition", (FA, 621) the contrast between her state of mind in 1944 and in 1960 made the book seem to Simone ridiculously optimistic and positive.

Quant à La Force de l'âge, j'ai souvent grincé des dents quand on me félicitait: "C'est tonique, c'est dynamique, c'est optimiste, à un moment où tel était mon dégoût que j'aurais mieux aimé être morte que vive. (FC, 678).

It was ironical that Beauvoir should have concluded La Force de l'âge with a passage on the inadequacy of written truth, only to feel, after its publication, that, indeed, the book was an embarrassing misrepresentation of her mood at the time. Because of the apparent optimism of La Force de l'âge, which was written and which appeared at a time when she had, in fact, "la rage au coeur", (TCF, 132) she compensated in La Force des choses, especially in the conclusion, by pouring out her feelings of despair. She later tells us:

J'ai exhalé cette rage, j'ai rappelé les horreurs de la guerre d'Algérie: j'espérais gêner mes lecteurs. (TCF, 132).

The final words of La Force des choses, written with a dramatic flourish, were:

je mesure avec stupeur à quel point j'ai été flouée. (FC, 686).

This conclusion was much publicized and - Simone de Beauvoir felt - completely misinterpreted. In the next volume, she writes that she had been "paralysée par le malentendu qui avait accueilli La Force des choses". (TCF, 151) Tout compte fait was written partly to explain and justify her gauchisme, her feminism, her atheism and other aspects of her thought, and partly to rectify the image of herself created by the previous volume: the image of "une femme brisée par l'âge et les déceptions". (TCF, 135). In this final volume, her last line is cautious and a little revengeful. She writes:

Cette fois, je ne donnerai pas de conclusion à mon livre. Je laisse au lecteur le soin d'en tirer celles [sic] qui lui plairont. (TCF, 513).

Despite this, Beauvoir has continued her battle against "false" images of herself. In the film about her which was first shown in Paris in 1978, the opening scene shows Lanzmann asking her why she had made the film. Beauvoir answers:

On pourrait répondre de manière désagréable, ou de manière plus aimable, on pourrait dire: par vanité, parce que j'ai envie que les gens me connaissent. Or, il y a beaucoup de gens qui ne lisent pas et qui me connaîtront - travers le film. On pourrait dire, en le disant d'une manière plus aimable, par désir d'être reconnue, parce que, parmi les gens qui me lisent, il y en a beaucoup qui se trompent tout à fait sur mon compte et aussi parmi les gens qui ne m'ont pas lue et qui ont entendu parler de moi. C'était une manière de rectifier. (84)

Beauvoir had prefaced La Force des choses by making a plea for fairness: she begged the reader not to judge her before reading the whole of the book:

Comme le précédent, ce livre demande au lecteur sa collaboration: je présente, en ordre, chaque moment de mon évolution et il faut avoir la patience de ne pas arrêter les comptes avant la fin. (FC, 9).

(Ironically, the book was frequently judged on its end alone!) At another point in the same book, Beauvoir had again insisted:

Dans chaque moment se reflètent mon passé, mon corps, mes relations à autrui, mes entreprises, la société, toute la terre; liées entre elles, et indépendantes, ces réalités parfois se renforcent et s'harmonisent, parfois interfèrent, se contrarient ou se neutralisent. Si la totalité ne demeure pas toujours présente, je ne dis rien d'exact. (FC, 296).

---

(84) Simone de Beauvoir. Un Film. Josée Dayan et Malka Ribowska. Paris: Gallimard, 1979, p. 11.

This urge to present the "totalité" of her experience, to justify herself by showing herself in her "true" light has continued to be a driving force behind the autobiographical project. The impossibility of the task seems to have made Beauvoir even more determined to try at least to near this goal. Early on in her autobiographical project, she realized what she had committed herself to. In the prologue to La Force de l'âge, she wrote:

Je me suis lancée dans une imprudente aventure quand j'ai commencé à parler de moi: on commence, on n'en finit pas. (FA, 9).

### 3) The Will to Guide Others.

Simone de Beauvoir is not completely honest with herself when she denies her desire to act as a model for other women. And yet at times she does admit this aim - an aim which is quite obvious to her readers.

In her childhood, and associated with the "exigence de se justifier", Simone discovered a new source of great personal satisfaction: teaching. Soon after she started school herself, she began passing on her knowledge to her sister. She found this activity "passionnant" (MJFR, 47) and attempts to explain this pleasure in her autobiography:

quand j'imprimais dans un esprit vierge des vérités, je créais quelque chose de réel. [...] Depuis que je travaillais sérieusement, le temps ne fuyait plus, il s'inscrivait en moi: confiant mes connaissances à une autre mémoire, je le savais deux fois.  
(MJFR, 47-48).

It is clear that in Simone's mind, to teach was a means to "se justifier". It gave her life purpose and meaning. At the same time, like writing, teaching provided her with a "témoin" and the means of recording her experience and knowledge in the consciousness of another, thus "saving" it from annihilation. Best of all was to write and teach at the same time, and at eighteen, writes Beauvoir, this "chemin" was already "clairement tracé":

me perfectionner, m'enrichir, et m'exprimer dans une oeuvre qui aiderait les autres à vivre. (MJFR, 191).

Even as an adolescent, the desire to write and teach was associated with the recounting of her own experience. In the next line, Beauvoir tells us:

Déjà il me sembla que je devais communiquer la solitaire expérience que j'étais en train de traverser. (MJFR, 191).

And indeed, one of the underlying aims of the autobiography has clearly been to use her own experience as a means of "helping others to live". Although, in



the preface to La Force de l'âge, Beauvoir declares that her "compte rendu" is "dénué de toute préoccupation morale", (FA, 11) there is no doubt that she regards the altruistic aim of helping others to live as a means of justifying her egotistical aim: to immortalize her experience.

In 1947, in her essay Pour une Morale de l'ambiguïté, Beauvoir had written:

Le propre de toute morale, c'est de considérer la vie humaine comme une partie que l'on peut gagner ou perdre, et d'enseigner à l'homme le moyen de gagner. (85)

It is evident that Beauvoir saw the autobiography as a means to "enseigner [...] le moyen de gagner" that "partie" which is "la vie humaine". In this, she was conscious of addressing herself particularly to women.

In Pour une Morale de l'ambiguïté, Beauvoir was quite prescriptive the way in which an "authentic" individual should act:

il lui faut vouloir la liberté en lui et universellement; il lui faut tenter de la conquérir: à la lumière de ce projet les situations se hiérarchisent. (86)

In Le Deuxième Sexe, written soon after, and, indeed, in the autobiography, Beauvoir continued to regard freedom as a moral criterion. It has always remained Beauvoir's conviction that to choose to avoid one's liberty, either by deceiving oneself that one has no choice or by using another person as an "alibi" (FA, 562) is a strong temptation, because it is easier to evade responsibility for one's choices and actions than to accept it and assume the burden and anxiety of self-determination. She has always believed this temptation to be particularly strong for women, and says this in La Force des choses:

Divisées, déchirées, désavantagées, pour elles plus que pour les hommes il existe des enjeux, des victoires, des défaites. (FC, 211)

---

(85) Pour une Morale de l'ambiguïté, p. 32-33.

(86) ibid., p. 113.

Beauvoir is aware that she is mostly read by women and that she appeals particularly to younger women. Just as she used to enjoy teaching her little sister, Beauvoir has always taken pleasure in being a guide to younger women. Most of Beauvoir's women friends are younger than her; some of them were former pupils.<sup>(87)</sup> Reminiscent of what she had said about teaching her little sister, Beauvoir admits that she likes the way that she is able to influence her women readers:

Elles m'intéressent; et j'aime mieux, à travers elles, avoir sur le monde une prise limitée, mais solide, que de flotter dans l'universel. (FC, 211).

Despite this, Beauvoir has frequently denied having this aim when writing her autobiography. In the preface to La Force de l'âge, she objected to the idea that she should have wanted, in Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée, to "donner aux jeunes filles une leçon". (FA, 11). In the introduction to La Force des choses, she makes the point that she does not see herself as having been particularly meritorious:

je m'apparais à mes propres yeux comme un objet, un résultat, sans qu'interviennent dans cette saisie les notions de mérite ou de faute. [...] je ne porte aucun jugement sur moi. (FC, 9).

When John Gerassi interviewed her in 1976, he asked her:

Savez-vous qu'il y a un grand nombre de couples qui prennent votre vie avec Sartre pour modèle, spécialement parce que vous n'avez pas été jaloux l'un de l'autre, que vous aviez une relation ouverte et que cela a marché pendant quarante-cinq ans? (88)

Beauvoir replied:

C'est ridicule de nous prendre pour modèles. Chacun doit trouver ses propres structures. Sartre et moi avons eu beaucoup de chance,<sup>(89)</sup> mais aussi notre situation était particulière, très exceptionnelle.

(87) Her close friend, Sylvie Lebon is thirty-three years her junior. Olga Kosakiewicz, Bianca and the woman she calls "Lise" were former pupils. In one of her dreams, Sylvie and Poupette were blurred into the one person. Beauvoir writes: "Je me retrouvais avec une personne qui était à la fois Sylvie et ma soeur". (Toute compte fait, 125).

(88) "Le Deuxième Sexe vingt-cinq ans après." Interview with John Gerassi in Les Ecrits de Simone de Beauvoir, p. 547-565.

(89) *ibid.*

However, the autobiography itself and other comments Beauvoir has made contradict these statements. In her film, which was produced in 1978, she explained to Sartre how she sees her work today:

ce que je voulais essentiellement, c'était parler, comme je le dis dans Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée, parler aux gens, pour ainsi dire, de bouche à oreille, parler de manière que les gens [...] tirent profit de ce que je leur disais. [...] A travers mes romans, et ma biographie aussi, il y a eu, certainement, beaucoup de femmes qui se sont plus ou moins identifiées à moi, ou qui ont cherché à penser une certaine ligne de vie à partir de celle qui avait été la mienne. Donc, sur ce plan-là, je pense que j'ai fait ce que je voulais. (90)

In an interview in 1979, Catherine David asked Simone de Beauvoir what advice she would give a young girl of twenty who resembled the girl she was herself. Beauvoir's answer is revealing:

Comme je suis une intellectuelle, je lui dirais probablement de lire, d'étudier, d'apprendre, de réfléchir. Je lui parlerais du féminisme. Je lui dirais, si ça se trouve, écrivez, c'est un grand bonheur d'écrire malgré toutes les difficultés. Et puis, occupez-vous du monde autour de vous, essayez de vous engager dedans. (91)

Beauvoir's opinion as to the morality of guiding others is not constant. As a philosopher, she believes that it is justified; as a writer of fiction and autobiography, she has wanted to avoid being "édifiant et moralisateur". (FA, 560). However, the philosopher is rarely absent from her writing. "Helping others to live" has meant indicating to them what she believes to be the best way for a woman to live, and she offers her own experience as an example. She discusses books she has read, films she has seen, and her travels with the same concern for her reader's edification.

This raises the question of Beauvoir's responsibility. To an extent which she never could have imagined; she was made, as Mérie Grégoire puts it, into "le

---

(90) Simone de Beauvoir. Un film de Josée Dayan et Malka Ribowska, p. 76-77.  
 (91) "Beauvoir elle-même". Le Nouvel Observateur. (22 janvier 1979), p. 84.

guide de la révolution que vivent les femmes". (92) The number of women who declare their debt to her, in their personal writing or in their studies of female experience, is enormous. As well as thanking her, however, we must learn from Beauvoir's experience. To a certain extent this means judging it, as Ménie Grégoire pointed out in her review of La Force des choses. She wrote:

Toutes les femmes qui ont acheté La Force des choses disent qu'elles se posent à elle-mêmes, page par page, chacune de ses interrogations. [de Simone de Beauvoir] [...] Sans doute Simone de Beauvoir a-t-elle senti qu'elle devait des comptes à toutes celles qu'elle a guidées et ébranlées. Elle ne s'étonnera donc pas si celles-ci éprouvent le besoin de juger l'expérience d'une vie hors série qui fut un peu le mythe de leur génération; ce n'est pas seulement d'elle qu'il s'agit mais de notre devenir à toutes. (93)

It is clear that Beauvoir has consented to being a "mythe" to not only one but to several generations of women. Although she has done much to demystify female experience, the omissions in the autobiography do serve to create a certain myth around her own life. Without in any way wishing to place in doubt Simone de Beauvoir's achievements, and her immense courage and stoicism, it is my aim in this study to situate her attitude to female experience in its social and personal context. This involves confronting the omissions and challenging the assumptions of this "femme indépendante" in order to gain as full a picture as possible of her experience. It is only in this way that women can learn from and go beyond Simone de Beauvoir.

---

(92) Ménie Grégoire. "La Force des choses". Le Prix d'une Révolte". Esprit. 326, (mars 1964,) p. 488.

(93) Ménie Grégoire, Esprit, p. 488.

## CHAPTER TWO

"LA JEUNE FILLE RANGEE".

Beauvoir has never underestimated the way in which her past has shaped the person she has become. She believes her "liberté" - her capacity to choose - to be limited by her "passé":

C'est lui qui définit ma situation actuelle et son ouverture vers l'avenir. Il est le donné à partir duquel je me projette et que j'ai à dépasser. Je tiens de lui les mécanismes qui se sont montés dans mon corps, les instruments culturels dont je me sers, mon savoir, mes ignorances, mes goûts, mes intérêts, mes relations à autrui, mes obligations, mes occupations. (TCF, 40).

However, it is important to realize that when Beauvoir re-examines her past, it is with a firm conviction (that she has never really lost, even though she calls it an illusion of her youth), that her life has been "une expérience exceptionnellement réussie de la condition humaine." (TCF, 49). Naturally she interprets her childhood experiences in the light of this belief. In Tout compte fait she writes:

Ce qui est sûr, c'est que je suis satisfaite de ma destinée et je ne la voudrais en rien différente. Je considère donc comme des chances les facteurs qui m'ont aidée à l'accomplir. (TCF, 13).

Beauvoir sees in her formative years a series of "chances" which enabled her to become the person she has become. For a person with her remarkable insight and lucidity, she appears strangely unwilling to contemplate her past in any other light. It is striking, too, that this existentialist autobiographer does not attempt to explain or to examine the source of what she calls her projet originel.

A re-examination of Beauvoir's early childhood and her choice of being sheds new light on Beauvoir's subsequent choices and projects. It places both what she regards as her life-long struggle for autonomy and

her autobiographical project in a slightly different perspective. It is crucial for us to ascertain what motivated these projects, in order to understand the way in which Simone de Beauvoir views - and portrays - her own experience as a female.

### I. "L'Unique".

Looking back, Simone de Beauvoir sees as a recurring feature in her situation her good fortune. She claims this was already manifest at birth. Not only did she have the blessing to be born into a socially privileged group, with a nursemaid of her own, and surrounded by books, music and an appreciation of education and the arts, but she was also very fortunate at a personal level. She was the first child of a happy young couple in love. Furthermore, her arrival was welcomed not only by her parents but by a large and doting extended family.

Beauvoir places great emphasis on the love and happiness which she experienced in the crucial first two years of life.<sup>(1)</sup> She considers it highly significant that she was able to revel in the glory of being the sole object of attention.

Louise, her young nursemaid, provided "la sécurité quotidienne"; her "regard tranquille" followed Simone everywhere. (MJFR, 10).

Sa présence m'était aussi nécessaire et me parassait aussi naturelle que celle du sol sous mes pieds. (MJFR, 10)

---

(1) In Tout compte fait, Beauvoir comments:

"Tous les pédiatres insistent aujourd'hui sur l'importance qu'ont dans la formation d'un individu ses deux premières années." (p. 13).

Like Beauvoir, Sartre stresses the importance of his early years, claiming that he received "tout l'amour dont un enfant a besoin pour s'individualiser et se constituer un moi qui ose affirmer". (Entretiens sur moi-même" in Situations X. Paris: Gallimard, 1976, p. 97.)

Her mother, Beauvoir writes, was "jeune, gaie, et fière d'avoir réussi un premier enfant". (TCF, 14). When her father came home in the evenings, her parents "s'embrassaient et riaient", and then her father turned to her:

Papa riait aussi avec moi; [...] Il m'amusait. (MJFR, 10).

As a young baby, Simone was surrounded by loving and admiring eyes:

Grands-parents, oncles, tantes, cousins, un abondante famille me garantissait mon importance. (MJFR, 13).

Other members of the family played a significant role in Simone's early childhood. Lil, her mother's younger sister, sometimes took Simone on small excursions, "bonne maman" spoiled her and "bon-papa", writes Simone, "me faisait consciencieusement sauter sur le bout de son pied". (MJFR, 13).

As well as her loving terrestrial family, Simone was told about the rest of her extended family: a host of supernatural beings who also seemed to exist for her benefit alone and whose "yeux bienveillants" never turned away from her. (MJFR, 13).

tout un peuple surnaturel se penchait sur moi avec sollicitude. Dès que j'avais su marcher, maman m'avait conduite à l'église; elle m'avait montré [...] des portraits du petit Jésus, du bon Dieu, de la Vierge, des anges, dont l'un était, comme Louise, spécialement affecté à mon service. (MJFR, 13).

It is clear that it felt natural to Simone to be at the centre of attention. Another of her pleasant early memories is of a trip with her young Aunt Lili to stay for a few days with an ageing aunt in a village in Haute-Marne. As well as being fussed over by her two aunts, she remembers that:

Les vieilles demoiselles du bourg me faisaient fête. (MJFR, 14).

It certainly seems that Beauvoir is right to emphasize the significance of her earliest years on the rest of her life. The first years of

life gave her emotional security and self-confidence. As she says:

un début heureux incite le sujet à tirer des  
circonstances le meilleur parti possible. (TCF,14).

During her stay in Haute-Marne, a violent storm broke out, with flashes of lightening lighting up the house. Beauvoir writes that it seemed a very serious event and it filled her with pride:

- chaque fois qu'il m'arrivait quelque chose, j'avais l'impression d'être quelqu'un. (MJFR,14).

The "souveraineté" which Simone tells us she attributed to herself (MJFR,61) was reinforced by her consciousness of her power over others:

Les adultes subissaient mes caprices avec une souriante complaisance: cela m'a convaincue de mon pouvoir sur eux. (TCF, 14).

The positive self-image she developed as a result of the attention of others was crucially important. She says herself that she tended to consider herself the one and only: "L'Unique". (MJFR, 60). The image she has of herself in her environment was of a little sovereign amongst her subjects.

## II. The Original Crisis.

Despite the apparent security and happiness of her early childhood years, it is nevertheless clear to Beauvoir, looking back, that "quelque chose clochait". (MJFR, 15). From an early age, she surprised those around her with violent tantrums:

des crises furieuses me jetaient sur le sol, violette et convulsée. (MJFR, 15).

Beauvoir is unable to indicate exactly when these crises began. The first



one she mentions was when she was three and a half years old, when she flung herself, howling, on the cement terrasse of a hotel, ostensibly because she was told not to peel a plum she had been given. However, it is probable - as I intend to show - that the crises began approximately one year earlier.

In Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée, Simone de Beauvoir writes that she has often pondered on "la raison et le sens" of her "rages". (MJFR, 15). She believes that her "vitalité fouguese" and her "extrémisme" partially explain the phenomenon. By this she means that her "exigence d'être souveraine"<sup>(2)</sup> would have been cruelly thwarted by her "condition enfantine". (MJFR, 18). Vis à vis adults, she, as child, was merely "la proie de leurs consciences". (MJFR, 16). Worse still, the constraints imposed on her as a child rarely emanated from "la nécessité"; they were simply arbitrary and inconsistent parental "ordres" and "interdits". (MJFR, 16). Simone de Beauvoir had first aired her horror of the parent-child relationship in Le Deuxième Sexe. About the child, she had written:

Il est naturel qu'il se rebelle. Il ne comprend pas les explications que sa mère tente de lui donner: elle ne peut pénétrer dans sa conscience à lui; ses rêves, ses phobies, ses obsessions, ses désirs forment un monde opaque: la mère ne peut que régler du dehors, à tâtons, un être qui éprouve ces lois abstraites comme une violence absurde.<sup>(3)</sup>

Given this existentialist explanation of her childhood tantrums - the revolt of a Subject against the oppression of being treated as an Object -, Simone de Beauvoir believes that her intransigence was, on the whole, quite salutary as a means of withstanding subordination. Her spectacular refusals to obey orders were never successful, but they at least constituted a dramatic display

---

(2) Francis Jeanson: Simone de Beauvoir ou l'entreprise de vivre, p. 47, p. 132.  
(3) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 330-331.

of resistance and inconvenienced the adults involved. As Simone writes:

j'étais vaincue; mais je ne me rendais pas", (MJFR, 16).

and this gave her a certain psychological power:

Ma violence intimidait. (MJFR,17).

In Tout compte fait, Beauvoir takes up the question of these "colères violentes" again, (TCF, 14) admitting that her previous rational explanation is not adequate:

Je ne l'ai qu'imparfaitement expliqué dans mes Memoires et je n'ai pas les moyens de le faire mieux aujourd'hui.

(TCF, 14).

Obviously, however, she sees the tantrums in basically the same light as before, because she adds:

je continue à penser qu'elles (les colères violentes) m'ont été salutaires. (TCF, 14)<sup>(4)</sup>

The inadequacy of Beauvoir's own explanation is made clear by other remarks made in the autobiography - remarks which she does not follow up at any length. Recalling her earliest years, she is aware of recurring states of intense anxiety. She links these to her life-long fear of and revolt against the inevitability of what she calls "le vide" (MJFR, 16) or "le néant". (MJFR, 50). What terrified her, she writes,

---

(4) This question of "tantrums" comes up frequently in the confessions of women. Mary Jane Moffat and Charlotte Painter make this point in Revelations: Diaries of Women (Vintage Books, 1974), associating them with a need for self-assertion. Commenting on Alice James, the editors write: "By adolescence her need for assertion took the form of "neuralgia" attacks, fits of violent hysteria similar to descriptions of the tantrums experienced by Virginia Woolf and Ruth Benedict." (p.192).

Ruth's tantrums, as she writes herself in her journal, disappeared only to be replaced by depressions, which she felt were "manifestations of the same kink". (Revelations, p. 148). It is interesting that Woolf and Beauvoir suffered throughout their lives from intermittent extreme depression.

was: "ma propre absence". (MJFR, 51):

j'entrevois une vertigineuse absence: c'est dans ce gouffre que je m'engloutissais, la bouche déchirée de cris. (MJFR, 16).

Associated with this was her fear of any change in her circumstances, her fear, as she grew up, that the future might alter her relationship with the world. She explains that "l'avenir" was threatening because:

Il me changerait en une autre qui dirait moi et ne serait plus moi. (MJFR, 11).

Simone de Beauvoir does not question this fear of her own disappearance. Her accounts of this intense and recurring childhood fear and of her frequent, extraordinarily violent tantrums strike the reader as leaving important aspects unexplored. A significant detail is that her subordination ceased soon after she started school, and did not recur till puberty. However, Simone was to find herself overpowered, intermittently, by anxiety attacks of frightening intensity throughout her life. Given the continuity of these crises in her life and their similar physical manifestations to her early tantrums, it seems essential to examine the question further, rather than to accept Beauvoir's interpretation as sufficient. What was it which shattered Simone's original sense of perfect security?

In his book on Simone de Beauvoir, Francis Jeanson, recognizing its importance, devotes a chapter to "la crise originelle". He surmises that "la sécurité initiale de l'enfant" and her "exigence de souveraineté"<sup>(5)</sup> were threatened by "une expérience de séparation, de 'sevrage' ".<sup>(6)</sup> However, he decides that:

"l'événement originel", la rupture décisive avec le bonheur de l'enfance ne saurait être rigoureusement daté,<sup>(7)</sup>

(5) Francis Jeanson: Simone de Beauvoir ou l'entreprise de vivre, p. 117.

(6) *ibid.*, p. 100.

(7) *ibid.*, p. 107.

and, for this reason, he calls it an "événement mythique".<sup>(8)</sup> In fact, Jeanson sees what he calls "l'événement originel" as an "abstraite angoisse" experienced by Simone in early childhood.<sup>(9)</sup> He believes the actual "crise originelle" "s'étale sur plusieurs années",<sup>(10)</sup> beginning at the onset of puberty and continuing well into Simone's adolescence. To him, it was a series of crises, taking place "à des moments différents",<sup>(11)</sup> during which Simone "weaned" herself - through disenchantment with them - from early dependence on her parents.

Francis Jeanson does not make a connection between S de B's original crisis and her life-long fear of death. As he says, "toute 'séparation' consciente est en effet une espèce de mort."<sup>(12)</sup> He points out that in her anxiety about death, Simone is in actual fact betraying her "horreur de l'impuissance", and of "l'insignifiance".<sup>(13)</sup> However, Jeanson remains within the existential framework and does not take the issue further than to conclude:

la mort, ce sera donc, tout aussi bien, l'absence au monde et la vanité d'une présence qui y demeurerait privée de sens. <sup>(14)</sup>

This is similar to Beauvoir's own understanding of her fear of death; I have already discussed this need for a meaning to her existence and for some sort of immortality, in reference to Beauvoir's autobiographical impulse. However, it does not shed any light on the "expérience de séparation, de 'sevrage' " to which Jeanson first alluded, and which seems to me the crux of the matter.

---

(8) Francis Jeanson: Simone de Beauvoir ou l'entreprise de vivre, p. 117.

(9) *ibid.*, p. 120.

(10) *ibid.*, p. 100.

(11) *ibid.*, p. 100.

(12) *ibid.*, p. 119.

(13) *ibid.*, p. 121.

(14) *ibid.*, p. 122. (Italics in the original)

Elaine Marks, in Simone de Beauvoir: Encounters with Death,<sup>(15)</sup> attributes more significance to Simone de Beauvoir's life-long crises than do Beauvoir herself or Jeanson. She describes these thus:

The ego discovers itself as unique, fragile, mortal, and is terrified of losing itself. These are classical anxiety symptoms, but they should not be dismissed merely as signs of a neurotic personality. (16)

No-one, to my knowledge, has ever suggested that Simone has a "neurotic personality". On the contrary, most of the work on Beauvoir has accepted without question the author's interpretation of what she likes to consider her "metaphysical" experiences. Elsewhere, Marks is more helpful:

These crises are ascribed to metaphysical anguish, the intimations of nothingness. That the crises are also psychosomatic and that they have their highest incidence and most intense manifestations during the periods recorded in the memoirs when Simone de Beauvoir feels abandoned, there can be little doubt. (17)

Elaine Marks often seems close to some revelations about Simone's pattern of crises, and she makes some very interesting points, but she is more concerned with Beauvoir's mechanisms for evading the anxiety states than with their origin and thus, she too, avoids examining the issue further. What she does emphasize is something that Simone de Beauvoir herself observes: when she believed herself close to death, in various accidents later in life,<sup>(18)</sup> it is significant that she was also "farthest away from anguish".<sup>(19)</sup> What Simone de Beauvoir explains as her fear of death and of her own disparition seems to conceal something else.

---

(15) Elaine Marks. Simone de Beauvoir: Encounters with Death. New Brunswick: Rutgers Uni. Press, 1973.

(16) *ibid.*, p.20.

(17) *ibid.*, p.115.

(18) See La Force de l'âge, p.310, where she describes a close scrape with death on one of her long walking expeditions. She writes: "je m'étonnai d'avoir éprouvé si peu d'émotion quand j'avais cru frôler la mort." See also La Force de l'âge, p.509-11, where she describes a cycling accident, and concludes: "soudain cela semblait exagérément facile de mourir; [...] Je crus être définitivement délivrée de mes craintes."

(19) Elaine Marks. Simone de Beauvoir: Encounters with Death, p. 121.

Marks deduces that:

Clearly Simone de Beauvoir is not plagued by fears but by anguish.<sup>(20)</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, in a comment made not about herself but about other people, admits as much herself when she writes:

les gens mal à l'aise dans leur peau sont ceux qui ruminent le plus assidûment leur mort.<sup>(21)</sup>

What, then, was Simone's crise originelle ? I cannot agree with the verdict of Jeanson and Beauvoir herself that a mythical event in early childhood filled her with an "abstraite angoisse" which did not "se concrétiser" until her adolescence.<sup>(22)</sup> It seems much more likely that her "original crisis" and her adolescent crisis were two separate traumas in her life, even if they were linked. Everything seems to indicate that Simone de Beauvoir underwent a real crisis early in her life, a crisis which destroyed not only the illusion of her "souveraineté", of her uniqueness, but also destroyed her conviction that her existence on earth was a "nécessité" and therefore significant and wholly justified. Furthermore, it seems that she was to experience the repercussions of this early crisis sporadically throughout her life.

What seems to me to be a crucially revealing passage is on the third page of Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée, constituting one of Simone's first conscious memories:

Parfois [...] je prenais peur [...] Je regardais le fauteil de maman et je pensais: "Je ne pourrai plus m'asseoir sur ses genoux." [...] J'ai pressenti tous les sevrages, les reniements, les abandons et la succession de mes morts.

(MJFR, 12-13).

---

(20) Elaine Marks. Simone de Beauvoir: Encounters with Death, p. 124.

(21) La Vieillesse, p. 469.

(22) Francis Jeanson. Simone de Beauvoir, p. 120.

Elsewhere she writes:

Je continuais à grandir et je me savais condamnée à l'exil.  
(MJFR, 12).

The crise originelle appears to be linked with her mother. Why is Simone able to imagine - and fear - a time in the future when she would no longer be able to sit in her mother's lap, unless she had already experienced this trauma? Beauvoir, like Marcel Proust in Combray, describes a pre-oedipal passion for the mother. Whereas Louise was always there to protect her, her mother was "plus lointaine et plus capricieuse". (MJFR, 10). She inspired in her eldest daughter "des sentiments amoureux" of a quite physical nature. Happiness, for Simone, was to be cuddled by her mother:

je m'installais sur ses genoux, dans la douceur parfumée de ses bras, je couvrais de baisers sa peau de jeune femme; elle apparaissait parfois la nuit, près de mon lit, belle comme une image, dans sa robe de verdure mousseuse ornée d'une fleur mauve, dans sa scintillante robe de jais noir.  
(MJFR, 10).

Perfumed, smooth-skinned and clad in exotic colours, Madame de Beauvoir aroused her child's sensuality. As well as this, Beauvoir writes:

ma mère m'assurait par sa tendresse une totale justification.  
(MJFR, 42).

It is perhaps for this reason that she writes:

je ne faisais guère de différence entre son regard et celui de Dieu. (MJFR, 41).

However, Beauvoir is conscious that she felt, early on, a certain vulnerability where her mother was concerned. Whereas Louise's presence and goodwill could be taken for granted, her mother's approval was not always forthcoming. Simone's peace of mind fluctuated in accordance with her mother's moods:

Quand elle était fâchée, elle me "faisait les gros yeux"; je redoutais cet éclair orageux qui enlaidissait son visage; j'avais besoin de son sourire. (MJFR, 10).

Beauvoir makes the same point much more strongly at a later stage:

toute reproche de ma mère, le moindre de ses froncements de sourcils, mettait en jeu ma sécurité: privée de son approbation, je ne me sentais plus le droit d'exister. (MJFR, 42).

Whereas her dependence on her mother obviously made a major effect on the young Simone, her father seems to have made much less impact in her early years. His role was auxiliary:

il n'avait pas dans ma vie de rôle bien défini. (MJFR, 10).

Given that it seems to be the mother who loomed largest in Simone's early childhood, why was it that Simone seemed to feel threatened by a withdrawal of maternal love - to the extent that her very "sécurité", her very "droit d'exister" was contingent on her mother's love and approval? What could have threatened her impression of "souveraineté" and uniqueness? One immediately thinks of the advent of a rival.

Hélène de Beauvoir was born when Simone was two and a half and significantly - she quickly acquired the name of "Poupette". In the family photo album, and in Simone's consciousness at two and a half, her mother was holding this new "little doll":

Maman tient dans ses bras un bébé qui n'est pas moi. (MJFR, 9).

On the very first page of Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée, Simone de Beauvoir comments on the effect of her sister's birth on her:

J'en fus, paraît-il, jalouse, mais pendant peu de temps. (MJFR, 9).

It is typical of Beauvoir not to want even to consider that Poupette's birth could have meant more than a temporary blow to her ego. In Tout compte fait, in which she shows more interest than previously in psychological explanations, she is even less willing to regard the arrival of her little sister as a possible trauma in her life. In this



last volume, she writes:

Sûre de moi et ouverte, rien ne m'empêchait d'accueillir chaleureusement une cadette que je ne jalousais pas. (TCF, 17).

In the first version, Simone's jealousy was apparent enough for her parents to notice, even though this was 1910, long before the popularization of child psychology.<sup>(23)</sup> She hastens to add that the duration of her jealousy was short, but she knew better than to assume that an anxiety disappears at the same time as its overt manifestations. Furthermore, it is surely no coincidence that Beauvoir dates her tantrums from around this time. In these long moments of frenzied insubordination, nothing that her parents could say or do would appease her; it was as if she had a grudge against her parents that she wanted to satisfy.

Dans ces moments-là, ni le regard orageux de maman, ni la voix sévère de Louise, ni les interventions extraordinaires de papa ne m'atteignaient. (MJFR, 15).

---

(23) In his essay entitled "Femininity," (1933) Freud writes that although the idea of sibling rivalry has been "very long familiar and is accepted as self-evident [...] we rarely form a correct idea of the strength of these jealous impulses, of the tenacity with which they persist and of the magnitude of their influence on later development." He writes that the elder child begrudges "the unwanted intruder and rival" all the signs of maternal care.

He continues:

"It feels that it has been dethroned, despoiled, prejudiced in its rights; it casts a jealous hatred upon the new baby and develops a grievance against the faithless mother which often finds expression in a disagreeable change in its behaviour. It becomes "naughty", perhaps, irritable and disobedient [...]. A child's demands for love are immoderate, they make exclusive claims and tolerate no sharing." ("Femininity" in New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis. Pelican, 1977. p. 156-57).

One example Freud gives of the jealousy of an older girl when a new baby arrived is in the essay "A Childhood Recollection from Dichtung und Wahrheit" in The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Vol. XVII (1917-1919). The girl was two and a half when her baby brother was born.

A revealing comparison may be made with a patient of Freud's, who, until he was four, "had had exclusive, uninterrupted possession of his mother's affection." Freud continues:

When he was not yet four, a brother [...] was born, and in his reaction to that disturbing event, he became transformed into an obstinate, unmanageable boy, who perpetually provoked his mother's severity. (24)

A trivial little anecdote related by Beauvoir demonstrates clearly enough how much Simone liked to be at the centre of attention and how hurtful it was to fall from glory and be made to appear quite insignificant. She writes:

Un soir, devant un ami de mon père, je repoussai avec entêtement une assiette de salade cuite; sur une carte postale envoyée pendant les vacances il demanda avec esprit: "Simone aime-t-elle toujours la salade cuite?" L'écriture avait à mes yeux plus de prestige encore que la parole: j'exultai. Quand nous rencontrâmes à nouveau M. Dardelle sur le parvis de Notre-Dame-des-Champs, j'escomptai de délicieuses taquineries; j'essayai d'en provoquer: il n'y eut pas d'écho. J'insistai: on me fit taire. Je découvris avec dépit combien la gloire est éphémère. (MJFR, 12-13).

Simone adds that because she was usually the focus of much attention:

ce genre de déception m'était d'ordinaire épargné. (MJFR, 13).

However, in saying this she is denying the significance of the major event of her early childhood - the event which brutally brought home to her "combien la gloire est éphémère".

After the birth of Poupette, Simone was no longer "L'Unique": Mme. de Beauvoir would certainly have had less time and inclination to cuddle the elder girl. In her autobiography, however, Beauvoir associates this sense of loss purely with growing up. In Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée, she writes of her fear of no longer being able to

---

(24) Freud: "A Childhood Recollection from Dichtung und Wahrheit", in The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. XVII (1917-1919) London: Hogarth Press, p. 149.

sit on her mother's lap;<sup>(25)</sup> in Tout compte fait, she writes: "J'ai perdu les caresses de ma mère", (TCF, 24) and "ma mère à cessé de me prendre sur ses genoux" (TCF, 23). In both cases, she explains the loss of physical closeness by the fact that she was becoming too old for such things. However, this seems to be an insufficient reason for the child's intense feeling of anxiety and insecurity and her acute nostalgia - at a tender age - for a time when things were different. A key sentence is Simone's declaration:

Rougeauds, ridés, les bébés aux yeux laiteux m'importunaient.<sup>(26)</sup>  
(MJFR, 57-58).

Characteristically, Simone de Beauvoir is far more prepared to acknowledge traumas and vulnerabilities where other people are concerned. Of the two of them she is only prepared to see her sister as a victim of sibling rivalry. She is convinced that Poupette suffered because she was relegated by everyone to "une place secondaire". (MJFR, 45). She tells us that, because "la 'plus petite' se sentait presque superflue", (MJFR, 45):

elle a mis beaucoup de temps à se délivrer tout à fait de son enfance. (TCF, 15).<sup>(27)</sup>

Beauvoir emphasizes Poupette's "handicap" (TCF, 14) in both the first and last volume of her autobiography.

---

(25) A further indication of the magnitude of this anxiety is the fact that Beauvoir had described it almost twenty years before, in Quand prime le spirituel, an early manuscript, which was not published until 1979. She writes of her heroine (Marcelle): elle se pensait qu'elle deviendrait un jour une grande personne et que sa mère ne la prendrait sur ses genoux. (p.3).  
(26) Italics mine.

(27) It is also the younger sibling's jealousy of the elder one which Sartre described in Quéstions de méthode. Gustave Flaubert was brought up in the shadow of his brilliant elder brother. Sartre writes: "Flaubert se sent frustré par son frère aîné de la tendresse paternelle." (p. 149).

As well as these remarks about her sister's childhood, Beauvoir makes some comments about her mother's behaviour which cast some light on her own development. In Une Mort très douce, Simone tells us more about her mother's relationship with her younger sister, Simone's Tante Lili. She writes:

Plus jeune qu'elle de cinq ans, blonde et rose, Lili suscita chez son aînée une ardente et ineffaçable jalousie. (28)

Françoise de Beauvoir would often tell Simone that her father, Simone's grandfather:

ne jurait que par ta tante Lili. (29)

According to Simone de Beauvoir, Françoise projected her resentment onto her own daughters. She writes:

Jusqu'aux approches de mon adolescence, maman [...] s'identifiait à moi; elle humiliait et ravalait ma soeur: c'était la cadette, rose et blonde, et sans s'en rendre compte maman prenait sur elle sa revanche. (30)

These observations are fascinating indeed. Firstly, Simone reveals that she is aware of the possibility of sibling rivalry which negatively affects the elder, and not the younger sibling. Secondly, whether or not it was wishful thinking on the part of Simone or actually true that her mother treated Poupette in this way, the fact remains - as I intend to show - that it was Simone who identified with her mother up until the beginning of her adolescence, and it was Simone, as much as her mother, who "humiliait et ravalait" her sister. It may well be the case that Poupette suffered considerably by being compared to Simone; it may also be true that her mother projected her resentment onto her younger daughter. What is so interesting is that, amongst all these insights, Simone does not once consider that her own childhood crisis

(28) Une Mort très douce. Paris: Gallimard, 1964, p. 49.

(29) *ibid.*

(30) *ibid.*

could have been because she herself felt "presque superflue" next to "la plus petite" (MJFR, 45) who was considered "si caressante", (MJFR, 48) and who, "blonde" with "les yeux bleus", (MJFR, 44) was said to resemble the man her mother loved: her father.

Beauvoir makes the observation herself that, as a child, she frequently ignored or repressed certain things which, as she realized later, were deeply felt:

Cette aptitude à passer sous silence des événements que pourtant je ressentais assez vivement pour ne jamais les oublier, est un des traits qui me frappent le plus quand je me remémore mes premières années. (MJFR, 20-21).<sup>(31)</sup>

She recognises, too, that this was because she was:

prompte à m'esquiver dès que ma sécurité me semblait menacée. (MJFR, 22).

Needless to say, this "aptitude" of hers was never to disappear. It is a feature of her life as well as of the autobiography, and a striking example of this is Simone's strange determination to avoid confronting the event which threatened her original feeling of security and happiness. Characteristically, Beauvoir chooses to see her childhood "colères" as a demonstration of insurgency against what she terms her humiliating "condition enfantine". (MJFR, 18). At the same time, however, she hints at something else: a fall from "la plénitude au vide" (MJFR, 16) which she vaguely identifies as a fear of her own absence, without taking the question any further.

The crise originelle made it necessary for Simone to assert herself in a world in which her "souveraineté" was no longer self-evident. As Francis Jeanson points out, "l'assurance d'être justifiée"

---

(31) Note that, as an existentialist, she avoids any suggestions of the unconscious.

was suddenly transformed into "l'exigence de se justifier".<sup>(32)</sup> Thus the crise originelle - and it was not the "événement mythique" that Jeanson suggests<sup>(33)</sup> - is at the very source of the autobiographical impulse. It was also the basis for Simone de Beauvoir's choix originel.

### III. "Une Petite Fille Modèle".

She was no longer "L'Unique", but young Simone had to feel that she was "la première". On the first page of Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée, Beauvoir declares:

Aussi loin que je me souviens, j'étais fière d'être l'aînée: la première. [...] je me sentais plus intéressante qu'un nourrisson cloué dans son berceau. J'avais une petite soeur: ce poupon ne m'avait pas. (MJFR, 9).

Beauvoir believes that having a little sister was part of her chain of good fortune: her relationship with Poupette gave her an opportunity to assert herself:

Je crois que je dois compter parmi mes chances d'avoir eu une soeur, cadette et proche de moi par l'âge. Elle m'a aidée à m'affirmer. (TCF, 16).

What Beauvoir chooses not to say is that being "la première", being "plus intéressante" than her rival was not so much a firm conviction as a choice. She admits that the portrait she paints of "une petite fille rangée, heureuse et passablement arrogante" was clearly not the whole picture:

Deux ou trois souvenirs démentent ce portrait et me font supposer qu'il eût suffi de peu de chose pour ébranler mon assurance. (MJFR, 63).

---

(32) Francis Jeanson: Simone de Beauvoir ou l'entreprise de vivre, p. 47.

(33) *ibid*, p. 100.

One such "souvenir" which she relates in another place, is revealing. Simone used to lie in bed, lulled by the peaceful murmur of her parents' voices in the next room.

un soir mon coeur s'arrêta presque de battre; d'une voix posée, à peine curieuse, maman interrogeait: "Laquelle des deux petites préfères-tu?" J'attendis que papa prononçât mon nom, mais pendant un instant qui me parut infini, il a hésité: "Simone est plus réfléchie, mais Poupette est si caressante..." (MJFR, 48).

The parents eventually agreed that they loved both girls equally. Simone's reaction to this demonstrates that she could make herself believe what she wanted to believe, a tactic which worked well enough most of the time:

Je n'aurais pas supporté que l'un d'eux me préférât ma soeur; si je me résignai un partage équitable, c'est que je me persuadai qu'il tournait à mon profit. Plus âgée, plus savante, plus avertie que ma cadette, si mes parents éprouvaient pour nous la même tendresse, du moins devaient-ils me considérer davantage et me sentir plus proche de leur maturité. (MJFR, 48).

This revelation clearly shows that Simone's pre-eminence was a choice rather than a self-evident fact. It also shows Simone's ability to persuade herself of what she wanted to believe. Not able to bear a certain truth, she "persuades herself" that the obstacle does not exist. She convinces herself that her security and her glory are intact. This reflects a choix originel, the consequences of which will become increasingly apparent.

In Tout compte fait, Beauvoir defines her projet originel, as she calls it, as a project to "savoir et exprimer", (TCF, 22) "connaître et écrire". (TCF, 38). I believe, however, that this project had its origin in a more fundamental choice of being, a choice which was the direct result of the crise originelle. When Simone found that she was no longer "L'Unique" and no longer "au centre absolu de l'univers",

(TCF, 50), she chose to create her own glorious existence.<sup>(34)</sup> Thus, what Jeanson calls her "exigence de souveraineté"<sup>(35)</sup> became a choice of sovereignty:

je ne concevais pas que l'avenir pût me proposer entreprise plus haute que de façonner un être humain. Non pas d'ailleurs n'importe lequel [...]; dans ma future création, [...] c'est moi que je projetais. Tel était le sens de ma vocation. [...] Je me rêvais l'absolu fondement de moi-même et ma propre apothéose. (MJFR, 58-9). (36)

Beauvoir sums up what I take to be her choix originel more succinctly as follows:

Ainsi au présent et dans l'avenir, je me flattais de régner, seule, sur ma propre vie. (MJFR, 59) (37)

A further indication that this was indeed Simone's original choice may be gleaned from Beauvoir's assertion that her violent tantrums - her "turbulence"- stopped soon after she started school. (MJFR, 34). A close look at this period of her life reveals the extent to which Simone once again felt supreme. Beauvoir herself gives the likely reason for the outburst of anger and revolt ceasing:

il n'y avait, dans l'ensemble, pas de conflit entre l'image que mon entourage m'offrait de moi et mon évidence intime. (TCF, 15).

Her choice of self was reinforced by the adults around her who played "le rôle d'un aimable miroir". (MJFR, 16). At such times in her life, Simone was well satisfied with herself and her lot.

---

(34) According to Sartre's definition of the choix originel, it is not a conscious deliberation. It is "antérieur à la logique". (L'Être et le néant p. 830). See p. 39).

(35) Francis Jeanson; Simone de Beauvoir ou l'entreprise de vivre, p. 117.

(36) Italics mine.

(37) Italics mine.



It is striking that the very things which Beauvoir came to despise, in her late adolescence, as forces of oppression, provided her with security and self-confidence in this period of childhood. Bourgeois values, nationalism and religion were a source of great personal strength. These, as well as school and family, contributed to her sense of self-worth, and at the same time they gave her the opportunity to justify her claim to sovereignty.

Being born into the bourgeoisie meant "des soins attentifs" (TCF, 13) such as having a nursemaid, Louise, devoted to her care. It meant that the family was able to leave the apartment in Paris each summer and spend some time in the family's country estate in Limousin.<sup>(38)</sup> More than material advantages, being "socialement privilégié" (TCF, 13) also brought with it a conviction of "supériorité" (MJFR, 49). Beauvoir recalls that she and her sister were not allowed to play with just any little girls who happened to be amusing themselves in the Luxembourg gardens. This, she writes with her beautiful irony, was:

évidemment parce que nous étions faites d'une étoffe plus raffinée. (MJFR, 49).

Simone's father liked to tell her that:

tout homme de bonne famille possède un "je ne sais quoi" qui le distingue du vulgaire. (MJFR, 131).

Since the bourgeoisie was "naturally" superior and the working class "naturally" inferior, Simone learnt to look upon the peasantry with contempt rather than with sympathy. She describes how she felt

---

(38) The country estate, "Meyrignac", was near Uzerche, in Limousin. Originally bought by Georges de Beauvoir's grandfather, the property later belonged to Gaston de Beauvoir, Georges' elder brother, who lived there with his family.

when as a young girl, she went with her mother to visit some farmers working for her grandfather. The condition in which they lived seemed to her to reflect "la grossièreté de leurs âmes":

je les voyais travailler dans les champs, boueux, sentant la sueur et la terre, et jamais ils ne contemplaient l'harmonie du paysage, ils ignoraient les beautés des couchers de soleil. Ils ne lisaient pas, ils n'avaient pas d'idéal; papa disait, sans animosité d'ailleurs, que c'étaient des "brutes". (MJFR, 131).

Because she was encouraged to see society through this inverted lens, Simone felt comfortable in the knowledge that she not only belonged to a privileged group, but that the distribution of social privileges represented a natural order and was thus a just division of the community:

le fait me paraissait patent: moralement, donc absolument, la classe à laquelle j'appartenais l'emportait de loin sur le reste de la société. (MJFR, 131)

Simone continued to believe in the superiority of her own family, even though she gradually became aware that certain families they knew "bénéficiaient d'un sérieux avantage: ils étaient riches". (MJFR, 49). During the war, Georges de Beauvoir, as a second class soldier, struggled to make ends meet. When Simone and Poupette were occasionally invited to children's parties at the homes of wealthy friends, Simone would feel "un peu de malaise" (MJFR, 50). Characteristically, however, she managed to transform a disadvantage into an apparent superiority, "convincing herself" that her situation was the best of all possible situations.

Toute mon éducation m'assurait que la vertu et la culture comptent plus que la fortune: mes goûts me portaient à le croire; j'acceptais donc avec sérénité la modestie de notre condition. Fidèle à mon parti pris d'optimisme, je me convainquis même qu'elle était enviable. (MJFR, 50).

Just as the family's social position reinforced Simone's self-esteem, so did the family's ardent nationalism. Once again, Simone's French nationality seemed to her a clear indication that she was destined to be amongst a chosen few. Her father, who called his "amour de la Patrie" his "seule religion", (MJFR, 38) expressed contempt for foreigners in France and for Jews; both groups were deemed by him unworthy of participation in French affairs. However, it was the war, in particular, which reinforced Simone's assumption that France represented "le Bien". "Les Boches", of course, were the incarnation of evil, and Simone, brought up to believe in rigid and "natural" categories, presumed that they were "des criminels de naissance". (MJFR, 30). The war was Simone's chance to demonstrate and justify her own sovereignty. She set out to be "une adorable petite patriote." (MJFR, 31).

Beauvoir affirms that she was craving adult approval; however she does not associate her sister with this need. Rather, she believes that she needed to compensate for the loss of the caresses she enjoyed as a young child:

trop âgée à présent pour me faire caresser, câliner, cajoler par eux, j'avais de leur approbation un besoin de plus en plus aigu. (MJFR, 31).

Trampling on a doll made in Germany, (which happened to belong to her sister) liberally planting allied flags in vases, collecting money and sacrificing her own sweets for the refugees, Simone displayed "un patriotisme exemplaire" which was praised at home and at school. (MJFR,30).

"Simone est terriblement chauvine", disait-on avec une fierté amusée. J'encaissai le sourire et dégustai l'éloge. Je ne sais qui fit cadeau à maman d'une pièce de drap d'officier bleu horizon; une couturière y tailla pour ma soeur et moi des manteaux qui copiaient exactement les capotes militaires. "Regardez: il y a même une martingale", disait ma mère à ses amies admiratives ou étonnés. Aucun enfant ne portait un vêtement aussi original, aussi français qu le mien: je me sentis vouée. (MJFR, 31).

Religion, too, gave Simone the opportunity to prove herself exemplary. Encouraged by her mother and her school mistresses, Simone invented "toutes espèces de mortifications, de sacrifices" in order to exhibit her "sagesse" and "piété". (MJFR, 32). When the school chaplain congratulated Madame de Beauvoir on her daughter's "belle âme", Simone was delighted:

Je m'épris de cette âme que j'imaginai blanche et rayonnante comme l'hostie dans l'ostensoir. (MJFR, 32).

In an interview with Francis Jeanson, Beauvoir maintained that the only positive aspect of her religious education was that it reinforced her assumption, as a young child, that females were equal to males in society - since they were in the eyes of God.

Dieu m'aimait autant que si j'avais été un homme, il n'y avait pas de différence entre les saints et les saintes. (39)

Despite this, Beauvoir is aware that religion actually played a major role in her socialisation as a female.<sup>(40)</sup> Paradigmatic Christian behaviour brought Simone a peculiarly feminine sort of glory. Indeed, she quickly discovered the pleasure of glory through self-denial and selflessness. As usual, she scorned moderation, and decided that when she grew up she would become a Carmelite nun. The severity of this highly regimented order - founded by the glorious Saint Teresa of Avila - must have seemed particularly admirable to the young dévouée, in a milieu in which heroic virtue was exalted. Simone de Beauvoir tells us that none of her female relations - "pas même tante Margeurite

---

(39) Francis Jeanson. Simone de Beauvoir ou l'entreprise de vivre, p. 257.

(40) As well as this, Simone, with a devout mother and a sceptical father, strongly associated religion with femininity. She recalls that the "vertus chrétiennes" of a man she knew (M.Mabille, the father of her friend, Zaza) "le féminisaient et le rabassaient" in her eyes. (MJFR, 116). It is clear that equality of the sexes in the eyes of God did not deceive her for long about the actual state of things.

qui avait été élevée au Sacré-Coeur" - practised religion with "autant de zèle" as her own mother. (MJFR, 41). Clearly, Simone wanted nothing more than to emulate, and whenever possible to outshine, the mother on whom she depended for love and approval..

In the games she played with her sister, Simone would choose the role of "la victime" or "le martyr". (MJFR, 59). It was by glorious acts of self-renunciation or martyrdom that the heroines whom Simone had heard of attained glory:

La plupart des héroïnes réelles ou légendaires - sainte Blandine, Jeanne sur son bûcher, Grisélidis, Geneviève de Brabant, - n'atteignaient, en ce monde ou dans l'autre la gloire et le bonheur qu'à travers de douloureuses épreuves infligées par les mâles. (mjfr, 59).

In her imagination, she cherished the idea of the eyes of God and the crowd resting on her lovingly, admiringly:

prostrée aux pieds d'un jeune Dieu blond, [...] je goûtais d'exquises pâmoisons; [...] Je poussais ces émotions au paroxysme quand, revêtant la chemise ensanglantée de sainte Blandine, je m'exposais aux griffes des lions et aux regards de la foule. (MJFR, 59).

Whether immersed in her quotidian role of "petite fille modèle" (MJFR, 32) or whether playing the imaginary role of some saintly heroine, Simone took pleasure in the very positive image of herself which she imagined reflected by God. At the same time, she is aware, at least in retrospect, why she chooses this image - and it was a choice. It saved her and consoled her from earthly rebuttals (and from one which she had experienced acutely at the age of two and a half, and from which she had never completely recovered):

Mon image, tout rayonnante de la joie qu'elle suscitait dans le coeur de Dieu, me consolait de tous mes déboires terrestres; elle me sauvait de l'indifférence, de l'injustice, et des malentendus humains. (MJFR, 75).

Simone was delighted to start school when she was five and a half. It legitimated her choice of being; she really seemed to be "au centre absolu de l'univers". (TCF, 50). Her father started to take an interest in her performance at school and paid her more attention than before. Much more important, however, and a source of unbounded joy to Simone was that going to school, like going to Church, restored her intimacy with her mother:

Elle me conduisait elle-même au cours, assistait à mes classes, contrôlait devoirs et leçons; elle apprit l'anglais et commença d'étudier le latin pour me suivre. Elle dirigeait mes lectures, m'emmenait à la messe et au salut; [...] A tout instant, jusque dans le secret de mon coeur, elle était mon témoin. (MJFR, 41).

Going to le cours Désir, a private Catholic girl's school, fulfilled little Simone's deepest needs. She revelled in being "la vedette du cours 'Zéro'". (MJFR, 25). Wednesdays and Saturdays were especially precious, for mothers came to watch their daughters for an hour in class. Simone writes that "la pompe" of this "cérémonie sacrée" "transfigurait" her whole week. (MJFR, 25). Amongst the mothers of all the pupils, her mother was witnessing her being the best in the class.

Selon que nous avions été plus ou moins sages, elles [nos mères] nous octroyaient des notes de conduite qu'à la fin de la classe nous déclinions à haute voix. Mademoiselle les inscrivait sur son registre. Maman me donnait toujours dix sur dix. (MJFR, 25).

Preparations for the celebration of Nativity at school brought Simone another precious moment of glory:

Aux environs de Noël, on m'habilla d'une robe blanche bordée d'un galon doré et je figurai l'enfant Jésus: les autres petites filles s'agenouillaient devant moi. (MJFR, 25-6).

Beauvoir recalls that the content of the lessons was never "bien palpitant". (MJFR, 68). The women teachers, "plus riches en vertus qu'en diplômés", (MJFR, 123) prided themselves on their piety rather than on

their rich culture. Simone however, asked for nothing more than their approval; their role was to witness, and admire Simone in her glory:

je ne leur demandais rien de plus que de sanctionner publiquement mon existence. Mes mérites s'inscrivaient sur un registre qui en éternisait la mémoire. (MJFR, 68)<sup>(41)</sup>

It is clear that at school, "devoir" and "plaisirs" were the same thing for Simone. (MJFR, 68). Beauvoir is fully conscious of the extent to which approval was necessary to her happiness, and gives this again as the reason for her contentment during this period of her life:

je n'avais qu'à suivre ma pente et tout le monde était enchanté de moi. [...] C'est pour cela que mon existence fut, à cette époque, si heureuse. (MJFR, 68).

As well as approval, school restored the sensation of "nécessité" on which Simone thrived. (MJFR, 76). "Des exigences précises" made every moment precious. (MJFR, 76). "Chaque jour menait quelque part": each day challenged her to confirm her sovereignty afresh:

il me fallait sinon me dépasser du moins m'égaliser à moi-même: la partie se jouait toujours à neuf; perdre m'eût consternée, la victoire m'exaltait. (MJFR, 68).

Whenever Simone felt that her activities were meaningless, that her projects were not gloriously validated by "la nécessité", she was swept with a sense of her own superfluosity, of the meaninglessness of her existence. The extreme form of this was a crisis of anxiety; the less devastating form was what she calls "l'ennui":

Je ne tolérais pas l'ennui: il tournait aussitôt à l'angoisse. (MJFR, 69)

---

(41) (Italics mine). In "Margeurite", the fifth part of Beauvoir's early novel Quand prime le spirituel, Beauvoir again betrays her pre-occupation with being the first and the favourite at the "Institut Ernestine Joliet", as she calls it:

"j'étais première à toutes les compositions et, à la sortie des cours, les vieilles demoiselles de l'Institut Ernestine Joliet m'embrassaient plus longuement qu'aucune autre élève." (p. 195).

It was for this reason, Beauvoir says, that she hated idleness; she was only happy doing tasks which justified her existence. Religion and school gave her a place and purpose in the universe. She did not need the actual structure of school hours; she was perfectly happy in the summer in the country, for she writes:

cette nécessité que l'étude conférait à ma vie  
rejaillissait sur mes vacances. (MJFR, 76).

Finally, as well as school, the family gave Simone's life structure and meaning. As she says, her parents and her sister provided her with:

des affections qui m'assuraient de mes mérites, des consignes  
et des repères qui définissaient ma place dans le monde.  
(MJFR, 63).

And she adds:

J'avais besoin d'être prise dans des cadres dont la  
rigueur justifiait mon existence. (MJFR, 64).

The fragility of her equilibrium is made apparent to Beauvoir by the memory of her constant fear, as a child, of any change in her emotional environment. When she did leave the family for a few days, at the age of nine or so, to go with acquaintances to a sea-side resort, she felt "mutilée" and miserable:

je ne savais plus comment me situer, ni ce que j'étais  
venue faire sur terre. (MJFR, 63).

At this stage of her life, between starting school and the age of ten or eleven, Simone was the pride and joy of both her parents. As she grew older, her father paid more attention to her. He taught her to read aloud with expression and liked to dictate difficult passages to her, mostly from Victor Hugo, and would boast that she had "l'orthographe naturelle". (MJFR, 39). With him, Simone was proud to feel she was "une grande personne". (MJFR, 39). However, it was her mother, Beauvoir tells us, who clearly took "la première place" in her life. (MJFR,33).



Near the beginning of the war, Louise temporarily left the household to help her own family on the land, so that her mother became Simone's close companion.

Despite her mother's disconcerting "sautes d'humeur", for the most part, Simone felt secure in "la chaleur de son affection", (MJFR, 41), and confided in her mother "avec une grande liberté" (MJFR, 42). More than a close companion, however, Madame de Beauvoir was a model for her daughter to emulate. When Simone played with her doll, called Blandine, she would pretend that she was the "mère parfaite d'une petite fille modèle". (MJFR, 58). In reality, the "petite fille modèle" wanted to earn the approval of her "mère parfaite" by being seen to be as virtuous as her mother. Describing the latter as a model, she writes:

Je ne la considérais pas comme une sainte, parce qu'elle m'était trop familière et parce qu'elle s'emportait trop aisément; son exemple ne m'en semblait que plus convaincant: je pouvais, donc je devais, m'égaliser à elle en piété et en vertu. (MJFR, 41).

From her mother, then, Simone learnt the rudiments of dévouement. She learnt to earn the love of God as she was supposed later to earn the love of a man - through devotion and selflessness:

Elle m'inculqua le sens du devoir, ainsi que des consignes d'oubli de soi et d'austerité. [...] j'appris de maman à m'effacer, à contrôler mon langage, à censurer mes désirs, à dire et à faire exactement ce qui devait être dit et fait. (MJFR, 43).

Finally, there was Simone's sister, Poupette, whose role in her life, writes Beauvoir, "devint considérable aux environs de mes six ans". (MJFR, 44). What Beauvoir does not say is that Poupette's role in her life was "considérable" when she was two and a half, and now that their association was on an entirely different plane, with Poupette duly subjugated, her impact on Simone was actually less important than before.

By the time Beauvoir says Poupette became important to her, she had established herself, unchallenged, as "la première". (MJFR, 9). At le Cours Dêsir, she was the star of the class, and her parents and school teachers were proud of her. The war had begun and she had cast herself successfully in the role of "adorable petite patriote". (MJFR, 31). She had taken her First Communion and she went three times a week with her mother to communion at Notre-Dame-des-Champs. Dazzled by her own "belle âme" she had become a "petite fille modèle". (MJFR, 32). As far as Poupette was concerned, Simone was "confortablement installée" in her "rôle d'ainée" and her little sister had no desire to dispute this: (MJFR,45).

Ma soeur bénéficiait, en tant que vassale, de la souveraineté que je m'attribuais: elle ne me la disputait pas. (MJFR, 61).

Beauvoir describes her involvement with her mother at this time as "une sorte de symbiose": this was even more the case, it seems to me, with her relation to her sister. She tells us that little Hélène felt for her "une absolue dévotion":

elle ne retrouvait de goût pour elle-même qu'après de moi.  
(MJFR, 45).

More than just an "associée", she was, writes Simone;

mon homme lige, mon second, mon double. (MJFR, 45).

Simone pitied only children: she could not imagine playing games and making up stories without her "partenaire". (MJFR, 46). Having a witness meant that everything she did "échappait à la gratuité". (MJFR,45). Telling her little sister about her experiences satisfied her need to have others "sanctionner publiquement" her existence. (MJFR, 68).

elle me permit aussi de sauver ma vie quotidienne du silence.  
(MJFR, 46).

Consequently, Beauvoir tells us:

nous ne pouvions pas nous passer l'une de l'autre. (MJFR, 45).

Simone de Beauvoir is candid about the pleasure she gained in dominating H el ene de Beauvoir - without, it seems, fully appreciating the likely reason:

Ce que j'appr eciais le plus dans nos rapports, c'est que j'avais sur elle une prise r elle. [...] Elle seule me reconnaissait de l'autorit ; les adultes parfois me c daient; elle m'ob eissait. (MJFR, 47).

The "prise" which Simone exercised over her younger sister would, she recalls, occasionally involve an element of sadism on her part. She tells us:

De tout temps, nous nous  tions chican es parce que j' tais brutale et qu'elle pleurait facilement. (MJFR, 101).

A favourite game of Simone's and obviously invented by her, was an endurance competition:

Nous nous pincions avec la pince   sucre, nous nous  corchions avec la hampe de nos petits drapeaux; il fallait mourir sans abjurer; je trichais honteusement, car j'expirais   la premi re  corchure, et tant que ma soeur n'avait pas c d , je soutenais qu'elle survivait. (MJFR, 59).

On holiday in Meyrignac, the two Beauvoir girls would play with their cousin Jeanne,<sup>(42)</sup> who, one year younger than Simone, was clearly another younger sister figure. She was as "caressante" as Poupette, and Georges de Beauvoir was obviously particularly partial to her, for he was later to cite her as an example to Simone. It was doubtless because of this that Simone resented her. She tells us that her "souriante passivit  incitait au sadisme". (MJFR, 58). Simone dominated both of these younger girls, who "subissaient docilement" her "tyrannie". (MJFR, 29). She enjoyed playing school with them, with her as teacher. Another pastime was to play horses and carriages, with them as horses and her in the carriage:

---

(42) Jeanne was the daughter of Simone's Oncle Gaston, (Georges de Beauvoir's elder brother) and Tante Marguerite, who lived at Meyrignac.



je les attelais à une petite charrette, et elles me tiraient au grand trot à travers les allées du parc. (MJFR, 29).

On another occasion at Meyrignac they were playing doctors and nurses and Beauvoir remembers:

j'administrerai avec une poire en caoutchouc un simalcre de lavement à ma cousine Jeanne. (MJFR, 58).

Whether or not there were other similar games, Beauvoir already makes it clear that she displayed a tendency to sadism with the two younger girls. Although such games are obviously quite common amongst siblings, the pattern which emerges does tell us something about Simone's feelings towards her sister. Her behaviour surely indicates a certain jealousy and resentment of Poupette, as well as a desire to constantly reassert her own dominance.

Beauvoir writes that one of her greatest pleasures at this stage of her life was to teach Poupette:

Apprenant à ma soeur lecture, écriture, calcul, je connus dès l'âge de six ans l'orgueil de l'efficacité. [...] Quand je changeais l'ignorance en savoir, quand j'imprimais dans un esprit vierge des vérités, je créais quelque chose de réel.

(MJFR, 47).

She recognises, too, that the pleasure she took in this activity was more than a pride in efficiency and the joy of creating something real:

Elle satisfaisait en moi des aspirations plus sérieuses que la vanité. (MJFR, 47).

However, then Beauvoir does not make the point the reader could well expect: she writes somewhat idealistically of the pleasure of being "utile":

pour la première fois, à mon tour, je servais. (MJFR, 47).

She also interprets it as the joy of being autonomous: teaching her little sister gave her the chance to escape "la passivité de l'enfance." (MJFR, 47-8). What she does not mention, with respect to teaching, is the joy of domination.

Freud points out in his essay on Goethe, that the elder brother took pleasure in teaching the younger sibling whose intrusion he had so bitterly resented.<sup>(43)</sup> It seems clear that a teacher-pupil relationship is a power relationship, in which the superiority of the teacher is acknowledged by both, and Beauvoir states that:

Un des liens les plus solides qui s'établirent entre nous fut celui de maître à élève. (MJFR, 47).

It is interesting that, in Tout compte fait, Beauvoir emphasizes the element of choice in her relationship with her sister. Whereas : in regard to other people, her feelings and behaviour were, to a large extent, dictated to her, she prides herself on "une seule libre création: celle de mes rapports avec ma soeur". (MJFR, 16). She explains:

J'ai inventé le mélange d'autorité et de tendresse qui caractérisèrent mes relations avec elle. C'est de ma propre initiative que je lui appris à lire, à écrire, à compter. J'ai moi-même élaboré nos jeux et notre rapport vivant. [...] en face d'elle je ne m'inspirais d'aucun modèle: je suivais mes élans spontanés. (TCF, 16-17).

To talk of "propre initiative" and "invention" is to talk of choice, and Beauvoir regards her teacher-pupil relationship with Poupette as a manifestation of what she considers her projet originel: "savoir et exprimer." (TCF, 22). In fact, it is a striking example of what I understand to be her choix originel. At the basis of Simone's project to teach and to guide others seems to be a much older need: to be supreme, to be her own "apothéose", to "régner". (MJFR, 59). These were the "élans spontanés", which decided the nature of her relation to Poupette - just as they had influenced the rest of her behaviour.

---

(43) Sigmund Freud. "A Childhood Recollection from Dichtung and Wahrheit.", p. 152.

Simone's choice of being was apt to induce in her what she herself calls "des rêveries schizophréniques". (MJFR, 58). Since she only felt fulfilled when she believed that she was living her life "sous la figure de la nécessité", changing "le vide en plénitude", (MJFR, 58) she would overcome any obstacle in her way, in order to attain this end. She describes this herself, in the second volume of the autobiography:

"Vous êtes une schizophrène", me disait souvent Sartre: au lieu d'adapter mes projets à la réalité, je les poursuivais envers et contre tout, tenant le réel pour un simple accessoire. (FA, 97).

Her capacity for self-persuasion and the determination with which she pursued her goal were doubtless the very pulse of her creativity and the source of her greatness; at the same time they fostered illusions of glory and omnipotence which were dangerously removed from reality. This is how she describes herself at ten years old, when her reign as "petite fille modèle" was nearing its end:

Dès que j'avais su réfléchir, je m'étais découvert un pouvoir infini, et de dérisoires limites. Quand je dormais, le monde disparaissait, il avait besoin de moi pour être vu, connu, compris; je me sentais chargée d'une mission que j'accomplissais avec orgueil. (MJFR, 70).

Ten years later, she was to write in her journal:

Je veux toucher Dieu ou devenir Dieu. (MJFR, 259).

Throughout her life, there were times when Simone was no longer able to sustain these illusions. Suddenly, she was flooded with an anguish reminiscent of her crise originelle : her whole existence appeared to be collapsing from "la plénitude au vide". (MJFR, 16). She herself describes this pattern as:

un rythme qui depuis ma petite enfance a réglé à peu près toute ma vie. Je traversais des semaines d'euphorie; et puis, pendant quelques heures, une tornade me dévastait, elle saccageait tout. [...] je roulais dans les abîmes de la mort, de l'infini, du néant. Je n'ai jamais su, quand le ciel redevenait calme, si je m'éveillais d'un cauchemar ou si je retombais dans un long rêve bleu. (FA, 70).

In this chapter, I have attributed much more significance than Beauvoir does to her emotional situation in her childhood. Whereas she herself explains her behaviour by her "condition enfantine", I have shown the importance of her particular family constellation. My approach to her has been true to her own existential approach to the individual. However, in the case of herself, she has shown an unwillingness, in her autobiography, to explore certain rather shady areas of her existence.

It is clear that Beauvoir's projet originel was not the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge as she claims. Rather, this life-long project was a means to attain her more fundamental project: to create an existence in which she once again felt justified, necessary and a focus of attention. At the source of this choice of being was a crisis of devastating intensity - an experience of displacement which had hurled her from glory to superfluosity, from "la plénitude au vide", (MJFR, 16) from "un long rêve bleu" to a "cauchemar".

Beauvoir attributes her "exigence" to her "début heureux". (TCF,14). It seems, however, as if it should not only be traced to her original position as "l'Unique", but also to the crisis which destroyed this euphoria when she was two and a half. It means that her life was not the straight path to autonomy and glory which Beauvoir suggests, but a continuous struggle to restore the self-esteem she had lost and which remained fragile throughout her life. In a very real sense, Beauvoir's glory - her many triumphs - can be regarded as the compensation which

she sought for being a loser at the age of two and a half. Seeing her life in terms of a struggle to justify herself helps explain the continuing attempt to defend herself and to portray herself as an exemplary figure in the successive volumes of the autobiography.

To make these observations is not to infer that Beauvoir was not exemplary - on the contrary. However, to understand what motivated her to be so, by isolating the "crise originelle" and the "projet originel" gives us new insight into Beauvoir's portrayal of her experience.



CHAPTER THREEBECOMING A WOMAN

The picture Simone de Beauvoir gives us of her adolescence is the most detailed and complete description she ever paints of any particular period in her life. It seems that the fifty year old writer felt sufficiently distanced from the adolescent she had been to portray her difficult and unhappy situation at that time with unusual directness and honesty. It is also interesting to observe how closely her portrayal of her own adolescence parallels the generalized analysis of female adolescence which she had written in Le Deuxième Sexe, ten years earlier.

As much as before, Simone's behaviour in her adolescence derived from what I consider to be her choix originel: to be loved, admired and glorious. The hostile attitude which her parents developed towards her caused her to react in much the same way as she had reacted after her original crisis at the age of two and a half: she attempted to transform her "détresse" into "orgueil". (MJFR, 193). However, in one major respect the adolescent crisis was very different from her previous trauma, and it was this which prevented the "jeune fille rangée" from aspiring to become what her family circle regarded as an exemplary wife and mother. The fact was that she was turning away from her judges. By the age of ten, her father had replaced her mother as a source of inspiration. By the age of eighteen, Simone was becoming disillusioned with her father. This, however, did not lessen her desire to find a figure who could play the role in her life that he had once played: a figure with "le prestige paternel", whom she could hold in esteem (MJFR, 146) - and in whose loving eyes she could once again behold the reflection of her own glory.

## I. Changes in the Family.

Soon after she had started school, Simone's father had begun to play an increasingly important role in her life. As a young child, she had been "subjuguée par sa gaieté et son bagou"; at school age she began to admire him "plus sérieusement". (MJFR, 38). Not only was his pre-eminence "indiscutée" at home, (MJFR, 39) but even outside the family he seemed to Simone to stand out from "le reste des hommes":

Personne dans mon entourage n'était aussi drôle, aussi intéressant, aussi brillant que lui. (MJFR, 28).

Whereas Simone, when she was younger, had identified with her mother and wanted to become like her, she could not hope to become like her father. Firstly, she was a female and he a male and secondly the respect in which she held him made it easier to idolize him than to identify with him. Their relationship did not take place at the "niveau ordinaire" at which her communication with her mother took place:

Il ne se penchait pas sur moi, mais me haussait jusqu'à lui. (MJFR, 39).

Because of his cultural superiority, Simone felt elevated beside her father and flattered when he paid her attention.

It was around the age of ten that Simone's feelings towards her father "s'exaltèrent". (MJFR, 72). More than ever, she loved him "avec romantisme". (MJFR, 73). Indeed, in accordance with Freud's own observations, it seems that Simone's oedipal attachment to her father closely resembled the dependence and jealous possessiveness which had been apparent at an earlier age, in her relationship with her mother. <sup>(1)</sup>

---

(1) Freud observed that the strength of the girl's oedipal attachment to her father paralleled her pre-oedipal attachment to her mother: "analysis has shown that where the attachment to the father was peculiarly strong, it had been preceded by a phase of equally strong and passionate attachment exclusively to the mother. Except for the change in the object, the love-life had acquired hardly a single new feature in the second phase." Freud: "Female Sexuality". (1931), Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Vol XXI, p.223.

170.

Simone writes that her passion for her father was enhanced by the change in the family's material circumstances. In 1919, when Simone was eleven, the coming to power of "les Bolcheviks" meant that Georges de Beauvoir, who had invested most of his capital in projects in Russia, went bankrupt. He took on the job of co-director in his father-in-law's shoe factory and this too, was doomed to failure. The collapse of the business meant, among other things, that his wife's promised dowry could not be paid. Finally, through the influence of a wealthy distant cousin, Georges entered the field of financial publicity, working for various newspapers - a job which paid badly and did not interest him either. In October, 1919, the family was obliged to move to a cheaper, cramped and uncomfortable apartment in the rue de Rennes. Despite all this, the head of the family managed - at first - to retain his "humeur égale" and Simone writes:

je m'éamus qu'un homme aussi supérieur s'accomodât avec tant de simplicité de la mesquinerie de sa condition. (MJFR, 72).

Since she considered him "méconnu, incompris" and a "victime d'obscurs cataclysmes", Georges' misfortunes, as well as the fact that he still managed to enliven the household with his "accès de gaieté", made him seem a hero in his daughter's eyes:

Plus sa vie devenait ingrate, plus la supériorité de mon père m'aveuglait. (MJFR, 108).

Not only was he admired for his good humour and frivolity, but also for his knowledge and culture. He took pleasure in introducing his wife and daughters to his great passion: literature. In the evenings, in their previous apartment, the family would congregate in Georges de Beauvoir's warm study and he would read aloud to them, or they would read quietly, side by side. Simone tells us that her father had inculcated in her mother "un respect religieux" for books; (TCF, 17); as for herself, from an early age reading was "la grande affaire" of her life. (MJFR, 71).

She writes simply:

J'ai aimé passionnément les livres. J'aimais mon père et mon père les aimait. (TCF, 17).

When her father read to them from Victor Hugo or Edmond Rostand or talked to them about the writers and plays he loved, Simone was "transportée bien loin des grisailles quotidiennes" and felt exhilarated. (MJFR, 108).

Madame de Beauvoir, on the other hand, was no longer a source of inspiration for Simone; on the contrary, the latter now found her mother's existence "grise et plate". (TCF, 24). Furthermore, around the age of ten, Simone was becoming acutely conscious that her mother was her "véritable rivale" when it came to her father's affection. (MJFR, 109). She writes:

Je rêvais d'avoir avec mon père des rapports personnels; mais même dans les rares occasions où nous nous trouvions tous les deux seuls, nous nous parlions comme si elle avait été là.  
(MJFR, 109).

Once her father took Simone to see a play at the Comédie Française. Delighted by this "complicité", which lasted several glorious hours, she had the "impression grisante" that her father belonged to her alone. (MJFR, 72). However, it was rare that she could delude herself in this way. The idea of a "silencieuse alliance" between herself and her father was definitively shattered one memorable lunchtime:

on parla d'un grand cousin dissipé qui considérait sa mère comme une idiote: de l'aveu de mon père elle l'était en effet. Il déclara cependant avec véhémence: "Un enfant qui juge sa mère est un imbécile." Je devins écarlate et je quittai la table en prétextant un malaise: je jugeais ma mère. Mon père m'avait porté un double coup, en affirmant leur solidarité et en me traitant indirectement d'imbécile. (MJFR, 110).

As well as her deteriorating relationship with her mother, Simone de Beauvoir explains the tension which developed around this time between the sisters in terms of her oedipal passion for her father. She believes that Poupette was jealous of the attention she, as eldest daughter, was

paid, and that they began to resent each other:

Du fait que j'étais la plus avancée, c'était de moi que mon père s'occupait le plus; sans partager la dévotion que j'avais pour lui, ma soeur souffrait de cette partialité. [...] Dans son exaspération, elle se mit à me <sup>(2)</sup>regarder d'un oeil nouveau: elle cherchait mes failles.

As for herself, she was annoyed that Poupette no longer accepted her self-appointed status as evident:

Je m'irritai qu'elle prétendît, même timidement, rivaliser avec moi, me critiquer, m'échapper. (MJFR, 101).

Simone had not yet reached puberty and already things were changing; she no longer seemed to be "la première". For the second time in her life, the thought of her past filled her with nostalgia and she tells us:

je portais le deuil de mon passé. (MJFR, 106).

---

(2) An observation which Simone de Beauvoir had made in Le Deuxième Sexe is relevant here. She wrote:

"Il est remarquable que le culte du père se rencontre surtout chez l'aînée des enfants: l'homme s'intéresse davantage à une première paternité; c'est souvent lui qui console sa fille, comme il console son fils, quand la mère est accaparée par de nouveaux venus, et elle s'attachera ardemment à lui. Au contraire, la cadette ne possède jamais son père sans partage; elle est ordinairement jalouse à la fois de lui et de sa soeur aînée; elle se fixe sur cette aînée même que la complaisance du père revêt d'un grand prestige ou elle se tourne vers sa mère, ou elle se révolte contre sa famille [...]. (Le Deuxième Sexe, II, p. 36).

Indeed, Poupette's attitude towards Simone did reflect her father's: first of all excessively fond of Simone, she began to criticize her elder sister at the same time as her father did, which constituted a double blow to Simone's sense of sovereignty.

(It is interesting that Beauvoir comments on the elder child's need for consolation at the birth of a younger sibling.)

## II. Simone's Adolescent Crisis.

Prior to writing the autobiography, Simone de Beauvoir had described the female "crise de l'adolescence" at some length in Le Deuxième Sexe. She described it as a conflict which faces every adolescent girl when she becomes aware that her destiny as a woman involves "son aliénation en objet"<sup>(3)</sup> and is opposed to "la revendication de sa liberté".<sup>(4)</sup>

Freud had acknowledged that the path to what he called "normal femininity"<sup>(5)</sup> was difficult and exhausting, even though he did not criticize its goal. For him, the female Oedipus complex is resolved when the girl adopts "a feminine attitude towards her father"<sup>(6)</sup> and identifies with her mother, her ex-rival, whom she may well still regard with a degree of hostility. In Le Deuxième Sexe, Beauvoir grants a great deal of validity to Freud's emphasis on the emotional complexity of the young girl's experience. She shows, as we have seen, how the little girl's passion for her mother is later transferred to the father, how her identification with her mother is transformed into a desire to be loved by the father. However, unlike Freud, she places the girl's conflict in a social context. She understands the adolescent girl's animosity towards her mother as being a product of their respective situations: the girl is struggling against having to assume the role her mother plays, which she sees to be limited, repetitive and inferior. Beauvoir calls the process by which the girl comes round to adopting a feminine role herself a "travail de deuil", declaring that it essentially involves the exchange of autonomy for "femininity" and therefore it constitutes a form of mutilation:

---

(3) Le Deuxième Sexe I, p. 92.

(4) ibid., p. 93.

(5) Freud. "Femininity" in New Introductory Lectures. (1933) Pelican 1977, p. 160.

(6) Freud. "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex". Standard Edition, 19. (1924).

La jeune fille enterre lentement son enfance, cet individu autonome et impérieux qu'elle a été; et elle entre avec soumission dans l'existence adulte.(7)

In Memoires d'une jeune fille rangée, Beauvoir shows how she struggled to avoid this fate herself.

However, her adolescent crisis was also more than this. It was, as well, an intense trauma peculiar to Simone, who found herself in a situation quite similar to the one she had experienced when she was two and a half. To understand this, we must look at her relationship after puberty, with the other members of her family.

When considering Simone de Beauvoir's relationship with her mother, as an adolescent, it is interesting to look again at what she had said about the mother-daughter bond in Le Deuxième Sexe. In this she described at some length the way in which a mother who has assumed her feminine role in society projects onto her daughter "toute l'ambiguité de son rapport à soi".(8) She showed how an adolescent daughter, in her desire for autonomy undermines her mother's "raison d'être", which is to be needed. Consequently the mother:

s'entête à "mater" cette volonté qui se dérobe.(9)

Beauvoir was emphatic about what this means:

La mère f. est sourdement hostile à l'affranchissement de sa fille et, plus ou moins délibérément, elle s'applique à la brimer. (10)

---

(7) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 124.

(8) *ibid.*, p. 124.

(9) *ibid.*, p. 334. See p.113, n. 11.

(10) *ibid.*, p. 87.

Naturally, the girl resents her mother for this. (11)

The first signs of Beauvoir's own matrophobia<sup>(12)</sup> were already emerging when she was ten years old, in the last year of the First World War. The era of restrictions had begun; coal was scarce and the winter of 1918-1919 exceptionally cold, meals were makeshift. Simone remembers:

Surmenées, Louise et maman se "montaient" vite; elles "avaient des mots"; il arrivait même que maman se disputât avec papa; elle nous grondait, ma soeur et moi, et nous giflait au hasard de ses nerfs. (MJFR, 65).

The following year, the family lost its fortune, so that the end of the war brought only a worsening of the family's material circumstances. Georges de Beauvoir sought consolation most evenings outside the house. Madame de Beauvoir was overworked, lonely and - her daughter surmises - sexually frustrated. Soon she was no longer able to afford help in the house:

elle détestait faire le ménage et la pauvreté lui pesait; elle devint d'une extrême nervosité. (MJFR, 100).

Simone de Beauvoir clearly recalls suddenly becoming painfully conscious, after she herself had reached puberty, that she did not want to lead her mother's life:

Un après-midi, j'aidais maman à faire la vaisselle; elle lavait des assiettes, je les essuyais; par la fenêtre, je voyais l... d'autres cuisines où des femmes frottaient des casseroles ou épiluchaient des légumes. Chaque jour, le déjeuner, le dîner; chaque jour la vaisselle; ces heures indéfiniment recommencées et qui ne mènent nulle part: vivrais-je ainsi? l... Non, me dis-je, tout en rangeant dans le placard une pile d'assiettes; ma vie à moi conduira quelque part. (MJFR, 105-106).

---

(11) In Le Deuxième Sexe, Beauvoir quotes Colette Audry, from her autobiographical piece: Aux Yeux du souvenir. (Gallimard, 1947), p.200. Audry writes of her adolescent relationship with her mother:

"Je ne pensais pas: elle est trop sévère: ni: elle n'a pas le droit. Je pensais: non, non, non, de toutes mes forces. Je ne lui reprochais pas le fait même de son autorité, ni des ordres ou des défenses arbitraires, mais de vouloir me mater." (DS. II. p. 43).

(12) Adrienne Rich, in Of Woman Born, (N.Y.: W.W. Norton & Co. 1976) defines "matrophobia" as the fear not of one's mother or of motherhood but of becoming one's mother. ("Bantam" edition, p. 237).



Whereas her father's "vie ingrate" (MJFR, 108) made him a hero in his daughter's eyes, her mother's dreary and repetitive existence was threatening and depressing, because of the distinct possibility that Simone's own future existence might be similar.

Her father maintained his distance during Simone's adolescence; her mother, however, tried to cling to her former intimacy with her girls. Seeing them grow more independent of her, she attempted to preserve her hold over them by constant interference, refusing them the right of privacy. Simone recounts how her mother would appear from nowhere and peer over her daughters' shoulders to see what they were reading. She would strain her ears to catch what the girls were talking about, in their beds at night. When they received a letter, she would bring it to them, telling them the content as she did so. It was not until Simone was nineteen that the girls dared to ask her to refrain from opening their letters; both felt this was "une importante victoire". (MJFR, 249).

Deprived of meaningful contact with her own peers, and accustomed to pushing her desires into the background, Françoise had lost the ability to judge what she could rightfully expect from others. Her increasing sense of exclusion, as the family grew beyond her and the foyer, made her push her way into situations in which she would otherwise have had no part. Simone de Beauvoir expands on this in Une Mort très douce, written after her mother's death:

elle ne tolérait pas de se sentir exclue. Elle n'hésitait pas à s'imposer, même quand elle se savait indésirable. /.../ Quand nous recevions des amis - "J'ai bien le droit de goûter avec vous" - elle accaparait la conversation. (13)

Due to this same fear of being excluded, Simone adds:

---

(13) Une Mort très douce, p. 59.

Elle a refusé que nous apprenions à nager, et empêché papa de nous acheter des bicyclettes: par ces plaisirs qu'elle n'aurait pas partagés, nous lui aurions échappé. (14)

Simone emphasizes that her mother's tyranny and the scenes in the house in which she exhibited what her husband wryly called her "caractère de chien"<sup>(15)</sup> were a product of her own frustrations rather than a conscious wish to make the lives of her two daughters miserable. Nevertheless, Françoise did make it impossible for them to retain their affection and respect for her. In Tout compte fait, Simone comments:

Si ma mère avait été moins indiscreète et moins tyrannique, les limites de son intelligence m'auraient moins gênée; la rancune n'aurait pas oblitéré l'affection que je lui portais. (TCF, 25).

Instead of attempting to understand her daughter's conflicts, Madame de Beauvoir considered her "une âme en péril, une âme à sauver", and thus as Simone points out, "un objet". (MJFR, 191).

Les yeux au ciel ma mère priait pour mon âme; ici-bas, elle gémissait sur mes égarements: toute communication était coupée entre nous. (MJFR, 175).

The growing entente between her two daughters in their late teens was threatening to Françoise de Beauvoir, who no longer enjoyed their confidences. Poupette, ostensibly less hard, more vulnerable and less intellectual, had long since replaced Simone as her favourite daughter and Françoise jealously tried to override Simone's baneful influence on Poupette. When she discovered, when Simone was seventeen, that the latter had lost her faith, her attempts to come between the two sisters were multiplied. Simone describes this in Une Mort très douce:

---

(14) *ibid.*, p. 58.

(15) *ibid.*, p. 55.

Quand elle sut que j'avais perdu la foi, elle lui cria /à Poupette/ avec furie: "Je te défendrai contre son influence. Je te protégerai!" Pendant les vacances, elle nous interdit de nous voir seule à seule: nous nous retrouvions clandestinement dans les châtaigneraies. Cette jalousie l'a tenaillée toute sa vie et nous avons gardé jusqu'à la fin l'habitude de lui dissimuler la plupart de nos rencontres. (16)

At least Simone knew the reasons for her mother's "désarroi"; (MJFR, 175) her father's hostility, on the other hand, was incomprehensible to her and, consequently, far more hurtful. Because she admired him so fervently, it was now his approval which counted. Furthermore, he seemed to Simone to be the judge of the whole world:

il jugeait souverainement. (MJFR, 109).

His approbation had given Simone a feeling of well-being and confidence:

Du moment qu'il m'approuvait, j'étais sûre de moi. (MJFR, 109)

And, indeed, in the past years, taking a keen interest in Simone's mental development and successes at school, her father had been lavish with his praise. When Simone reached puberty, things suddenly changed and it was perhaps not until her father started to withdraw his affection that Simone became aware of the extent of her dependence on him.

When she reached adolescence, at the age of twelve and a half, Simone entered what she calls "l'âge ingrat". (MJFR, 103).

J'enlaidis, mon nez rougeoya; il me poussa sur le visage et sur la nuque des boutons que je taquinais avec nervosité. /.../ J'eus des tics: je n'arrêtais pas de hausser les épaules, de faire tourner mon nez. (MJFR, 103).

Georges de Beauvoir had always placed a great deal of emphasis on beauty in women: Simone tells us that he himself was something of "un dandy",

---

(16) Une Mort très douce, p. 61-62.

(MJFR, 37) he had moved in fashionable circles where "les jolies femmes" were appreciated (MJFR, 37) and had married one himself. In short, his eldest daughter's unfortunate physical appearance irritated him - which made her more painfully self-conscious than ever:

"Ne gratte pas tes boutons, ne tourne pas ton nez" me répétait mon père. Sans méchanceté, mais sans ménagement, il faisait sur mon teint, mon acné, ma balourdise, des remarques qui exaspéraient mon malaise et mes manies. (MJFR, 103).

Even more hurtful to Simone than her father's tactless comments was the marked preference he, too, began to show for Poupette, "qui restait une jolie enfant". (MJFR, 109). The old sibling rivalry was sparked off again. This time, however, Simone was jealous of her sister's position not so much in her mother's affection as in her father's. She admits how her father's new interest in her younger sister hurt her:

Sans me l'avouer, je souffrais de leur entente et j'en voulais vaguement à ma soeur. (MJFR, 109) (17)

On one occasion, which Simone found particularly painful, the rich cousin who had procured Georges de Beauvoir his job organized a children's revue in which the Beauvoir girls took part. Simone recalls:

En robe de tulle bleue, semée d'étoiles, ses beaux cheveux répandus sur son dos, Poupette incarnait la Belle de la Nuit. Déguisée en Espagnole, je devais me pavaner en jouant de l'éventail, tandis qu'elle chantait. ... Tous les regards fixés sur moi, et sentant mes joues s'enflammer, j'étais au supplice. (MJFR, 103-4).

Despite her own extreme embarrassment, it did not escape Simone's notice that her father "rayonnait de fierté" when his younger daughter "parada, déguisée en "Belle de la Nuit", in front of the audience of friends and acquaintances. (MJFR, 109).

---

(17) Italics mine.

What made her father's attitude so painful at this time was Simone's complete lack of critical distance from him. It was not until she was thirteen that she discovered, due to something Zaza said, that it was possible to have a different opinion from her father.

Around this time, her parents briefly discussed sending Simone to another school. Monsieur de Beauvoir found the school mistresses at l'Institut Adeline Désir "un peu demeurées"; for example, "il n'admettait pas qu'on arrêât la littérature française au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle". (MJFR, 124). He went so far as to suggest that the girls should be sent to a lycée - which would have given them a better education and would have been far less expensive. Simone, however, was adamant that she should not leave her friend Zaza, and Madame de Beauvoir, who considered a secular education not proper for girls,<sup>(18)</sup> supported her daughter. Consequently, for emotional reasons, Simone stayed at the school; nevertheless, her father's attitude greatly influenced her. She began to denounce her teachers' "bêtise" (MJFR, 124) regarding them as "d'assez dérisoires bigotes", (MJFR, 123) and she, in turn, influenced Poupette. Both started openly to mock the teachers, who finally complained to Madame de Beauvoir. Simone's comment shows us that what looked like revolt on the girls' part was actually a reflection of their father's attitude. Her mother, she tells us:

s'inquiétait un peu: mais comme mon père riait avec nous, elle passait outre. (MJFR, 124).

---

(18) For provincial Catholics, such as Simone's mother, and for the Catholic bourgeoisie, such as Zaza Mabile's family, a lycée represented the enemy camp: "Pendant des générations, tous ces gens avaient combattu la laïcité." (MJFR, 253).

Later, when Simone was preparing to teach in a lycée, she writes that the Mabile family was shocked: "à leurs yeux, je me préparais un avenir infamant." (MJFR, 253).

If it was Monsieur de Beauvoir's influence which provoked Simone's insubordination at the school where she had previously been "une petite fille modèle", it was, similarly, his predominance which affected Simone's attitude to religion. Simone de Beauvoir was fourteen when she realised that she no longer believed in God, and she emphasizes that the fact that her mother was a believer, and her father was not, disposed her to scepticism.

Mon père ne croyait pas; les plus grands écrivains, les meilleurs penseurs partageaient son scepticisme; dans l'ensemble, c'était surtout les femmes qui allaient à l'église; je commençais à trouver paradoxal et troublant que la vérité fût leur privilège alors que les hommes, sans discussion possible, leur étaient supérieurs. (MJFR, 136-137).

"Le scepticisme paternel" had "ouvert la voie"; once set on the path, it gave Simone great strength to know that she and her father were in the same position:

je ne m'engageais pas en solitaire dans une aventure hasardeuse. (MJFR, 138).

Simone was not isolating herself from all groups: she had merely confirmed to herself that she had changed her allegiances from her mother to her father, and felt relieved to have done so:

J'éprouvais [.] un grand soulagement à me retrouver affranchie de mon enfance et de mon sexe, en accord avec les libres esprits que j'admirais. (MJFR, 138).

In actual fact, other than abstractly - in Simone's mind - her father provided very little "soulagement" indeed, during her adolescent years. Simone was seventeen before her parents discovered that she had lost her faith, and it seems that her father gave her no support in the ensuing period. As for her success at school, Georges de Beauvoir's encouragement was tinged with resentment - as Simone was to discover.

Simone's prowess in the classroom had once delighted her father. However, that had been before the war, when the family's prospects still

looked good, and he still hoped to make his daughters into "dames" (MJFR, 177) and marry them in "le beau monde." (MJFR, 176).

Pour y briller, il jugeait qu'une femme devait avoir non seulement de la beauté, de l'élégance, mais encore de la conversation, de la lecture, aussi se réjouit-il de mes premiers succès d'écolière. (MJFR, 176).

After the war, however, and his loss of income, the girls' marriage prospects were greatly reduced in scope. Their father would tell them bitterly:

"Vous, mes petites, vous ne vous marierez pas  $\overline{. . .}$ . Vous n'avez pas de dot, il faudra travailler." (MJFR, 106).

During her teenage years, Simone's scholastic achievements served only to remind him of his social decline. He still liked to boast that, had she been a boy, "elle aurait fait Polytechnique." (MJFR, 177). In this case, her success would have covered the family in glory. As it was, in their milieu in the 1920's, it was "incongru" for a girl to engage in tertiary studies, and as for a career: "prendre un métier, c'était déchoir." (MJFR, 175). Georges de Beauvoir firmly believed that a woman's place was "au foyer et dans les salons"; he intensely disliked "les bas-bleus". (MJFR, 175-176). His embarrassment about his daughter increased as Simone continued her studies and aimed to become a teacher, for "il tenait tous les professeurs pour des cuistres" and suspected all members of that "dangereuse secte" - "les intellectuels" - of attempting to destroy traditional values. (MJFR, 177).

Her father's "rancune" (MJFR, 177) and "morosité" (MJFR, 179) confused Simone, who believed that, by taking her studies seriously she was conforming exactly to her father's wishes. He did seem to attach great importance to her various successes. Only later did his daughter realize that his was not genuine pride:

Son insistance me persuada qu'il était fier d'avoir pour fille une femme de tête; au contraire: seules des réussites extraordinaires pouvaient conjurer la gêne qu'il en éprouvait. (MJFR, 179).

Despite her father's hostility, Simone remained very much under his influence. Describing herself at eighteen, she writes:

Sur bien des points [...] je n'avais aucune opinion et j'acquiesçais à tout ce qu'il me disait. Nos désaccords me parassaient si bénins que je ne fis d'abord aucun effort pour les atténuer. (MJFR, 188).

Monsieur de Beauvoir greatly admired Anatole France and Maupassant. Simone found the former too hedonistic and the latter frankly dull. She disliked her father's double standard for men and women. Social gatherings irritated her and she annoyed her father by her deliberate lack of social grace. Simone particularly resented the numerous reunions of the various relatives; her father, with his "culte de la famille" (MJFR, 189) would accuse her of "ingratitude" (MJFR, 192) and complain that she was heartless. Nevertheless, on the whole, Simone wanted nothing more than to be able to think like her father. She never chose to disagree, for the sake of revolt; on the contrary it hurt her to believe that her father was wrong. Until she was eighteen, her passion for her father remained steadfast. At the same time, she felt increasingly bitter towards him:

j'avais compté sur son appui, sa sympathie, son approbation: je fus profondément déçue qu'il me les refusât. (MJFR, 188).

Simone, who says herself: "je n'avais rien d'une révoltée", (MJFR, 187) began to feel completely trapped under her parents' roof. For her, the house became "une prison sans barreaux, (MJFR, 227) and variations of this metaphor are used repeatedly to express the sensation of



claustrophobic sequestration, powerlessness and dependence. (19)

Ten years earlier, in Le Deuxième Sexe, Simone de Beauvoir had used the word "prison" to describe the situation of the adolescent girl. (20) And, indeed, Simone came to realize, in her adolescence, that it was because she was a female that she was "enfermée" (MJFR, 175) and "ligotée". MJFR, 209). Whereas her cousin Jacques lived "à ciel ouvert", she was confined "dans une nursery". (MJFR, 123). Although her father liked to tell people: "Simone a un cerveau d'homme. Simone est un homme", the reality, as she points out, was different:

Pourtant on me traitait en fille. (MJFR, 123).

Simone writes that at one particular stage, when she was eighteen, the hopelessness of her situation plunged her into a severe depression:

---

(19) MJFR, p. 123:

- ... Avec Jacques entraient dans la maison les rumeurs d'un monde qui m'était fermé.
- ... on me confinait dans une nursery.
- ... on me retenait en cage.
- p. 127:... l'espace fermé, [ ]... le temps sclérosé des adultes.
- p. 175:... Je m'étais accommodée de vivre en cage.
- ... J'étais encore enfermée.
- ... Cette prison-ci n'avait pas de barreaux.
- ... ma captivité ...
- p. 209:... en prison, ligotée ...
- p. 225:... on m'avait retenue en cage.
- p. 240:... je fis ma première escapade ...
- p. 258:... je restais confinée à la maison et dans des bibliothèques.
- p. 265:... j'étais claquemurée. J'étouffais, je me consumais, j'avais envie de me fracasser la tête contre ces murs.

(20) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 87.

pas une lueur nulle part. Pour la première fois de mon existence, je pensais sincèrement qu'il valait mieux être mort que vivant. (MJFR, 210).

"La monotonie quotidienne", and her "ennui" were such that, combined with her solitude and her sense of abandonment, Simone felt, at times, that she was verging on insanity:

Par moments, je perdais tout à fait le sens de la réalité. (MJFR, 258). [...] par moments je devenais tout à fait étrangère au monde et il m'ahurissait par son étrangeté; les objets n'avaient plus de sens, ni les visages, ni moi-même. (MJFR, 265).

As well as those moments when life lost all meaning or purpose, Simone was swept more frequently than before, in her adolescence, with the devastating anguish which she had always associated with her "peur de la mort". (MJFR, 264). Since these traumas increased when she was fourteen, Beauvoir associates them with the disappearance of God from her universe. She writes:

la face de l'univers changea. [...] Naguère, je me tenais au centre d'un vivant tableau dont Dieu même avait choisi les couleurs et les lumières; toutes les choses fredonnaient doucement sa gloire. Soudain, tout se taisait. Quel silence! [...] Plus d'une fois, dans les jours qui suivirent, [...] je ressentis dans l'angoisse le vide du ciel. (MJFR, 139).

Soon after this, she writes, she had another "découverte": that she was "condamnée à mort". This brought on another terrifying moment of despair:

Il n'y avait personne que moi dans l'appartement et je ne refrénaï pas mon désespoir; j'ai crié, j'ai griffé la moquette rouge. [...] Il me semblait impossible de vivre toute ma vie le coeur tordu par l'horreur. (MJFR, 139).

The fact was, however, that what Beauvoir likes to call "ces fulgurations métaphysiques" (MJFR, 139) occurred long before she ceased to believe in God, which suggests that they were of a psychological

rather than a metaphysical order. From a very early age she had been traumatized by the idea of her own absence and sudden attacks of panic had been a continuity in her life since her original crisis. At seven- she writes-:

Dans les siècles révolus, dans le silence des êtres inanimés  
je pressentais ma propre absence: je pressentais la vérité,  
fallacieusement conjurée, de ma mort. (MJFR, 51).

Hence, losing her faith did not lead Simone to "discover" the reality of the eventual annihilation of her body and soul; the fact that God was one more of her childhood securities to desert her did, however, increase the intensity and frequency of her moments of despair.

Another frightening trauma occurred when Simone was eighteen, on holiday at La Grillère.<sup>(21)</sup> She describes it as follows:

Une nuit, à la Grillère, comme je venais de me coucher dans un vaste lit campagnard, l'angoisse fondit sur moi; il m'était arrivé d'avoir peur de la mort jusqu'aux larmes, jusqu'aux cris; mais cette fois, c'était pire: déjà la vie avait basculé dans le néant; rien n'était rien, sinon ici, en cet instant, une épouvante, si violente que j'hésitai à aller frapper à la porte de ma mère, à me prétendre malade, pour entendre des voix. Je finis par endormir, mais je gardai de cette crise un souvenir terrifié. (MJFR, 206).

Beauvoir does not attempt to explain this crisis. Nor does she suggest that it was in any way linked with her personal situation at the time. However, in the pages preceding the description of the crisis, she does give us some clues as to what actually provoked the recurrence of her original crisis. The holidays, she writes, were "pénibles". She had felt "absolument seule au monde". Her parents regarded her with "méfiance" and her sister, evidently influenced by them, was a stranger to Simone. (MJFR, 205). Simone was irritated by their inability to understand her,

---

(21) La Grillère was also in Uzerche, twenty kilometres from Meyrignac. Her father's sister (Tante Hélène) lived there with her husband, Maurice, and two children, Robert and Madeleine.

but, much more than this, she remained, she writes, "très vulnérable".

The attitude of her parents towards her hurt her deeply:

Je tenais à mes parents, et dans ces lieux où nous avions été si unis, nos malentendus m'étaient encore plus douloureux qu'à Paris. (MJFR, 206).

As well as this, she had made the mistake of not bringing enough books on holiday with her. Without these "présences fraternelles" it was impossible to escape even momentarily from the reality of her stark loneliness. (MJFR, 206). There was no-one who could fulfil "le rôle d'aimable miroir". (MJFR, 16).

Some weeks later, Simone was present at the deathbed of her uncle Gaston. Again, Beauvoir associates the ensuing torment with her fear of death and yet hints at something more:

ni mes regrets, ni ma compassion ne justifiaient l'ouragan qui dévasta pendant deux jours. (MJFR, 214).

A little further on, Beauvoir briefly alludes to other moments of anguish, which she again describes as a fear of death:

La peur de la mort ne m'avait pas quittée, je ne m'y habituais pas; il m'arrivait encore de trembler et de pleurer de terreur. (MJFR, 264).

She does not elaborate on these crises or attempt to trace the exact context in which they took place. Indeed, in an interview in 1979, Beauvoir commented that her "paniques" gripped her "à n'importe quelle occasion."<sup>(22)</sup> However, whether or not the actual moment at which they engulfed her appeared to her rather random, it seems that the crises themselves were an expression of insecurity. They were frequent

---

(22) "Beauvoir elle-même" in Le Nouvel Observateur, (22 janvier, 1979) p. 82.

in her adolescence when she felt she no longer had a place in the lives of those around her, when she did not feel "exigée". (MJFR, 126). During these bouts of anguish, Simone's sense of meaninglessness and loss of identity were amplified to a nightmarish extreme: she was obsessed with the absolute absence of her own being in a terrifying void which she could only visualize as death. However, in actual fact, it was not only death which frightened her but her own insignificance, and this fear was particularly acute in her adolescence, when she was floundering for a sense of identity.

In several ways, Simone's adolescent crisis was a repetition of her original crisis. Simone had been two and a half years old with a fixation on her mother when little Poupette was born, taking her mother's time and love from which Simone had previously benefited exclusively - or so she had felt. Simone was twelve and a half with a fixation on her father when she reached puberty and entered "l'âge ingrat", while her younger sister blossomed and replaced Simone as her father's pride and joy. In each case, Simone suffered from a feeling of displacement and resented her sister for usurping her position with a parent. At these painful times, between the time Simone was two and a half and six and a half, and between twelve and a half and eighteen and a half, Poupette is hardly mentioned in the autobiography. (23)

We have seen that Simone's adolescent crisis was more than the conflict between her "condition proprement humaine" and her "vocation

---

(23) When Simone was six and a half and eighteen and a half, things were improving: she was no longer jealous of her younger sister and, in each case, Poupette became a treasured friend, and again becomes a frequent name in the autobiography.

féminine" - a conflict which she had claimed, in Le Deuxième Sexe, faced every adolescent girl. However, her personal conflict was related to her social situation as a female. Her mother had rejected her because she was rejecting religion and the values of dévouement ; her father rejected her because, with his double standard, he regarded his daughter's scholarly ambition and professionalism as a reflection of his own failure. It was because both parents resented the fact that their daughter was gradually distancing herself from the feminine role they wanted her to assume that they withdrew their support and encouragement. Thus Simone's personal conflict was directly related to her failure to fulfill her parents' expectations of her as a woman in society.

### III. Nature and Literature: A Confirmation of the Original Choice.

Throughout her adolescence, Beauvoir's determination to transform her "détresse" into "orgueil" (MJFR, 193) was more evident than ever. In marked contrast to her extreme vulnerability were the moments of lofty exaltation in which she promised herself a glorious future. Telling herself that one day she would once again "régner", (MJFR, 59), she decided that, in the meantime, she would provide herself with the love and reinforcement that she lacked:

je m'aimerai assez, décidai-je, pour compenser cet abandon.(MJFR,190)

It is clear that Simone was confirming a fundamental choice about herself which she had already made at an earlier date. If her choice of self had been less apparent in the six years preceding puberty, it was because there had been no conflict between her self-image and her image in the eyes of others.

Because they were projections into the future rather than being based on her actual situation, Simone's states of exaltation frequently took the form of what Sartre called her "transes". (FA, 44). They were moments of great exhilaration in which Simone, excited by the

image of her future glory, congratulated herself on her existence. These "trances" were diametrically opposed to her "crises" but appear to stem from the same source: her choix originel. Whereas her attacks of anguish were set off by a sudden consciousness of the meaninglessness and superfluousness of her own existence, her "trances" were moments of narcissistic self-glorification, in which Simone de Beauvoir saw her image, or her future image, favourably reflected by the external world.

Trying to describe these states, Beauvoir writes of "cette fête dans mon sang", (MJFR, 82). "tous ces mouvements du corps qui paralysent le langage", "frissons" and "vertiges". (FA, 44). The intensity of the moments in which she is able to sustain the conviction of being "l'Unique", sovereign and unrivalled, explain, in part, the paroxysmal nature of the periods when this illusion collapses. A feature of her adolescence was the continual oscillation from one mood to the other:

D'un jour à l'autre, d'une heure à l'autre, je passais de l'abattement à l'orgueil. (MJFR, 229).

The elated state of "orgueil" was invariably induced by the contemplation of nature or by literature. In the midst of nature, even after she no longer believed in God, Simone was able to relive the exaltation which she had once felt, when she imagined her image reflected by God. Whereas, in society she was endowed with an image, and one which was extremely hurtful to her, in nature she was "comme Dieu même, sans visage". (MFJR, 115). She was, at the same time, "le paysage et le regard." (MJFR, 190).

je n'étais plus une conscience vacante, un regard abstrait mais l'odeur houleuse des blés noirs, l'odeur intime des bruyères, l'épaisse chaleur du midi ou le frisson des crépuscules; je pesais lourd; et pourtant je m'évaporais dans l'azur, je n'avais plus de bornes. (MJFR, 126).

If nature was particularly important to Simone during her adolescence, it was because it was an antidote to the reality of a world in which, as she writes: "je ne régnais plus". (MJFR, 126). In an important passage, she explains why it was that nature took on "des couleurs mystiques". Nature revealed "une vie toujours neuve", as opposed to the "routine" which she knew. In contrast to what society seemed to hold for her as a young woman, nature was encouraging: "vieillir n'était pas nécessairement se renier." (MJFR, 126). Watching nature transform itself, seeing "les triomphes et les déclins, les renouveaux, les agonies", Simone discovered "quantité de manières d'exister" beyond the horizons of her narrow existence. (MJFR, 126). As well as this, nature promised her a pre-eminence which society did not. In the role of God-like witness in which she cast herself in nature, she imagined that her presence was necessary for its very existence:

il fallait mon regard pour que le rouge du hêtre rencontrât le bleu du cèdre et l'argent des peupliers. Lorsque je m'en allais, le paysage se défaisait, il n'existait plus pour personne.  
(MJFR, 126-127).

Hence the ecstasy which the experience of nature provoked in her. Although her love of nature was very real,<sup>(24)</sup> it was the image of her existence reflected by nature which inspired Simone above all else. Nature indulged her choice of sovereignty.

A nouveau j'étais unique et j'étais exigée. (MJFR, 126).

In Le Deuxième Sexe, Beauvoir had observed that it is common for adolescent girls to feel for nature "un amour singulier".<sup>(25)</sup> In much of what she wrote about the "secours" which nature offers the female

---

(24) See: Claire Cayron. La Nature chez Simone de Beauvoir. Paris : Gallimard, 1973.

(25) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 120.



adolescent, we recognize her own self-portrait. (26)

[l'adolescente] veut devenir à son tour un sujet souverain: mais, socialement, elle n'accède à sa vie d'adulte qu'en se faisant femme; elle paie sa libération d'une abdication; tandis qu'au milieu des plantes et des bêtes elle est un être humain; elle est affranchie à la fois de sa famille et des mâles, un sujet, une liberté. Elle trouve dans le secret des forêts une image de la solitude de son âme et dans les vastes horizons des plaines la figure sensible de la transcendence; elle est elle-même cette lande illimitée, cette cime jetée vers le ciel; [...] sa présence est impérieuse et triomphante comme celle de la terre même. (27)

Literature, like nature, was the source of many an "extase" and "ravissement". (MJFR, 26). From an early age, Simone found reading a precious escape from the closeted and monotonous existence which she was obliged to lead as a young lady. Amongst books and amid nature she was, once again, in her "royaume". (28) Whereas her parents cast her in the role of "une coupable", literature gave her the opportunity to see herself "avec d'autres yeux que les leurs". (MJFR, 110). Identifying with the heroines she admired, she felt that she, too, could create a glorious existence for herself.

m'identifiant à des héroïnes de roman, je pressentais à travers elles mon destin. (TCF, 157).

Simone had been eleven or twelve when she read Little Women and identified with Jo, "l'intellectuelle" who loved books and writing and hated housework. (MJFR, 89). Whilst she read, Simone's own life took on a fictional quality and, she writes:

Je devins à mes propres yeux un personnage de roman. (MJFR, 90).

---

(26) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 120.

(27) ibid., p. 122-123.

(28) ibid., p. 120.

This propensity was even more apparent during her adolescence. Simone read George Eliot's The Mill on the Floss when she was fourteen, and this book, she writes, made "une impression encore plus profonde que naguère Little Women." (MJFR, 141). Maggie Tulliver, the heroine, loved nature and reading, but was "trop spontanée pour observer les conventions respectées par son entourage." Needless to say, Simone tells us: je me reconnus en elle":

C'est au moment où elle se retirait dans le vieux moulin, méconnue, calomniée, abandonnée de tous, que je brûlai de tendresse pour elle. ... Les autres la condamnaient parce qu'elle valait mieux qu'eux; je lui ressemblais, et je vis désormais dans mon isolement non une marque d'infamie mais un signe d'élection. (MJFR, 141)(29)

Later, Simone was equally inspired when she read Michael Arlen's Le Feutre vert and Rosamond Lehman's novel Poussière. In the heroines, Iris Storm and Judith, she saw her own greatness reflected. She admired Iris' "solitude", her "désinvolture et son intégrité hautaine". (MJFR, 324).

Judy she admired because:

Elle se donne sans se perdre: elle mène une vie d'étudiante indépendante, elle a son monde à elle, ses projets. (30)

When she was eighteen, her cousin Jacques introduced Simone to modern French literature. She found that these writers wrote about the very "aspirations" and "révoltes" which she herself felt, without having been able to express. She writes:

La livres que j'aimais devinrent une Bible où je puisais des conseils et des secours. ... ils créaient une sorte de communion; au lieu de vivre ma petite histoire particulière, je participais à une grande épopée spirituelle. (MJFR, 186).

---

(29) Italics mine.

(30) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p.118.

Zaza was equally impressed with Judy, and wrote about her in a letter to Simone. (See MJFR, page 356).

Once again, Simone, by identifying with the writers, was able to see in her "différences" "le gage d'une supériorité qu'un jour tout le monde reconnaîtrait." (MJFR, 187).

Beauvoir writes that she read Gide, Claudel, Valéry and Jammes with "la tête en feu, les tempes battantes, étouffant d'émotion". (MJFR, 186). When she read, in Les Nourritures Terrestres:

"Familles,<sup>(31)</sup> je vous hais! foyers clos, portes refermées", she was convinced that by being bored at home, she was serving "une cause sacrée". (MJFR, 193). From the early Barrès, she learnt that "l'homme libre" inevitably provoked the hatred of the "Barbares" and she felt she was fighting "le bon combat". (MJFR, 193).

The new generation of writers, writing for the Nouvelle Revue Française, were bourgeois, like Simone and also "mal à l'aise dans leur peau". Like her:

La guerre avait ruiné leur sécurité sans les arracher à leur classe. (MFJR, 193).

Mauriac, Radiguet, Giraudoux, Proust, Max Jacob, Montherland, Arland - all "exaltaient l'inquiétude". (MJFR, 194). Like Simone, they expressed a "refus des paroles creuses, des fausses morales et de leur confort", and, in repudiating their class, they aimed for nothing less than "l'absolu." (MJFR, 194).

---

(31) Beauvoir misquotes this as: "Famille, je vous hais!"

It was at eighteen, too, that Simone read "les théories de Bergson sur 'le moi social et le moi profond' "(32) and - she writes:-

je reconnus avec enthousiasme ma propre expérience. (MJFR, 206).

This idea was useful as a means of defending herself against the hostility of others:

J'invoquai une instance supérieure qui me permît de récuser les jugements étrangers: je me réfugiai dans "mon moi profond" et décidai que toute mon existence devait lui être subordonnée. (MJFR, 195).

Identifying with their emotions and well aware of the impact writers had on her life, Beauvoir decided to be a writer herself. Indeed, when she read The Mill on the Floss, at fourteen, her excitement was due to more than her profound identification with the heroine:

A travers son héroïne, je m'identifiai à l'auteur: un jour une adolescente, une autre moi-même, tremperait de ses larmes un roman où j'aurais raconté ma propre histoire. (MJFR, 141).

For a long time, Beauvoir had dreamt of becoming "une légende" - "comme Emily Brontë ou George Eliot". (FC, 58). In France, as well as England, there was a tradition of women writers. We know that Simone had admired Mme de Sévigné (MJFR, 91) and that she liked reading Colette, who was still writing and was in many ways a model of an independent woman writer. Although she does not mention reading Mme de Staël or George Sand in her adolescence, she could not but have heard of these two eminent nineteenth century writers, who had fought their own battles for freedom.<sup>(33)</sup> Thus it

---

(32) Beauvoir writes of "le moi superficiel" and "le moi profond". The former is an individualisation of the social and the rational and can be communicated. The latter is personal to each individual, and not guided by reason. Because of this, it cannot be communicated to others.

(33) As a child, Simone read some fashionable women writers, such as Mme. de Ségur, (Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée p.23,52-3,57, 82, 107). Zenaïde Fleuriot, (MJFR, 52, 57) and the stories of Mme. d'Aulnoy (MJFR, 52). She also mentions that as an adolescent, she enjoyed reading Mme de Noailles' poetry, (MJFR, 229), Marcelle Tinayre's novels and Eugénie de Guérin's diary (MJFR 143)

seemed to Simone that her future glory was not doomed to be an idle dream:

En tant que femme, ces sommets me semblaient en outre plus accessibles que les pénéplaines; les plus célèbres de mes soeurs s'étaient illustrés dans la littérature. (MJFR, 142).

As an intellectual, too, there were models. Beauvoir writes that, in the twenties, a handful of women had passed the agrégation or had obtained a doctorate in philosophy, and Simone wanted to join these "pionnières". (MJFR, 160). However, although her scholarly successes brought her some glory, the very fact that they made her, as a woman, "exceptionnelle" (MJFR, 295) meant that she did not meet with general approval. In particular, her father's ambivalence was clear. As a writer, however, she could aspire to "la gloire la plus universelle et la plus intime". (MJFR, 142). It was not only because she herself admired writers that she wrote in a friend's album, at the age of fifteen, that she wanted to become "un auteur célèbre". (MJFR, 142). It was also because her father greatly admired writers:

mon père les mettait bien au-dessus des savants, des érudits, des professeurs. (MJFR, 142).

Becoming a famous writer, then, would enable her to say what she believed and yet receive general recognition, even acclaim, from all the various sections of society.

Si je réussissais une vie, une oeuvre qui fissent honneur à l'humanité, on me féliciterait d'avoir foulé aux pieds le conformisme; [ . . . ] on m'accepterait, on m'admirerait. (MJFR. 215).

However, in actual fact, her self-esteem was a defense and a choice rather than a deeply felt conviction. It is for this reason that Simone's desire to be accepted and admired was closely associated with the idea of merit: she felt obliged to prove her worth, in the form of a contribution to humanity. At the same time, it was the belief that her future glory depended on

herself that gave her hope and helped her out of her despair. Thus, she writes:

mes études, la littérature, les choses qui dépendaient de moi demeuraient le centre de mes préoccupations. (MJFR, 147).

#### IV. Love: Justification of Self and Radicalization of Ideas.

We have seen that Simone's original choice was to be approved, admired and to feel sovereign. In an abstract sense, she desired no less than universal approval. Concretely, however, she needed something quite specific in order to attain this end: she needed to be loved by someone with "le prestige paternel". (MJFR, 146). This was both an emotional and a cultural prestige: Beauvoir describes herself at eighteen longing for a man:

qui partagerait mon goût pour les idées et pour l'étude, à qui je tiendrais par la tête autant que par le coeur. (MJFR, 235).

This "homme supérieur", Beauvoir tells us, was destined to incarnate:

le Juge suprême par qui je rêvais d'être un jour reconnue. (MJFR, 107).

In Le Deuxième Sexe, Beauvoir had stressed the importance of the young girl's love for her father. Because of "la place qu'occupe le père dans la famille, l'universelle prépondérance des mâles" and "l'éducation", the girl, she wrote, soon becomes convinced of "la supériorité masculine".<sup>(34)</sup> Whereas her earlier love for her mother had involved "une active émulation", she cannot hope to become "le père souverain, and the nature of her love is different as a consequence. She looks up

---

(34) Le Deuxième Sexe I, p. 83.

to her father with "une admiration impuissante" and seeks from him a "valorisation" of herself.<sup>(35)</sup> If he shows her affection, she feels her existence to be "magnifiquement justifiée"; she feels "comblée et divinisée".<sup>(36)</sup>

In her autobiography, Beauvoir shows that, as an adolescent, she was made to feel worthless because she did not conform to the feminine role expected of her by her family; on the other hand, conforming to it would have meant accepting a low status which would have made her feel worthless in her own eyes. She had described, in Le Deuxième Sexe, how the young girl copes with her insecurity and lack of confidence by becoming excessively dependent upon her father and upon men generally. Her own experience was no exception to this. On the contrary, it is striking how often Beauvoir emphasizes her "soif de nécessité", (MJFR, 145) her need to feel her existence justified and to feel "exigée", (MJFR, 126) and for this she looked towards men. Given her horror of the meaninglessness of her own existence, issuing from her emotional insecurity, it is possible, even, that Simone's dependence was particularly extreme. She writes that, at fifteen, she dreamt of a man who:

me garantirait mon existence sans lui ôter sa souveraineté.  
(MJFR, 147).

Simone de Beauvoir also pointed out, in Le Deuxième Sexe, that she does not mean that all women are looking for "des substituts du père".

---

(35) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p.35.

(36) ibid., p. 36.

It is as men that they enjoy a "prestige viril". The father merely constitutes, in most cases, the first prestigious male whom the young girl knew. (37) This is certainly true; nevertheless the fact that Simone associated virile prestige with certain of her father's qualities did tend to mean that she looked particularly for these qualities in other men. It is simplistic to suggest that the male figures who influenced Simone in her adolescence were merely father surrogates. However, she herself stresses that her image of her father influenced her choice of a partner. It is ironical, though, that the males to whom she was attracted because of qualities in which they resembled her father, were gradually to lead her away from her father in her thinking.

Georges de Beauvoir, Simone tells us, was very much a product of his epoch and his class: his ideas were those of a conservative bourgeois. He was brought up in "une confortable aisance" (MJFR, 34) in Paris and attended the famous Collège Stanislas. (38) As a young man, he was a hedonist and a society man. His great passion was acting: performing in amateur troops both satisfied his narcissism and gave him access to "des cercles plus élégants et moins austères que le milieu dans lequel il était né". (MJFR, 37). Despite this passion, he dared not throw all security to the winds and defy the prejudices of his milieu by making acting his profession. Simone remembers him as a restless man, somewhat dissatisfied with his social ranking, but still, in his younger days, a "charmeur" and a "brillant causeur". (MJFR, 37). He found the "sérieuses vertus" held up

---

(37) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 36.

(38) The Collège Stanislas was founded in 1804, and in 1905, when a law separated Church and State, it became completely independent of the State. It remained one of the most important Catholic boys' schools in Paris.



by the bourgeoisie quite boring, (MJFR, 36) and, with his gaiety and love of fun, he was idolized by his daughter, accustomed as she was to a stiflingly repressive atmosphere in her mother's company and at school. (39)

Although not a practising Catholic, Georges de Beauvoir respected the Church. Simone tells us that he was horrified by "les lois Combes" - the 1905 laws separating Church and State, which brought about the closure of many ecclesiastical schools. He endorsed the morality propagated by the Church, especially for women - consenting to both his daughters being sent to a Church school, while at the same time, he liked to exhibit a manly cynicism towards religion.

An ardent nationalist, he admired Charles Maurras and Léon Daudet, who collaborated, in 1908, to transform the Action Française (founded in 1905) into a daily paper which ventilated xenophobic and anti-republican views. Georges de Beauvoir was too much of a cynic not to consider the re-establishment of the monarchy an unrealizable ideal, but "la République ne lui inspirait que du dégoût". (MJFR, 38). In 1926, when the papacy placed the newspaper on the Index, thus publicly condemning the "Action Française" movement, many of its partisans turned to the militant, paramilitary or royalist groups such as the Croix du Feu and the Camelots du Roi. Without being a member of a rightist league himself, Georges de Beauvoir had friends among the Camelots du Roi.

---

(39) Simone recounts how she felt, when she was seventeen, on holiday with her mother and "des cousins extrêmement bien-pensants" - without her father. It is clear that, although she could not tell him that she, too, had lost her faith, his presence saved her from complete isolation amid believers: "Mon père absent, maman et mes cousins communièrent dans une même dévotion, professaient les mêmes principes sans qu'aucune voix rompît ce parfait accord; parlant avec abandon devant moi, ils m'imposaient une complicité que je n'osais pas récuser: j'avais l'impression qu'on me violentait. (MJFR, 157).

At fifteen, Simone, obviously with her father in mind, had a definite picture of her relationship with her future partner. She envisaged feeling for him "une admiration passionnée", and being subjugated by his "intelligence", "culture" and "autorité". (MJFR, 145). Nothing about her love for him would be arbitrary:

Il faudrait que l'élu s'imposât à moi/.../par une sorte d'évidence. (MJFR, 145).

He would be the "exact témoin" which formerly God had appeared to be. He would be like herself - her "pareil", her "double" - and yet superior - "le modèle" of what she herself wanted to become. In this way, he could offer her guidance and support:

L'image que j'évoquais, c'était celle d'une escalade où mon partenaire, un peu plus agile et robuste que moi, m'aiderait à me hisser de palier en palier. (MJFR, 146).

He would justify her existence without annexing it to his:

l'homme prédestiné me garantirait mon existence sans lui ôter sa souveraineté. (MJFR, 147).

Simone was seventeen before she came into contact with ideas fundamentally different from her father's. The sole exception was the two summers she spent, in her early teens, reading Vaulabelle's Histoire des deux Restaurations.<sup>(40)</sup> She writes that, as a result, she began to hate "la monarchie, le conservatisme" and "l'obscurantisme". (MJFR, 134). However, her divergence from her father's ideas was made possible by the fact that Vaulabelle's seven volume book was in her grandfather's library at Meyrignac, and thus had the stamp of approval from a respected member of the family.

---

(40) Vaulabelle, a Republican with advanced liberal ideas, wrote Histoire des deux Restaurations between 1814 and 1857.

It was not until Simone was almost seventeen and had left school that she attended lectures with boys for the first time. The lecturer in literature at the Institut Sainte-Marie at Neuilly, Robert Garric, was her first contact with a male teacher. Just over thirty, he was a well known name, for he was founder and director of Les Equipes Sociales, a movement which aimed at "la réconciliation des classes" and which, within a few years, had spread all over France, boasting some ten thousand members and twelve hundred teachers.

Simone rapidly found his lecture "le meilleur moment de la semaine", admiring him more and more. (MJFR, 179). It was rumoured at the Institute that Garric could have had "une brillante carrière" in a university. As it was, "il n'avait aucune ambition personnelle", he was devoted to the cause of his Equipes and "vivait en ascète" in a working-class area. (MJFR, 179). What he preached, Simone points out, was not a contestation of her own beliefs. Rather, it was a logical extension of the idea of Christian "dévouement" on which she had been raised.

Certes, autour de moi, on prônait le dévouement, mais on lui assignait pour limites le cercle familial; hors de là, autrui n'était pas un prochain. Les ouvriers en particulier appartenaient à une espèce aussi dangeureusement étrangère que les Boches et les Bolcheviks. Garric avait balayé ces frontières: il n'existait sur terre qu'une immense communauté dont tous les membres étaient mes frères. (MJFR, 180).

Unlike her father, Garric was "un catholique convaincu", but he was not dogmatic and some members of the Equipes were not religious. He was the first person Simone had met who attempted to bridge the chasm between religious ideology and bourgeois ideology, by stressing the need for the bourgeoisie to act unselfishly. He maintained that:

le peuple est bon dès qu'on le traite bien; en refusant de lui tendre la main, la bourgeoisie commettrait une lourde faute dont les conséquences retomberaient sur elle. (MJFR, 180).

Simone, who had always found this chasm disconcerting, writes:

je buvais ses paroles: elles ne dérangaient pas mon univers,  
[... ] et pourtant elles rendaient à mes oreilles un son  
absolument neuf. (MJFR, 180).

As for literature, which Garric, like Georges de Beauvoir, held in high esteem, he introduced two new names: Charles Péguy, (who also was a Catholic patriot with a humanitarian socialist conscience) and André Gide, whom he mentioned "presque furtivement", one afternoon, "en excusant d'un sourire son audace". (MJFR, 182).

For Simone, this was the first time she had met somebody who had made a courageous choice about his existence:

Enfin je rencontrais un homme qui au lieu de subir un destin avait choisi sa vie! (MJFR, 181).

At the same time, there was nothing arbitrary about his choice. Garric's existence seemed almost to be imposed on him from above: his choice seemed like a calling.

dotée d'un but, d'un sens, son existence incarnait une idée, et elle en avait la superbe nécessité. (MJFR, 181).

To Simone, at the time, Garric seemed close to the Nietzschean "Übermensch":

Ce modeste visage [...] c'était celui d'un héros, d'un surhomme. (MJFR, 181).

He seemed to fulfil all the criteria of the ideal partner about whom she had begun to dream at the age of fifteen. He represented everything she would like to be herself, ("je contemplais avec émerveillement l'exemple que me donnait Garric") (MJFR, 181) and since she could not become him, the next best was to be loved by him. Simone began to wonder whether she had, indeed, met her "destin", but did not allow herself to entertain this hope for long. The idea of a married Garric was, after all, a little "choquant", and she decided it would be sufficient simply to "exister un peu pour lui". (MJFR, 183.) Her friend Zaza irritated her by finding petty faults with Garric, but Simone consoled herself that it was for the best:

j'aurais mal supporté qu'une autre recueillît avec autant de dévotion que moi les paroles et les sourires de mon héros.  
(MJFR, 182).

Meanwhile, at home, she infuriated her parents with her new asceticism, refusing to engage in polite intercourse with her mother's friends, studying even at the dinner table. Suddenly, with Garric's example before her, she felt necessary:

Une évidence me pétrifiait: des tâches infinies m'attendaient, j'étais tout entière exigée; si je me permettais le moindre gaspillage, je trahissais ma mission et je lesais l'humanité.  
(MJFR, 181).

Just as had been the case, previously, with her father, Simone felt that her life needed the approval of Garric in order to be justified.

She writes:

J'apportai tous mes soins à ma première dissertation, mais seule une religieuse dominicaine, qui suivait les cours en costume civil, reçut des félicitations. (MJFR, 173).

After this disappointment, she was more successful:

Je redoublai d'efforts pour gagner son estime: j'y parvins. Une dissertation sur Ronsard, l'explication d'un Sonnet à Hélène, une leçon sur d'Alembert, me valurent des éloges enivrants.  
(MJFR, 183).

A year later, having completed Garric's course and done some teaching in the female section of the Equipes, Simone became disillusioned with the ideals of her ex-hero. She felt that it was neither providing them with culture nor helping them, when she talked to working-class girls without any formal education about Balzac or Hugo, one evening a week. She writes that she would have felt ridiculous, had she followed the instructions given to the teachers, and discoursed on such themes as "la grandeur humaine" or "la valeur de la souffrance". (MJFR, 223). Gradually, she realized that Garric's ideas were glorified charity and a far cry from actual social change. Rather than producing real solidarity and

reciprocity, the Equipes both asserted the superiority of the bourgeoisie and provided it with a means of self-justification by the exchange of "culture" for gratitude. The power of the privileged class - to decide when to give gifts and to whom - remained unchallenged.<sup>(41)</sup> As to be expected, this realization greatly dulled Simone's enthusiasm for the man:

Mon admiration pour lui s'était éteinte en même temps que ma foi dans son oeuvre. (MJFR, 223).

Simone realized that Robert Garric had been "un fantôme" to her; (TCF, 19) however, she continued to dream of being the companion of a hero. At eighteen, lonely and unhappy, her dreams returned to the only male she knew on a friendly basis: her cousin Jacques.<sup>(42)</sup> As a young boy, Jacques, who was six months older than Simone, had always impressed her. Because his father had died when he was small, he had developed a feeling of responsibility unusual for his age, and his intelligence and precocity dazzled his cousin. The way he had talked to the workmen in his late father's stained glass business had the authority of a grown man, and totally subjugated Simone. In his teens he had gone, like Georges de Beauvoir, to the Collège Stanislas where he had at first shone at his studies. He would sometimes visit the house and help Simone with her homework; later on she writes, he preferred to have "de vraies conversations" with her father. (MJFR, 123). Around the age of fifteen, he became enamoured with his literature master, who taught him to prefer Mallarmé to Rostand - a preference which irritated Georges de Beauvoir. Simone's allegiances were indeed put to the test, but she agreed with her father that Jacques

---

(41) In Pour une Morale de l'ambiguïté, written in 1946, well before Beauvoir wrote about Garric in the memoirs, she wrote that "un des scandales de la charité" is that "elle s'exerce du dehors, selon le caprice de celui qui la distribue et qui est détaché de son objet. (p. 125).

(42) Jacques Laguillon's mother, Germaine, was a cousin of Françoise de Beauvoir.

was "posing":

Néanmoins, tout en récusant ses goûts, j'admirais qu'il les défendît avec tant de superbe.

When Jacques came to the house, just as when her father came home in the evening, he brought with him "les rumeurs d'un monde" which was not accessible to Simone. (MJFR, 123). This greatly added to the prestige of both.

Jacques, too, brought a gaiety into the house, which was seldom present now that Georges de Beauvoir was so often out, and embittered by financial failures. With Jacques, Simone was again able to feel as light-hearted as she had been when her father amused her as a child:

On pouvait donc, à notre âge, connaître encore une gaiété d'enfants! (MJFR, 184).

Despite his capacity for fun, Jacques was also "mal à l'aise dans sa peau" - like the modern writers he liked to read, and like Simone herself.

Beauvoir writes:

je me sentais moins insolite auprès de lui qu'auprès de tous les gens qui acceptaient la vie; [...] je conclus que nous étions lui et moi de la même espèce. (MJFR, 261).

It was Jacques who introduced Simone to the realm of contemporary literature and he lent her a great variety of books. Her father did not approve at all:

Ayant effleuré du regard mes auteurs favoris, mon père les jugea prétentieux, alambiqués, baroques, décadents, immoraux; il reprocha vivement à Jacques de m'avoir prêté, entre autres, Etienne de Marcel Arland. (MJFR, 187). (43)

At almost nineteen, her father no longer attempted to censor her books, but Simone's reading did exacerbate the conflict between them.

---

(43) In Etienne (Gallimard, 1924), Marcel Arland portrays the tormented love-affair between Louise (Etienne's mother) and Max d'Ayrens with extreme delicacy and discretion.

However, by this time, it was Jacques who had "la première place" in Simone's affection. (MJFR, 197).

Looking back upon this adolescent passion, Simone is conscious of "la part du rêve" (TCF, 27) in her love for Jacques. Out of desperation and loneliness, she imagined a Jacques whom she knew, in more lucid moments, did not really exist. She liked to tell herself that, because they had been childhood sweethearts, their "idylle" was "inscrite au ciel". (MJFR, 208). As she gradually became aware of the time he spent in bars and that the fact that he was failing his examinations was due to the frivolous and dissipated existence he led, she could not delude herself any more that his life was "admirable". However, she liked to think of it as "émouvante". (TCF, 27). Once again, she told herself that her existence had a mission: to help Jacques:

J'avais un rôle dans sa vie: /.../ il fallait combattre son découragement et l'aider à poursuivre sa recherche. (MJFR, 211).

By this stage, she was losing some of her illusions about men. It was not only Jacques who was wasting his time in bars - her father too, came home most nights reeking of alcohol.

The idea of marriage to Jacques was not finally discarded until 1929, after Simone had met Sartre. Jacques put an end to Simone's dreaming and her doubts about his worth as a husband by becoming engaged to his best friend's sister (who had a considerable dowry), soon after his return from his military service in Algeria.

Simone was nineteen before she came into contact with political ideas fundamentally different from those of her father, Garric and Jacques. By this time, Simone writes:

Je savais une chose: je détestais l'extrême-droite. (MJFR, 236).



The increasing strength of the extreme right, its bigoted and violent ostracism of "mâtèques" and "juifs" (MJFR, 236), its advocacy of the death penalty, its "violence" and "bêtise" - everything for which, as she was beginning to realize, her father stood - all this now threw her into "une colère effrayée". (MJFR, 236).

Most of the students at the Sorbonne with whom she associated appeared to her "insignifiants" and uninspiring. However, one young man did attract her attention. Considerably older than her, "aux yeux bleus et graves", (MJFR, 233) and dressed all in black, he only ever spoke to a small brunette who was obviously his girlfriend. One particular incident convinced Simone that he was indeed, someone out of the ordinary, and she contrived a meeting with him:

Un jour il traduisait à la bibliothèque des lettres d'Engels, quand, à sa table, des étudiants se mirent à chahuter; ses yeux étincelèrent, d'une voix brève il réclama le silence avec tant d'autorité qu'il fut aussitôt obéi. "C'est quelqu'un!" pensai-je, impressionnée. Je réussis à lui parler et par la suite, chaque fois que la petite brune était absente, nous causions. (MJFR, 234).

Pierre Nodier was associated with a group called "Philosophies", which was principally composed of Morhange, Friedmann, Henri Lefebvre and Politzer.<sup>(44)</sup> They collaborated on a leftist journal called L'Esprit<sup>(45)</sup>

---

(44) Pierre Morhange (whom Beauvoir misspells as Mohrange), Georges Friedmann, Henri Lefebvre, Georges Politzer and Norbert Guterman were the core of the group.

(45) The periodical Philosophies was published from March 1924 to March 1925. L'Esprit appeared from May 1926 to January 1927. Later the group put out La Revue Marxiste (February 1929 - September 1929) and La Revue de Psychologie Concrète (two issues in 1929). The group was heavily influenced by its philosophical masters: Blondel, Brunschvicg and Bergson, despite its hostility to them. Naville, writing for the Trotskyist periodical Clarté, criticized the Esprit group for attempting to combine Judeo-philosophical jargon and historical materialism. (Pierre Naville. Clarté, août-septembre 1926, p.85).

and Nodier brought Simone some issues to read. She writes that she did not feel "dépaysée" by their ideas, for these bourgeois revolutionaries expressed themselves in the language to which she was accustomed, and they did not fundamentally challenge her thinking:

ces jeunes gens parlaient eux aussi d'âme, de salut, de joie, d'éternité [...]. Ils s'intéressaient avant tout aux avatars de l'Esprit; l'économie et la politique n'avaient à leurs yeux qu'un rôle accessoire. Ils condamnaient le capitalisme parce qu'il avait détruit dans l'homme "le sens de l'être."  
(MJFR, 234).

Beauvoir adds that these thinkers were not unlike the surrealists, who had also - since around 1925 - begun to be concerned with political action and to talk in terms of "la Révolution". (46) She herself was attracted to the radicalism of the idea of a socialist revolution, even though she writes that she still had little understanding of the issues involved. Her conversations with Nodier were beginning to challenge her thinking - in a direction which she was keen to take - and she deeply regretted not being able to become much closer to him:

je trouvais tant de profit à ces entretiens que parfois je m'interrogeais tristement: pourquoi mon lot n'est-il pas d'aimer un homme comme celui-ci, qui partagerait mon goût pour les idées et pour l'étude, à qui je tiendrais par la tête autant que par le coeur? (MJFR, 235).

Simone was extremely sad when she said goodbye to Nodier in May 1927. He was leaving to take up a post in Australia - and "la petite brune" was to follow him. (MJFR, 235).

Around this time - possibly in an attempt to fill the void left by Nodier's departure - Simone made friends with a young man called Jean Mallet,

---

(46) In his "Deuxième Manifeste du surréalisme", published in the surrealist periodical La Révolution Surréaliste, on the 15th of March, 1928, André Breton, who saw himself as a revolutionary and a materialist, attacked the Esprit group - and Naville - for having espoused communism. Later, others closely associated with surrealism, such as Aragon and Eluard, also became well-known members of the P.C.F.

who was a communist and an ex-pupil of Alain, (la conjonction, en ce temps-là, n'étonnait pas", Beauvoir explains). He outlined Alain's ideas to her and lent her some of his books. He also enthused about Romain Rolland, renowned as a left-wing intellectual and pacifist, and Simone was converted to the cause of pacifism. She liked the "feu" in Mallet's eyes and voice and was impressed with his wide range of cultural interests: painting, the cinema, the theatre and music-hall. It was doubtless the influence of Mallet and Nodier which made her note, a little arrogantly, in her diary:

J'ai découvert qu'on peut être intelligent et s'intéresser à la politique. (MJFR, 236).

By 1929, Simone knew most of her fellow students. However, one group at the Sorbonne remained quite aloof from the rest, and that was "le clan formé par Sartre, Nizan et Herbaud." (MJFR, 310).<sup>(47)</sup> It is clear that the "mauvaise réputation" and the reputed intelligence of the group greatly interested Simone. (MJFR, 310). Herbaud was the only one of the trio to attend the course by Léon Brunschvicg which Simone went to, and she tells us:

Il avait fait un exposé, en janvier, au cours de Brunschvicg et pendant la discussion qui avait suivi, il avait amusé tout le monde. J'avais été sensible au charme de sa voix gouailleuse, de sa lippe ironique. (MJFR, 310).

When, one morning, Herbaud came to work at the Bibliothèque Nationale, Simone wasted no time!

J'avais eu l'inspiration - contrairement à mes habitudes - de monter déjeuner au restaurant intérieur à la Bibliothèque; il m'avait fait place à sa table avec autant de naturel que si nous avions eu rendez-vous. Nous avons parlé de Hume et de Kant. (MJFR, 310).

---

(47) The man she calls André Herbaud was actually René Maheu (1905-1975). In Tout compte fait, (p. 245), Beauvoir calls him by his real name, Maheu, describing him as "ancien camarade de Sartre". She thus continues to conceal the real identity of "Herbaud".

After the Easter vacation, the two regularly worked side by side at the Bibliothèque and continued their conversations in their lunchtime. Simone's exaltation was strikingly similar to that inspired by Robert Garric, a few years earlier. Herbaud was only three years older than her, but his self-assurance, his intelligence and versatility impressed Simone. He was unlike anybody she had ever met, and once again, his prestige was all the greater because he moved in a world to which Simone had had no access. His love of fun and the fact that "il paraissait vivre ailleurs que dans les livres" reminded her of Jacques; (MJFR, 311) his convictions, his intellectualism and his consciousness that he had a task to perform reminded her of Garric:

Il prouvait par son exemple qu'on peut se bâtir, en dehors des vieux cadres, une vie orgueilleuse, joyeuse et réfléchie: telle exactement que je la souhaitais. (MJFR, 314).

Herbaud was neither "un bien-pensant" like Garric, nor "un rat de bibliothèque" as she sometimes felt she was, nor "un pilier de bar", which Jacques seemed to have become. (MJFR, 314). Intellectually, too, he guided Simone in a direction she was eager to take. Indeed, she writes emphatically:

il m'indiquait mon avenir. (MJFR, 314).

Reflecting the internationalism of the French left after the First World War, its advocacy of disarmament, its hostility to military service, and its romantic faith in the ideals of the League of Nations, Herbaud was "anti-nationaliste" and "anti-militariste".<sup>(48)</sup> (MJFR, 314). Simone's friends were mostly religious and she had not yet dared distance herself wholeheartedly from forms of mysticism. Herbaud, however, was "anti-religieux" and "anticléric": "l'ascétisme chrétien lui répugnait", and

---

(48) It is interesting that Maheu later became an international civil servant, working for Unesco. From 1962 to 1974, he was director-general of the Unesco secretariat.

"il avait horreur de toutes les mystiques":

Je lui donnais à lire ma dissertation sur "la personnalité" dont j'étais fière à l'excès; il fit la moue; il y décelait les relents d'un catholicisme et d'un romanticisme dont il m'exhorta à me nettoyer au plus vite. J'aquiesçai avec emportement. J'en avais assez des "complications catholiques", des impasses spirituelles, des mensonges du merveilleux; à présent je voulais toucher terre. Voilà pourquoi en rencontrant Herbaud j'eus l'impression de me trouver moi-même. (MJFR, 314).

Simone was "bouleversée". "La violence de cet engouement" surprised even herself. (MJFR, 311). Her physical attraction to Herbaud was evident. Not only did she like him more and more, but very important - she liked her image in his eyes:

ce qu'il y avait d'agréable, c'est qu'à travers lui, je me plaisais à moi-même. (MJFR, 322).

She began to take extra care with her appearance, seeking his approval, and he "récompensait" her efforts with compliments. (MJFR, 322). As well as her joy at finding approval, once more, from somebody with "le prestige paternel", Simone had a "témoin" once again:

tout ce qui m'arrivait, tout ce qui me passait par la tête, je le lui destinais. (MJFR, 325).

There was, however, an obstacle to fulfilment of her love. Herbaud was married. Furthermore, when Simone told him about Jacques, mentioning her disappointment that the latter had been having an affair with a woman - whom he had discarded in a manner typical of his class and sex - Herbaud had advised her to marry him "ou à son défaut quelqu'un d'autre" for he believed: "une femme doit se marier." (MJFR, 324). His double standard for men and women concerning sexual libertinage irritated her, and reminded her of an aspect of her father which she rejected. As well as this, she could not help regarding Herbaud's preoccupation with the figure he cut in society as a weakness - and presumably she felt strongly

about this because she herself needed to scorn public opinion in order to convince herself of her own worth. Nonetheless, these reservations were minor compared to her enthusiasm; she needed them to protect her from a relationship which had no future:

je ne savais jamais au juste quand je le reverrais et cette incertitude m'attristait; par instants, je ressentais avec détresse la fragilité de notre amitié J...J Je m'exhortais à vivre au jour le jour, sans espoir et sans crainte, cette histoire qui, au jour le jour, ne me donnait que de la joie. (MJFR, 325)

It was through Herbaud that Simone met Jean-Paul Sartre and Paul Nizan. All three invited her to join them for the preparation of the oral examination for the Agrégation. They worked together from the beginning of July, 1929, for three weeks, and Simone de Beauvoir learnt a great deal from the "petits camarades", as they liked to call themselves. (MJFR, 335). Simone's description of their attitude at the time and of the influence they had on her shows these few weeks to be a turning point in her development:

sur bien des points je restais dupe des sublimes bourgeois; eux, ils dégonflaient impitoyablement tous les idéalismes, ils tournaient en dérision les belles âmes, les âmes nobles, toutes les âmes et les états d'âmes, la vie intérieure, le merveilleux, le mystère, les élites; en toute occasion dans leurs propos, leurs attitudes, leurs plaisanteries - ils manifestaient que les hommes ce n'étaient pas des esprits mais des corps en proie au besoin, et jetés dans une aventure brutale. Un an plus tôt, ils m'auraient encore effrayée; mais j'avais fait du chemin depuis la rentrée J...J. Je compris vite que si le monde où m'invitaient mes nouveaux amis me paraissait rude, c'est qu'ils ne déguisaient rien; ils me demandaient somme toute que d'oser ce que j'avais toujours voulu: regarder en face la réalité. Il ne me fallut pas longtemps pour m'y décider. (MJFR, 336).

When, later in the month, Maheu's fears were confirmed - he had failed the written part of the agrégation - he no longer had any reason to stay in Paris and left immediately to join his wife at Bagnoles-de-l'Orne. It was then that Sartre told Simone paternalistically:

"A partir de maintenant, je vous prends en main." (MJFR, 338).

The relationship with Sartre was irrecusably the end of the "attente"<sup>(49)</sup> of adolescence. She shows that in Sartre she had found the idol of whom she had dreamt as a young girl:

Sartre répondit exactement au voeu de mes quinze ans. (MJFR, 344).

Already at twenty three, Sartre had an impressive reputation among his peers. He was renowned for his brilliance, and the first mention of him in the memoirs is when Beauvoir tells us that "à la surprise générale", he had failed the written examinations of the agrégation, (MJFR, 272), which he was sitting again in 1929, in the same group of students as Simone. The trio formed by Sartre, Nizan and Herbaud, because of its extremism and aloofness, was the subject of a degree of speculation and rumour, and, as for Sartre, Beauvoir writes:

on disait qu'il était le plus terrible des trois et même on l'accusait de boire. (MJFR, 310).

At the Ecole Normale Supérieure, Sartre was famed for his "dons comiques" (MJFR, 335). As well as all this, there was Herbaud's great admiration for Sartre. Indeed, Herbaud sealed his own fate by telling Simone and Sartre about each other, and further arousing their interest in the other by his overt jealousy. Although he was only two and a half years older than her, when Sartre "took her in hand", Simone was as subjugated by the all-powerful figure which Sartre cut as she had been by her father as a young girl.

Sartre shared Georges de Beauvoir's passion for literature and acting, but more than this: "il s'intéressait à tout" (MJFR, 339). What

---

(49) In Le Deuxième Sexe, Beauvoir had written of the adolescent girl: "d'une manière plus ou moins déguisée, sa jeunesse se consume dans l'attente. Elle attend l'Homme." (Le Deuxième Sexe II, p.80).

most impressed Simone was his sense of purpose: for him, his existence was writing, and living was subordinate to his "oeuvre":

la véritable supériorité qu'il se reconnaissait, et qui me sautait aux yeux, c'était la passion tranquille et forcenée qui le jetait vers ses livres à venir. (MJFR, 339).

Whereas Simone writes that she could not imagine an existence without writing, Sartre "ne vivait que pour écrire". (MJFR, 340). His determination made her "frénésies" appear "timides", and his example showed her the distance she still had to go. At the same time he gave her existence a shape, a future:

l'avenir me semblait soudain plus difficile que je ne l'avais escompté mais il était aussi plus réel et plus sûr; au lieu d'informes possibilités, je voyais s'ouvrir devant moi un champ clairement défini. (MJFR, 343).

Simone no longer confronted the future alone; now she had a model and a guide. As well as this, Sartre was a "témoin" and a judge:

un regard, certes bienveillant, mais plus impartial que le mien me renvoyait de chacun de mes mouvements une image que je tenais pour objective. (FA, 28).

The Sartre Simone describes at this time was a "révolté" rather than a "révolutionnaire." (FA, 36). He enjoyed entertaining a certain extremism, without being dedicated to change. As Beauvoir puts it:

il était alors beaucoup plus anarchiste que révolutionnaire; il trouvait détestable la société telle qu'elle était, mais il ne détestait pas la détester. (MJFR, 340).

Sartre, who, like Simone, had "une sympathie de principe pour les ouvriers", professed to share Nizan's hopes for "une révolution prolétarienne" (FA, 37), but, in fact, he was more immersed in his own quest for new values and the desire to express them than any real concern for the proletariat. The fact that Nizan was a member of the Communist Party did not cause him to change his position. Both Sartre and Simone vehemently attacked the bourgeoisie,



but, as they realized later, whilst doing so, they remained very much its products themselves.

By 1929, then, Simone had emancipated herself, to a large degree, from her father's view of the world, and in the course of the years to come, she distanced herself almost completely from the attitudes prevalent in the milieu in which she spent her first twenty years. What did remain surprisingly intact, however, was the image she conjured up, at fifteen, of her dependence on her future partner: Throughout the autobiography, Sartre never loses his "prestige paternel". Beauvoir readily admits that, for her, Sartre's existence "justifiait le monde". (FA, 220). Casting him in the role she had destined for him, of supreme judge, she tells us:

seule l'opinion de Sartre pouvait m'attendre aux moelles. (FA, 42).

For many years, she successfully persuaded herself that there existed between them "une harmonie préétablie", and she would tell herself: "On ne fait qu'un". (FA, 150). In an interview in 1976, Beauvoir commented that she had always been convinced that her "entente" with Sartre was "totalement solide" and "prédestinée".<sup>(50)</sup> By believing this, of course, she avoided confronting her own vulnerability.

If independence was a particularly difficult battle for Simone de Beauvoir, it was not only because she was, like most young girls, conditioned to believe that "un heureux accomplissement d'elle-même" lay in "la soumission amoureuse"<sup>(51)</sup> as we have seen that she did. On top of this, there was her own extreme need for affirmation. As a child, it was her

---

(50) Interview with John Gerassi in Society, Jan-Feb 1976. Translated back into French and reprinted in Les Ecrits de Simone de Beauvoir, p. 547.

(51) Le Deuxième Sexe, I, p. 84.

mother's love, as an adolescent it was her father's and as an adult it was Sartre's on which Simone depended to give meaning to her existence. Beauvoir notes this herself, but she does not regard her insecurity as a continuum or attempt to trace its source. Having made her choice of self in this situation, she disregarded her insecurity as much as possible and struggled with herself to become the independent woman she aspired to be - and Sartre encouraged her to be. And, indeed, she did achieve this to an admirable extent, as we shall see in the section on "The Independent Woman". Here it is sufficient to note that although Beauvoir views her meeting with Sartre as the beginning of her life as an independent woman, it was, at the same time, a continuation of a long-established pattern of dependence, and it particularly reflected Simone's adolescent relationship with her father.

CHAPTER FOUR

SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR AS A PHYSICAL BEING

A problem with Beauvoir's autobiography is the very limited insight it gives us into the author as a physical being. This is a serious lack in a work which attempts to portray an individual woman's life in all its complexity. Furthermore, in Le Deuxième Sexe, Simone de Beauvoir herself had stressed that the way in which a woman perceives her body is crucial to an understanding of her behaviour.

Such an omission demonstrates that Beauvoir's intention was not primarily "feminist" - in the sense that she was not particularly concerned to show the female experience in its specificity. She was more interested in recording the influence of her environment and of social forces on her emotional and intellectual development. Nevertheless, by examining the autobiography in conjunction with the rest of Beauvoir's opus - both her essays and her fiction - it is possible to form a general picture of her assumptions about the female body and to trace some of the reasons for these assumptions.

In Le Deuxième Sexe, Beauvoir leaves the reader with a clear impression of her ambivalence towards her body - an ambivalence which also emerges in the autobiography. For this reason, it is worth pausing to examine the argument she put forward about female biology in the 1949 essay.

In this essay, Beauvoir made the point quite strongly that the significance of biology depends on its social context: woman's anatomy does not imply any particular destiny or provide the key to female behaviour. Rather, it reflects "la totalité d'une situation" that it also helps to define.<sup>(1)</sup>

---

(1) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 561.

However, Beauvoir obscured her argument by asserting that women are particularly placed at a disadvantage by their physiological constitution. There is, she maintained, a conflict of interests between the species and the individual. Whereas the process of reproduction is necessary for the species, it is debilitating and presents no advantage to the individual woman. She described "la menstruation", "l'accouchement" and "l'allaitement" as each constituting a "servitude épuisante" to the woman herself, claiming that the ability to reproduce gives the female body "une inquiétante fragilité".<sup>(2)</sup> In this essay, Beauvoir does not regard the reproduction of the species as an act of individual creation; on the contrary, she portrays the woman as a helpless victim of the biological processes occurring within her:<sup>(3)</sup>

engendrer, allaiter ne sont pas des activités, ce sont des fonctions naturelles; aucune projet n'y est engagé; c'est pourquoi la femme n'y trouve pas le motif d'une affirmation hautaine de son existence; elle subit passivement son destin biologique.<sup>(4)</sup>

Men, on the other hand, can more easily engage themselves in individual projects which are of worth to society - rather than to the species:

La vocation du mâle, c'est l'action; il lui faut produire, combattre, créer, progresser, se dépasser vers la totalité de l'univers et l'infinité de l'avenir.<sup>(5)</sup>

Because woman's physiology tends to confine her to a state of immanence, the girl's initiation to womanhood, at the advent of puberty, is the first of many crises associated with her biological constitution. From now on, according to Beauvoir, the woman sees herself reduced, by her

---

(2) Le Deuxième Sexe I, p. 67.

(3) "elle apparaît comme possédée par des puissances étrangères:alienée." Le Deuxième Sexe I, p. 61.

(4) Le Deuxième Sexe I, p. 110.

(5) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 228.

reproductive functions, to being "la proie de l'espèce"<sup>(6)</sup> and she experiences her body as "une chose opaque aliénée".<sup>(7)</sup>

By associating the existential categories of transcendence and immanence with male activity and female passivity, Beauvoir was able to rationalize and justify her own ambivalence to her body. Her pride in her physical endurance became the pride of transcendence, and the repugnance she had always felt for the physiological workings of the female body was able to be interpreted as the horror of immanence. And yet the very arguments she uses to support her transcendence/immanence theory reinforce her point that cultural factors are paramount. Her horror of female sexuality and of the bodily processes connected with the reproductive function in women is clearly a product of cultural phenomena. In this chapter I will examine the impact on Simone of the puritanism of the age and of her middle-class, catholic milieu, as well as the impact on her of the sexism of her environment and culture. A chronological approach brings out the cultural influences most clearly.

---

(6) Le Deuxième Sexe I, p. 56.

(7) ibid., p. 66.

## I. Childhood.

In Simone de Beauvoir's first twelve years of life her body seems to have made no significant impact on her consciousness. Indeed, in her family, bodies were covered up and not mentioned:

Dans mon univers, la chair n'avait pas droit à l'existence.  
(MJFR, 60).

As a very young child, Simone enjoyed the sensuality of her physical intimacy with her mother. Throughout her childhood, she was proud of her mother's beauty. As for herself, she was told that "les brunes aux yeux bleus" were a rarity, and she was well satisfied with her reflection in the mirror as she watched her young nursemaid, Louise, arrange her hair in ringlets. (MJFR, 12).

Since Simone was an attractive little girl and healthy, her body did not preoccupy her. Apart from this, she was not given the opportunity to contemplate any part of her body other than her face:

en dehors de mes bains - et Louise me frictionnait alors avec une vigueur qui m'interdisait toute complaisance - on m'avait appris à ne pas regarder mon corps, à changer de linge sans me découvrir. (MJFR, 60).

She never saw her parents or any other adults anything other than "hermétique-ment vêtus" (MJFR, 60). Apart from one holiday at the beach when she was eight years old,<sup>(8)</sup> Simone never went to a beach, a swimming pool or a gymnasium, so that she writes --:

la nudité se confondait pour moi avec l'indécence. (MJFR, 163).

This confusion was to last a lifetime. Simone was fifty-five years old when she saw her mother's body exposed for the first time, as the latter lay

---

(8) She went to Villers-sur-Mer with friends of her parents.

dying in her hospital bed. Her mother, once so prudish, was now too ill to care about such matters; Simone, however, surprised herself by "la violence" of her "déplaisir":

Voir le sexe de ma mère, ça m'avait fait un choc. (9)

To her father, Simone tells us, she was neither "un corps" nor even "une âme"; (MJFR, 39) she was "un pur esprit". (MJFR, 103). As for her mother, she was extremely puritanical. As a girl, Françoise had been a "demi-pensionnaire" at the Oiseaux convent<sup>(10)</sup> and she retained her convent morality after marriage. Simone describes her as "corsetée des principes les plus rigides: bienséances provinciales et morales de couventine".<sup>(11)</sup> Although Simone believes her mother had been a contented young wife who had enjoyed her sexual relations with her husband, she still scarcely distinguished "le vice" from "la sexualité":

elle associa toujours étroitement l'idée de chair à celle de péché. (MJFR, 41).

Her attitude obviously affected her daughters. For one thing, she was determined to keep them in ignorance of sexuality. She did not even warn Simone about the "surprises" awaiting her at puberty:

Les questions "physiques" lui répugnaient tant que jamais elles ne les aborda avec moi. (MJFR, 41).

She also censured Simone's reading, choosing suitable books "avec circonspection". (MJFR, 53). When she began to read adult books, around the age of ten, Simone was sometimes given books which had some pages pinned together by one or other of her parents. This censorship was not simply due to

---

(9) Une Mort très douce, p. 29.

(10) Between 1818 and 1904, the Couvent des Oiseaux was a very aristocratic private boarding school for demoiselles, run by the order of Saint Augustine. It was converted into artists' ateliers at the time of the dissolution of the congregations. (1905-1907 saw the separation of the Church from the State in France).

(11) Une Mort très douce, p. 50.

Simone's young age, for her aunt Lili, Françoise de Beauvoir's younger sister by five years, also "n'avait droit qu'aux ouvrages 'pour jeunes filles'." (MJFR, 84). The intention was obviously to preserve their pre-marital innocence.

It was 1919 and Simone was eleven when she and her sister were sent to stay with their cousin Madeleine in the country, while their parents moved into the new apartment. Madeleine, who was three years older than Simone, was allowed to read books which the Beauvoir parents considered well "au-dessus de son âge" (MJFR, 85) and, surrounded by animals, she was aware of the ways of nature. She amazed the two girls by telling them that men, too, had "deux boules" like her dog, and that, before too long, Simone would bleed once a month, like all women. She confirmed Simone's suspicions that "les bébés se forment dans les entrailles de leur mère". (MJFR, 86). Simone even observed animals procreating for the first time. However, she did not associate this behaviour with "des moeurs humaines" (MJFR, 86) and the phenomenon of conception, pregnancy and childbirth remained a complete mystery.

Madeleine had the advantage of more liberal parents and living in the country. Zaza had the advantage of a more carefree upbringing in a family of nine children, several of which were brothers. Simone made friends with Zaza when they were both ten years old and the Beauvoir girls, who had never been allowed to learn either to ride bicycles or swim, were flabbergasted by Zaza's "hardiesse garçonnière". (MJFR, 113). When, on one occasion, Madame Mabile took Zaza and Simone for a walk, Simone watched with admiration while her friend performed all sorts of physical antics:

Zaza fit sut l'herbe la roue, le grand écart et toute espèce de culbutes; elle grimpaux arbres, elle se suspendait aux branches par les pieds. (MJFR, 93).

In comparison, Simone was hardly aware of the existence and certainly not of the possibilities of her body.



## II. Adolescence.

It was at the advent of puberty that Simone's body suddenly intruded on her consciousness. The body that had made little impact on her for twelve and a half years suddenly became an inconvenience.<sup>(12)</sup> More than this, it represented a threat: in the eyes of others it identified her with the "confrérie féminine", (MJFR, 103) a group which she - along with the rest of society - had come to regard as inferior. She was repelled both by her body and by her image of womanhood - each made the other seem worse.<sup>(13)</sup>

Simone was twelve and a half when she began to menstruate. Unfortunately, she had forgotten her cousin Madeleine's "imprécises prophéties" and she wondered what her "ignominieuse maladie" could possibly be. (MJFR, 103).<sup>(14)</sup> Her shame was complete that evening, when her father jokingly made some allusion to her state. Until that time her father had always treated her as if she were purely a mind. Now, suddenly, he looked at her as a body, an object. For Simone, this was a turning point. It marked the beginning of her adolescent crisis:

J'avais imaginé que la confrérie féminine dissimulait soigneusement aux hommes sa tare secrète. En face de mon père je me croyais un pur esprit: j'eus horreur qu'il me considérât soudain comme un organisme. Je me sentis à jamais déchue. (MJFR, 103).

---

(12) Beauvoir wrote in Le Deuxième Sexe: "Il ne faut pas oublier que l'adolescent et l'adolescente éprouvent leur corps d'une manière très différente: le premier l'assume tranquillement et en revendique orgueilleusement les désirs; pour la seconde, en dépit de son narcissisme, il est un fardeau étranger et inquiétant. (II, 147).

(13) In Le Deuxième Sexe, Beauvoir declared that the young girl "éprouve sa féminité comme une mutilation." (II, p. 561).

(14) Colette Audry, in Aux Yeux du souvenir (Paris: Gallimard, 1947) and Françoise d'Eaubonne in Chiène de Jeunesse, (Paris: Juillard, 1965) likewise describe their horrified reaction to menarche. Neither had been warned. D'Eaubonne writes of the impression, which resulted from this, "d'appartenir à une espèce à part et marquée d'une tare punitive." (p. 96).

In Le Deuxième Sexe, Simone de Beauvoir had described "la crise de la puberté" in strong terms.<sup>(15)</sup> She particularly emphasized the young girl's sudden shame and the "dégoût de son corps".<sup>(16)</sup> Convinced that the adolescent girl could not possibly react to menarche anything other than negatively, she declared:

Que l'enfant ait été ou non avertie, l'événement lui apparaît toujours comme répugnant et humiliant.<sup>(17)</sup>

"Tare honteuse", "événement malpropre", "désagrément mensuel",<sup>(18)</sup> "ce malheur étonnant",<sup>(19)</sup> "la servitude menstruelle"<sup>(20)</sup> "cette tare féminine"<sup>(21)</sup> - such are the terms in which Simone de Beauvoir describes the young girl's experience of menstruation. Images of sickness and dirtiness abound. The girl "se sent sale"<sup>(22)</sup> and she is repelled by "cette odeur fade et croupie" which emanates from her body: an "odeur de marécage".<sup>(23)</sup>

The idea of being "malade", of having some "infirmité", recurs with great frequency in the autobiography, as in Le Deuxième Sexe. The morning of the day on which Poupette paraded, in full glory, as "la Belle de la Nuit", it was discovered that Simone's best dress now stretched tightly over her developing breasts, emphasizing them "avec indécence". (MJFR, 104).

---

(15) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 56.

(16) *ibid.*, p. 60.

(17) *ibid.*, p. 61.

(18) *ibid.*, p. 64.

(19) *ibid.*, p. 63.

(20) *ibid.*, p. 85.

(21) *ibid.*, p. 65.

(22) *ibid.*, p. 61.

(23) *ibid.*, p. 64.

This image of a swamp is one both she and Sartre use frequently in connection with female genitalia. I discuss this later in this chapter. (See p. 193).

There was no time to do anything other than to try to conceal her "poitrine" - and throughout the occasion, Simone felt that her budding sexuality was some kind of shameful sickness:

On l'enveloppa [la poitrine] de bandages si bien que j'eus tout le jour l'impression de coller dans mon corsage une encombrante infirmité. (MJFR, 104).

To add to her trials, puberty brought Simone a multiplicity of associated physical problems. Unlike Zaza and Poupette, Simone entered an "âge ingrat" (MJFR, 148) which lasted till she was fifteen and a half.

J'enlaidis [...] il me poussa sur le visage et sur la nuque des boutons que je taquinai avec nervosité. [...] J'eus des tics: je n'arrêtais pas de hausser les épaules, de faire tourner mon nez. (MJFR, 103).

Her own body repelled her to such an extent that she could not bear to drink out of a glass which she had used before.

Simone's resentment that her body was developing, against her will, into that of a woman, made her view any changes in her body with horror. For example, she writes:

je répugnais à l'idée de voir mon torse se ballonner. (MJFR, 102).<sup>(24)</sup>

However, the object of her disgust was not just her own body, but female sexuality generally. The secrecy which surrounded physical matters in the family, combined with her random reading - which more often than not further obfuscated her impression of sexuality - promoted an array of horrifying fantasies and images such as the following:

---

(24) In Le Deuxième Sexe, Beauvoir stresses that breasts are not functional or advantageous to the woman herself: "insolites et gênants les seins sont un fardeau; dans les exercices violents ils rappellent leur présence; ils frémissent, ils font mal. (II, 81).

j'avais entendu, autrefois, des femmes adultes uriner avec un bruit de cataracte; en pensant aux outres gonflées d'eau qu'elles enfermaient dans leur ventre, je ressentais le même effroi que Gulliver le jour où de jeunes géantes lui découvrirent leurs seins. (MJFR, 102).

In Le Deuxième Sexe, Beauvoir generalizes about the young girl's fear and horror of the idea of procreation. The idea of pregnancy - "cette monstrueuse enflure"--"l'épouvante". As for childbirth, whether the young girl been enlightened as to the facts or not, "les images d'enflure, de déchirure, d'hémorragie vont la hanter": (25)

La fillette sera d'autant plus sensible à ces visions qu'elle est plus imaginative; mais aucune ne pourra les regarder en face sans frémir.

Simone's reaction, as an adolescent, to her mother's body was a further reflection of the way in which female sexuality repelled her:

Aucun corps n'existait moins pour moi - n'existait davantage. Enfant, je l'avais chéri; adolescente, il m'avait inspiré une répulsion inquiète. (26)

An extract from Le Deuxième Sexe appears strikingly autobiographical. Once again it describes the unwillingness of the young girl to assume her sexuality, and the female condition which she associates with it:

Auparavant, la fillette pouvait avec un peu de mauvaise foi se penser encore un être asexué, elle pouvait ne pas se penser; il lui arrivait même de rêver qu'elle se réveillerait un matin changée en homme; à présent, les mères et les tantes chuchotent avec des airs flattés: "C'est une grande fille, maintenant"; la confrérie des matrones a gagné: elle leur appartient. La voilà rangée sans recours du côté des femmes. (27)

---

(25) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 48. (Italics mine)

(26) Une Mort très douce, p. 28.

(27) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 63.

It is true that just before puberty, Simone's reading had made her, for a time, "la proie de désirs torturants": (MJFR, 102)

je me retournais dans mon lit, la gorge sèche, appelant un corps d'homme contre mon corps, des mains d'homme sur ma peau. Je calculais avec désespoir: "On n'a pas le droit de se marier avant quinze ans!" (MJFR, 102).

After puberty, however, her impatience became fear - and disgust. Literature had excited her by its evocation of passion. However, nothing in her own environment evoked pleasure in sexuality,<sup>(28)</sup> so that Simone could only envisage sex in terms of a "crudité animale", and, as such, it seemed strangely out of place in the world she knew of "conventions" and "routines". (MJFR, 163).

Simone relates that, at sixteen, she was disturbed by the gropings of a man standing just behind her in the cinema. Some time later, an employee in a theological bookshop shocked her by exposing himself to her at the back of the shop. (MJFR, 161-162). In Le Deuxième Sexe, Beauvoir had written that the young girl attributes such behaviour to "malades", "maniaques" and "fous":

La fillette palpée par son voisin au cinéma, celle devant qui un passant déboutonne sa braguette pensent qu'elles ont eu affaire à des fous. <sup>(29)</sup>

However, the thoughts that "normal" people and one day, presumably, she herself should indulge, in private, in "messes noires" was incomprehensible to her.<sup>(30)</sup> When Simone was in her last year of school, an extremely wealthy girl whom she had long idolized for her beauty and grace, returned to

---

(28) The one exception was her cousin, Titite, Jacques' elder sister, who was three years older than Simone:

"Fiancée à un ami d'enfance, un ravissant jeune homme aux cils immenses, elle attendait le mariage avec une impatience qu'elle ne cachait pas." (MJFR, 147). After her marriage, Simone comments:

"Son corps exubérant ne connaissait pas la honte et quand elle évoquait ses noces, le désir qui brillait dans ses yeux l'embellissait." (MJFR, 163).

(29) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 50.

(30) *ibid.*

the school to announce her forthcoming marriage to a rich business associate of her father's. This new image of Margeurite de Théricourt obsessed Simone:

Cette sérieuse demoiselle gantée, chapeautée, aux sourires étudiés, comment y superposer l'image d'un corps rose et tendre couché entre les bras d'un homme? [...] Quand je l'évoquais, à demi dévoilée, exposée au regard d'un homme, je me sentais emportée dans un simoun qui pulvérisait toutes les normes de la morale et du bon sens. [...] Ou la sexualité était une brève crise de folie, ou Margeurite ne coïncidait pas avec la jeune personne bien élevée qu'escortait partout une gouvernante. (MJFR, 164)

The fact was that it was considered as important for the young bourgeois girl to have a virginal mind as to have a virginal body: ignorance was admired as innocence. At home, Simone's father pursued "le culte de la jeune fille, la vraie". (MJFR, 178). He was very fond of Simone's cousin, Jeanné, who, Simone comments, was "peu douée pour les études mais très souriante et très polie". (MJFR, 175). To him, she was the incarnation of the "idéal" of "la jeune fille". At sixteen:

elle croyait que les enfants naissaient dans les choux. (MJFR, 178). [...] Mon père répétait [...] que son frère avait une fille délicieuse, et il soupirait. (MJFR, 175). (31)

Hemmed in by all sorts of puritanical social conventions, girls in Simone's milieu were obliged to remain ignorant about female sexuality, and yet were forced to be aware of the existence of male sexuality. Any

---

(31) Attitudes had not changed much since 1880, when a controversy raged about the "loi Camille Sée", passed that year, which permitted the establishment of "lycées de jeunes filles", putting an end to the absolute domination of the Church in education for girls in France. A quotation from Le Gaulois of November 25th, 1880, cited by Mona Ozouf in L'Ecole, l'église et la République, 1871 - 1914, (Paris: Armand Colin, 1963) reflects contemporary thought:

"On va supprimer la jeune fille [...]. Assez de ces petites niaises qui croient à l'ange gardien, au bonhomme Noël, aux bébés qui naissent sous les choux. La science de l'Etat se chargera de souffler sur ces illusions enfantines. [...] On leur apprendra tout, même la rébellion contre la famille, même l'impureté. Elles citeront Tacite, Montesquieu, les jours de gaieté. Elles n'auront même pas été vierges avant de devenir femmes." (p. 104).

untoward behaviour on their part was considered exhibitionism, because it awakened male desire:

une dame "comme il faut" ne devait ni se décolleter abondamment, ni porter des jupes courtes, ni teindre ses cheveux ni les couper, ni se maquiller, ni se vautrer sur un divan, ni embrasser son mari dans les couloirs du métro: si elle transgressait ces règles, elle avait mauvais genre. (MJFR, 82).

The strictness of her milieu was made apparent to Simone by the arrival of Stépha Avdicovitch in its midst. Stépha was a student from Poland, who had left her country to complete her education in Berlin (where she had stayed two or three years) and then Paris. Despite her moneyed background and her excellent education, Stépha was frowned upon by Zaza's family, in which she was employed as a governess during the summer holidays. The reason for this was that she exuded "une séduction tout à fait insolite" (MJFR, 275). - unheard of for a respectable young woman in the restrictive French bourgeoisie. Beside her, Simone and Zaza seemed like "de jeunes nonnes". (MJFR, 276). Because of the way Stépha openly flirted with the charming and wealthy young Frenchmen who were constantly invited to the Mabelle house, Madame Mabelle told Zaza to steer clear of "cette étrangère", who, she was convinced, was no longer "une vraie jeune fille". (MJFR, 276).

Frightened of losing her reputation, and frightened, also, by what she might discover, the young girl from a "good family" was as determined as everyone else that she should preserve her ignorance. Beauvoir writes:

Je ne sais pas s'il entrerait ou non de la mauvaise foi dans mon ingénuité; en tout cas la sexualité m'effrayait. (MJFR, 163).

Her naïvety was such that, at seventeen, she was not able to recognise sexual arousal for what it was. Dancing lessons were a nightmare because, never having learnt to use her body, she was conscious of her extreme

clumsiness. As well as this, the "impression bizarre" that she felt when her "cavalier" pulled her close to his chest confused and upset her.

Unwilling to face up to her sexual frustration, she chose to avoid it:

Rentrée à la maison, je me jetais dans le fauteuil de cuir, hébétée par une langueur qui n'avait pas de nom et qui me donnait envie de pleurer. Je pris prétexte de mon travail pour suspendre ces séances. (MJFR, 162-163).

Considering the ignorance with which Simone and her adolescent contemporaries confronted menarche, they had every reason to suspect that more unpleasant shocks lurked behind the threatening facade of silence. In Le Deuxième Sexe, Beauvoir had written at some length about the question of "l'initiation sexuelle" and the fear and the masochistic behaviour which its anticipation produced in young girls. She maintained:

la fillette est révoltée quand elle comprend qu'elle est vierge et scellée, que, pour la changer en femme, il faudra qu'un sexe d'homme la pénétre. (32)

Simone could only come to terms with this brutal image by visualizing it as an act of love:

je me persuadais qu'on peut célébrer au lit des messes blanches: un authentique amour sublime l'étreinte physique, et entre les bras de l'élu, la pure jeune fille se change allégrement en une claire jeune femme. (MJFR, 289-290).

Given these conditions, she regarded the prospect of her own "initiation sexuelle" quite calmly, and describing her frame of mind at twenty, she writes:

j'attendais sans appréhension et même avec impatience le moment où je deviendrais une femme. (MJFR, 290).

---

(32) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 54.



170.

However, sexuality, as she observed it around her, rarely accorded with this idyllic picture of marital passion and commitment to the other. Indeed, she writes:

l'intrusion de la sexualité [...] me découvrait brusquement, dans leur redoutable unité, le besoin et la violence. (MJFR, 291).

The sight of "les filles fardées" and their pimps in the streets propelled her into "une détresse indicible". (MJFR, 289). The idea that there were bodies which "criaient famine et qui pesaient lourd" was abhorrent to her, (MJFR, 291) as she wanted to believe that sex was associated with love. The conduct of many of her fellow students at the Sorbonne shocked Simone because of the apparent ease with which they engaged in sexual relationships. More shocking to her than male libertinage - which was after all institutionalized - were homosexuality and female libertinage - which had no place in her rigid conception of love and marriage.

Si l'on me disait qu'un tel et une telle "étaient ensemble", je me contractais. Quand Blanchette Weiss,<sup>(33)</sup> me désignant un normalien réputé, me confia qu'hélas! il avait de ces moeurs, je frissonnai. Les étudiantes affranchies, et surtout celles qui avaient hélas! de ces goûts, me faisaient horreur. (MJFR, 241-242).

Simone's own reaction to "l'intrusion de la sexualité" tended to be her classical reaction to intrusion of any sort. As much as possible, she avoided her sexual conflicts. She shrank from any enlightenment which might have made her come to terms with the things that she did not want to know. Thus, at seventeen, she did not admit to herself that dancing classes aroused her, even though she had fully recognised sexual desire when she was twelve:

A douze ans, mon ignorance avait pressenti le désir, la caresse; à dix-sept ans, théoriquement renseignée, je ne savais même plus reconnaître le trouble. (MJFR, 163).

---

(33) The girl Beauvoir calls Blanchette Weiss was a fellow student at the Sorbonne.

A year or two later, Stépha tried, "avec ménagement", to rid Simone of some of her naïvety and prejudices, but Simone's psychological blocks were strong: "je me raidissais". (MJFR, 289). When, one night, they passed a crowd observing a pimp being arrested, Simone writes:

Je crus que j'allais tomber sur le trottoir; [ ... ] tout me donnait envie de hurler. (MJFR, 289).

At the same time as attempting to deny the existence of "le besoin" and "la violence", (MJFR, 291), Simone persuaded herself - as she was wont to do - that her own experience would be "des messes blanches", justified by "un authentique amour sublime". (MJFR, 289-290). As long as nothing conflicted too blatantly with her own picture of harmonious marital sexuality, she was able to avoid confronting her own fears.

Beauvoir also writes about another sort of reaction to the ambivalence with which the adolescent girl contemplates the sexual act. In Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée, Beauvoir quotes a letter which the nineteen year old Zaza wrote to her:

"Dernièrement, m'écrivait-elle, on a organisé une grande excursion avec des amis, au pays basque; j'avais un tel besoin de solitude que je me suis donné un bon coup de hache sur le pied pour échapper à cette expédition. J'en ai eu pour huit jours de chaise longue et de phrases apitoyées, mais j'ai eu du moins un peu de solitude, et le droit de ne pas parler et de ne pas m'amuser". (MJFR, 251).

This incident made a great impression on Simone, who had already alluded to it in her first manuscript, Quand prime le spirituel, and in Le Deuxième Sexe.<sup>(34)</sup> In this last book, Beauvoir commented:

---

(34) In Part IV of Quand prime le spirituel, the heroine, Anne, cuts her foot with an axe to avoid going to stay with acquaintances and it meant "huit jours de chaise longue". (p. 149). In Le Deuxième Sexe, Beauvoir writes about "une amie de jeunesse" who stayed six weeks in bed as a result. The Deuxième Sexe version is presumably exaggerated for effect.

Ces pratiques sadico-masochistes sont à la fois une anticipation de l'expérience sexuelle et une révolte contre elle; il faut, en supportant ces épreuves, s'endurcir contre toute épreuve possible et par là les rendre toutes anodines, y compris la nuit nuptiale. (35)

She observed that the adolescent girl, struggling to come to terms with her sexual destiny as a "proie passive"<sup>(36)</sup> is not so much "masochiste" as "sadique":

en tant que sujet autonome, elle fouaille, bafoue, torture cette chair dépendante, cette chair condamnée à la soumission qu'elle déteste sans vouloir cependant s'en distinguer.<sup>(37)</sup>

Zaza was far more sexually precocious than Simone; at fifteen she had exchanged kisses with a boy she had dreamt of marrying when she was older. At dancing classes, she enjoyed the pleasure of being held in the arms of young men. At the same time, she was aware of her mother's disgust for the sexual act. As a girl, Simone had been aware of - and frustrated by -

---

(35) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 110-111.

In Baudelaire (1947), Sartre had analysed in similar terms what he considered to be a dichotomous subject/object relationship to the self. He claimed that Baudelaire had "une si violente horreur de lui-même qu'on peut considérer sa vie comme une longue suite de punitions qu'il s'inflige". (Gallimard, Idées, p. 103). In order to punish himself, "il tente de se voir comme s'il était un autre". (p. 105). Hence: "il introduit en soi l'oeil des autres pour se saisir comme un autre". (p. 106). Sartre explains the phenomenon thus: "si nous nous coulons dans la robe du juge, si notre conscience réflexive mime le dégoût et l'indignation à l'égard de la conscience réfléchie, si, pour qualifier celle-ci, elle emprunte à la morale apprise ses notions et ses mesures, nous pouvons nous donner un moment l'illusion d'avoir introduit une distance entre le réfléchi et la réflexion. (p. 105).

Baudelaire, as a social person, is condemning the autonomous person, whereas Zaza, as an autonomous person, despises the social person (the "feminine" woman) and is condemning herself for her anticipated sexual role. However, both are similar in that they use masochistic behaviour not to redeem themselves in their own eyes so much as to express their self-contempt. Note that the sexual interpretation of self-punishment does not exist in Sartre's theory: this is Beauvoir's hypothesis of the cause of bodily punishment in adolescent girls.

(36) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 110-111.

(37) ibid.

Zaza's overwhelming love for her mother. It was only later that she realized the extent to which Zaza identified with her mother, to the point of feeling "une répulsion physique" towards her father. Beauvoir explains:

Sa mère l'avertit très tôt, et avec une crudité méchante, des réalités sexuelles: Zaza comprit précocement que Madame Mabille avait haï dès la première nuit et à jamais les étreintes conjugales. (MJFR, 117).

The fact that her mother had had nine children, despite her attitude towards sex, seems to have made a deep impression on Zaza. Since she could only have presumed that her mother would have consented to sex for the sake of her husband, it could only be interpreted as a necessary submission to the man's will. When Beauvoir interprets the axe incident as a symbolic gesture, she is suggesting that Zaza was, at the same time, protesting against and accepting her own destiny as a woman:

Les manies sadico-masochistes impliquent une fondamentale mauvaise foi: si la fillette s'y livre, c'est qu'elle accepte, à travers ses refus, son avenir de femme; elle ne mutilerait pas haineusement sa chair si d'abord elle ne se reconnaissait pas comme chair. (38).

Whether or not Simone de Beauvoir's interpretation of Zaza's self-mutilation - and that of young girls in general - is correct, it is significant that she sees it in this light. It is indicative of her own attitude, as an adolescent, to sexuality. Even in Le Deuxième Sexe, written when she was forty, Beauvoir wrote that the woman's sexual initiation "constitue toujours une sorte de viol". (39)

---

(38) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 111.

(39) ibid., p. 131.

In 1972, Beauvoir spoke out against the idea which some feminists had taken up, that "tout coit est un viol". She said that she even believed that her statement, in Le Deuxième Sexe, that "la première pénétration est toujours un viol" was too extreme. To make these claims was to "retomber dans tous les mythes masculins qui font du membre viril un soc, une épée, une arme dominante". (Tout compte fait, 507). In an interview with Alice Schwartz in Le Nouvel Observateur, (14 février, 1972, p.47-54) she declared: "La question est d'inventer de nouveaux rapports sexuels non oppressifs".

### III. Maturity.

It was not until she was in her early twenties that Simone de Beauvoir began to observe her body. She began to perceive its needs and desires, to be proud of its prowess, to be aware of its weakness. Whenever it did not conflict with her will, she took tremendous pride and pleasure in her body. At those times in which it enabled her to be an active subject, she admired the capacity and physical endurance of her body and derived satisfaction from its subordination to her mind.

In Le Deuxieme Sexe, Beauvoir bemoaned the fact that a woman rarely has the opportunity to confront the world alone, "unique et souveraine".<sup>(40)</sup> When reading such passages, one is reminded of the solitary and strenuous walking trips which Simone has made in her life. They began in 1931, when Simone started her teaching career with a post at Marseille. Exploring the Mediterranean landscape became a "passion". At twenty-three, she writes:

Je n'avais jamais pratiqué de sport; je prenais d'autant plus de plaisir à utiliser mon corps, jusqu'aux limites de ses forces. (FA, 97).

These exhausting excursions were a "fête" (FA, 94): a glorious, Dionysian celebration of the body. Beauvoir writes:

Je ne pensais à rien sinon aux bêtes, aux fleurs, aux cailloux, aux horizons, au plaisir d'avoir des jambes, un estomac, des poumons, et de battre mes propres records. (FA, 384).

In her description of these hikes, the profusion of verbs, which indicate struggle with and eventual conquest of nature, betray a delight in sheer physical effort:

Je grimpai sur toutes les rocailles, je rôdai dans toutes ses ruelles; (FA, 94) [...] je m'accrochais aux flancs des collines, je me faufilais à travers les garrigues, (FA, 96) [...] je me hissai avec peine dans des gorges escarpées. (FA, 98).

---

(40) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 556.

The mental pleasure in the ultimate achievement was the source of the physical pleasure - the struggle. "L'effort haletant de l'escalade" provided "la volupté de la délivrance, quand le sac glisse des épaules". (FC, 119). As a measure of the effort involved in the exercise, Simone tells us:

Au début, je me limitais à cinq ou six heures de marche, puis je combinai des promenades de neuf à dix heures: il m'arriva d'abattre plus de quarante kilomètres. Je ratissai systématiquement la région. (FA, 95).

Simone's pride in her transcendent body was all the greater when her physical endurance proved superior to that of male colleagues. An amusing episode - about which Simone is unable to conceal a certain smugness - was when, in the summer of 1939, Fernand Gérassi, Stépha's husband, decided to join her for a few days, hiking in Provence. Fernand had gone to fight in the Spanish Civil War in 1936 and was presumably quite hardy:

Fernand [...] me rejoignit à Puget-Théniers, chaussé de superbes souliers cloutés. Le premier jour, nous marchâmes gaiement pendant huit heures, à travers des collines rouges. Le lendemain, nous allâmes en neuf heures, par la montagne, de Guillaume à Saint-Etienne-de-Tinée. Il se coucha, le soir, tremblant de fièvre. Je fis sans lui, le jour suivant, une longue escalade et, quand je le retrouvai le soir, il avait décidé de repartir pour Nice. Je poursuivis ma route sans lui. (FA, 384).

Simone was used to good health and was proud to be able to make demands on her body. Her attitude reveals a certain stoicism. When she fell ill, early in 1937, she at first did not take it seriously:

J'avais l'habitude de traiter par le mépris les gripes, les angines, les fièvres; [...] enfin, je n'allais pas céder à un microbe. (FA, 299).

After a long period of hospitalization, her doctor sent her to convalesce in the south of France where she soon started to resume her long walks - against his strict orders.

Beauvoir's stoicism was doubtless reinforced by Sartre's attitude, for he liked to consider bodily weakness a sign of self-indulgence. Although it is clear that Simone could hardly be accused of hypochondria, it is equally evident that she could not expect much sympathy from Sartre. In the summer of the same year, in Greece with Sartre and Bost, Simone became sea-sick going from Mykonos to Delos. She writes that Sartre (who, at this stage of his life had never experienced nausea, (TCF, 284) ) was "indifférent à ces spasmes qu'il imputait à ma mauvaise volonté". (FA, 314).

### III. 1. Sexuality.

In the domain of sexuality, Simone's attitude to her body oscillates from joy to shame, depending on whether her body dominates her will or is subordinate to it, and whether she feels she is regarded as a subject or as an object by the Other.

When Beauvoir described the difficulties of attempting to be a "femme indépendante" in Le Deuxième Sexe, she wrote:

C'est dans le domaine sexuel que les problèmes les plus difficiles vont se poser.<sup>(41)</sup>

She outlined various problems in this essay with great understanding; however, these problems are scarcely touched upon in the memoirs. Indeed, she gives us very little indication of her sexual self in the autobiography. Once again it will be necessary to look outside the memoirs in order to build up a picture of this aspect of her experience and to explain her reticence.

---

(41) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 526.

In the domain of sexuality, despite her attempts to rid herself of it, Simone's cultural conditioning remains conspicuous. One consequence of her puritanical upbringing are the omissions in the autobiography. Another is a certain ambivalence in her attitude to sex - an ambivalence which was created and reinforced by the puritanism and sexism which prevailed in society.

Beauvoir's adolescent attitude - "tout va bien si le corps obéit à la tête et au coeur mais il ne doit pas prendre les devants" (MJFR, 290) - was never to change fundamentally. She was happy when "sexualité", "actes", "émotions", "paroles", "désir" and "plaisir" all formed part of a "totalité". (FA, 144).

Despite her ambivalence towards the female body, Simone de Beauvoir reveals herself, in the autobiography and fiction, as a sensual, physical person. Her body was often the source of intense pleasure. Simone had just turned twenty-one when she met André Herbaud (René Maheu) and he seems to have been the first person seriously to attract her as a sexual being. Her portrait of him, in Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée, is one of the very rare occasions in the autobiography on which she presents to the reader a man as a physical presence. Never again does she describe a man's physical appearance in such detail - or wax so lyrical:

Mon regard [...] se reposait volontiers sur son visage rose qu'éclairaient des yeux d'un bleu enfantin; ses cheveux blonds étaient drus et vivants comme de l'herbe. [...] Malgré l'élégance de son pardessus bleu, de son écharpe claire, de son complet bien coupé, je lui avais trouvé quelque chose de campagnard. (MJFR, 310).

His sexual attraction for Simone is evident:

Herbaud avait un corps. [...] Comme il sentait fièrement dans ses veines la fraîcheur de son sang! Je le regardais arpenter le jardin avec une grâce un peu dégingandée, je regardais ses oreilles, transparentes au soleil comme du sucre rose, et je savais que j'avais à côté de moi non pas un ange, mais un fils des hommes. (MJFR, 313).



The extent to which he tantalized her is apparent, in her description of him, from the way she concentrates on his mouth: his "grand sourire humide", (MJFR, 313), "sa lippe ironique", "sa voix gouailleuse", (MJFR, 310), and above all, his laugh:

ce qu'il y avait de plus irrésistible chez lui, c'était son rire; [...] quand son rire explosait, tout me paraissait nouveau, surprenant, délicieux. (MJFR, 313).

Not only was she intensely aware of his body: Herbaud also made her conscious of her own. For the first time, Simone was delighted to be more than "une âme", "un pur esprit":

je me réjouissais qu'il me traitât en créature terrestre. (MJFR, 313).

She relished the attention he paid to her body, his affectionate comments on the way she walked, and on her "drôle de voix rauque". (MJFR, 322).

Beauvoir's comment in Le Deuxième Sexe is significant:

Il n'est pas vrai, comme on l'a prétendu parfois, que la vierge ne connaisse pas le désir et que ce soit l'homme qui éveille sa sensualité; cette légende trahit encore une fois le goût de domination du mâle qui veut qu'en sa compagne rien ne soit autonome, pas même l'envie qu'elle a de lui; [...] la plupart des jeunes filles appellent fiévreusement des caresses avant qu'aucune main les ait jamais effleurées. (42)

Simone met Jean-Paul Sartre in July of the same year - 1929. Although any sense of physical attraction for him - such as she had felt for René Maheu - is missing in the autobiography, she was captivated by his mind and his personality. Maheu had left to join his wife in the provinces and, for the two weeks of the competitive oral examination, Beauvoir writes of herself and Sartre:

nous ne nous quittâmes guère que pour dormir. (MJFR, 338).

---

(42) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 135.

In the agrégation, Sartre came first and Beauvoir second, (a fact which she modestly does not mention) and this double triumph can only have further reinforced their bond. Simone left Paris at the beginning of August to spend the summer with her family in Limousin and, although less than a month had elapsed since she had first met Sartre, she writes:

Quand je le quittai au début d'août, je savais que plus jamais il ne sortirait de ma vie. (MJFR, 344).

Sartre joined her in Limousin for almost two weeks, staying in La Boule d'Or, a nearby hotel. They spent the days together in a meadow far removed from Simone's family and, according to Simone, they talked non-stop. Simone returned to Paris in September and moved into her own room in her grandmother's house, where she was accorded unprecedented freedom to do as she pleased.

Je payais un loyer à ma grand-mère et elle me traitait avec autant de discrétion que ses autres pensionnaires; personne ne contrôlait mes allées et venues. (FA, 16).

Sartre returned to Paris from elsewhere in the middle of October and lived equally freely, it seems, with his grandparents. The autobiography leads us to assume that Simone's "initiation sexuelle" occurred soon after they met again in Paris, for Simone writes:

Lorsque je le retrouvai, en octobre, j'avais liquidé mon passé; je m'engageais sans réserve dans notre histoire. (FA, 18) (43)

Simone was obviously ready for a sexual relationship. Very much in love with Sartre, she was impatient to discover eroticism for herself. She tells us this much:

J'avais cessé avec enthousiasme d'être un pur esprit; quand le coeur, la tête et la chair sont à l'unisson, prendre corps est une grande fête. Je ne connus d'abord que la joie. (FA, 67).

---

(43) In an interview with Catherine Chaine, in Le Nouvel Observateur, 638, (31 janvier - 6 février 1977), Sartre maintains that their "véritable liaison" began in November 1929.

Hers was obviously what Simone describes in Le Deuxième Sexe as "le cas le plus favorable à une initiation sexuelle":

celui où sans violence ni surprise, sans consigne fixe ni délai précis, la jeune fille apprend lentement à vaincre sa pudeur, à se familiariser avec son partenaire, à aimer ses caresses. (44)

It is to the fiction that we must turn, after this, for further indication of Simone's evident sensuality and of the pleasure she derived from her body where there was also mutual affection and respect. In L'Invitée, which Beauvoir wrote sporadically between 1938 and 1941, she describes the "désir étouffant"<sup>(45)</sup> that the thirty old Françoise felt for twenty year old Gerbert when they were hiking together in the mountains, and her physical and emotional happiness when they eventually began to spend the nights in each other's arms. The parallels between Gerbert and Jacques-Laurent Bost are numerous. In both L'Invitée and La Force de l'âge, Beauvoir comments on "la blancheur de son sourire",<sup>(46)</sup> his youth, his charm and his appeal. There is every reason to suppose that Gerbert is modelled on Bost and that he and Simone did have a sexual relationship in 1936, around the time of the dissolution of the "trio" which Beauvoir and Sartre had formed with Olga Kosakievicz early in 1935.<sup>(47)</sup>

In Les Mandarins, which Beauvoir completed in 1953, she modelled the love affair between Anne and the American writer Lewis Brogan on her relationship with Nelson Algren, whom she met in Chicago, in February 1947.

---

(44) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 154.

(45) L'Invitée. Paris: Gallimard, Livre de poche, 1943, p. 454.

(46) L'Invitée, p. 444. La Force de l'âge, p.294.

(47) Bost was twenty and Beauvoir twenty-eight in 1936. He was an ex-pupil of Sartre's and a close friend of them both. He later married Olga Kosakievicz.

Although she writes about this in the autobiography, it is only in the novel that Beauvoir describes their physical relationship. One year younger than Simone, "Lewis" was "un homme assez jeune, assez grand"<sup>(48)</sup> with "une bouche sensible, des narines un peu farouches". His eyes were "d'un gris-vert bien défini" and "ses cheveux" were "décidément blonds".<sup>(49)</sup> When they became lovers, "Anne" felt only pleasure - for each regarded the other as an equal subject, rather than as a sexual object:

Il était nu, j'étais nue, et je n'éprouvais aucune gêne; son regard ne pouvait pas me blesser, il ne me jugeait pas, il ne me préférait rien. [...] Son désir me transfigurait. Moi qui depuis si longtemps n'avait plus de goût, plus de forme, je possédais de nouveau des seins, un ventre, un sexe, une chair; j'étais nourissante comme le pain, odorante comme la terre. C'était si miraculeux que je n'ai pas pensé à mesurer mon temps ni mon plaisir; je sais seulement que lorsque nous nous sommes endormis on entendait le faible pépiement de l'aube.<sup>(50)</sup>

The same joy is apparent in Simone's description of the beginning of her sexual relationship with Claude Lanzmann, in July 1952. Lanzmann was twenty-five when he joined the editorial board of Les Temps Modernes. Beauvoir writes:

J'avais beaucoup de sympathie pour Lanzmann. Beaucoup de femmes le trouvaient attirant: moi aussi. Il tenait d'un ton détendu les propos les plus extrêmes et sa tournure d'esprit ressemblait à celle de Sartre. Son humour faussement naïf égayait beaucoup ces séances. (FC, 271).

July was ending and Simone was about to leave with Sartre for Italy for two months when Lanzmann rang to invite her to see a film - "n'importe lequel." (FC, 301). In a brief passage, Beauvoir says a great deal about the importance of being sexually desirable and the joy of acknowledging one's own body - things she had told herself were not so very important:

---

(48) Les Mandarins. Paris: Gallimard, 1954. (Coll. Folio, 1972, tome II, p.11).

(49) *ibid.*, p. 29.

(50) *ibid.*, p. 39.

J'hésitais; mes dernières journées étaient chargées, mais je savais que je ne devais pas refuser. Nous prîmes rendez-vous. A ma grande surprise, dès que j'eus raccroché, je fondis en larmes. (FC, 301-302).

Five days later, Beauvoir left to drive down to Italy:

debout au bord du trottoir, Lanzmann agitait la main tandis que j'embrayais. Quelque chose était arrivé; quelque chose, j'en étais sûre, commençait. J'avais retrouvé un corps. (FC, 302).

Lanzmann returned to Paris two weeks after Beauvoir, and she writes:

nos corps se retrouvèrent dans la joie. (FC, 304).

It is clear, even from these brief allusions to sex, that Beauvoir was a sensual person who was able to derive great pleasure from her body. However, it is equally clear, when one looks at the whole of her work in the light of her biography, that there was a tension, in her life, between her sexuality and her situation as a woman in society. A number of negative influences constantly marred her capacity to enjoy sex as a free, dignified being. I propose to look at the way in which the sexism, puritanism and misogyny which were so prevalent in Beauvoir's environment affected her own attitude to sex.

Let us first consider sexism. Oddly, it is only in the first of the four volumes of the autobiography that Beauvoir makes explicit reference to the double sexual standard. In the later volumes, where her adult experience of this would have been enlightening, she makes no reference to the question. However, it is apparent - from fleeting comments scattered throughout her work - that she herself learnt to apply different standards to the sexual behaviour of men and women - and has continued to do so. The reasons for her silence about her own experience of the sexual double standard and for her own sexist assumptions will become more obvious as we look at all we know about this realm of her experience.

Simone learnt at an early age that men and women were judged according to quite different criteria. In Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée and in Une Mort très douce, the brief account of her mother's life and death, she shows how women, just like men, were brought up to excuse men their self-indulgences and yet to judge women with extreme severity. Her own parents were typical in this regard. Beauvoir relates how her father's best friend was living with a woman out of wedlock and that this in no way affected the frequency with which he was invited to the house, but his "concubine" was never asked to accompany him. She adds:

Ma mère ne songea jamais à protester contre une inconséquence que sanctionnaient les usages mondains. (MJFR, 40).

Simone's mother had naturally been a virgin when she married Georges; he, however, had had affairs with numerous women - and even kept a photograph of his "dernière maîtresse" ("brilliante et jolie") in his study.<sup>(51)</sup> It was possibly not until she was an adult that Simone realized where her father was actually going when he left the house, "presque chaque soir", (MJFR, 156), during her adolescence. Simone was about fourteen when her father, in order to try to regain his youthful libidinal verve, began to resort to the "professionnelles du café de Versailles ou aux pensionnaires du Sphinx".<sup>(52)</sup> Madame de Beauvoir, at thirty-five, had lost her "première fraîcheur".<sup>(53)</sup> She did not make a scene when her husband returned in the early hours of the morning smelling of alcohol and "racontant d'un air embarrassé des histoires de bridge ou de poker". Simone comments:

elle le croyait peut-être, tant elle était entraînée à fuir les vérités gênantes.<sup>(54)</sup>

---

(51) Une Mort très douce, p. 52.

(52) ibid., p. 55.

(53) ibid., p. 54.

(54) ibid., p. 55.

Simone was fifteen and a half when her cousin Titite, Jacques' sister, became engaged. Because of her unconcealed pleasure in her fiancé's company, Titite was the target of much criticism by relatives:

certaines tantes chuchotaient qu'en tête-à-tête avec son fiancé elle se tenait mal: très mal. (MJFR, 147).

And yet the same sollicitous relatives were the first to be anxious about the young men of the family being too restrained. Indeed, when she - and Jacques - were seventeen, Simone relates that his mother:

avait déploré à mots couverts devant mes parents que Jacques fût trop sage. (MJFR, 166).

Tante Germaine's worries would have met with sympathy, for, as Simone points out:

Mon père, la plupart des écrivains et, somme toute, le consentement universel encourageaient les garçons à jeter leur gourme. (MJFR, 166).

This was, in fact, what Jacques proceeded to do, having a liaison with a young woman called Magda, who, writes Simone:

faisait partie de ces inquiétants prodiges qu'on rencontre la nuit, dans les bars. (MJFR, 266).

As was the custom, Jacques later dropped this girl from a lower social class to marry a proper "jeune fille" - one who possessed both a dowry and innocence. Simone tells us a similar story about her cousin Robert. (55)

René Maheu, too, despite his progressive attitude in most areas, had exactly the same attitude to women as Simone's father - and everyone else she met.

Un homme qui demeurait vierge passé dix-huit ans, c'était à ses yeux un névrosé; mais il prétendait que la femme ne devait se donner qu'en légitimes noces. (MJFR, 324).

Maheu was married and obviously granted himself sexual licence, although - given the contempt he expressed for "femmes faciles" (MJFR, 324) - he would have been disgusted had his wife behaved similarly. He flirted with Simone until early in 1931<sup>(56)</sup> and, at the same time, he told her that he was interested in a young lady from Coutances.<sup>(57)</sup>

(55) Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée, p. 165.

(56) Witness the episode in La Force de l'âge, p. 60-61.

(57) Maheu was married to Inès Allafort du Verger. Around this time, in February 1931, she gave birth to their only child: a son named Jean.

By the time Simone met Jean-Paul Sartre in mid-1929, she was no longer as idealistic as she had once been about applying the same set of rules to men and women alike. It seems that she resigned herself, at this stage, to a double standard of sexuality. She accepted Sartre's - and her father's - liking for libertinage and polygamy. In 1964, describing her father's infidelities, she wrote:

Je ne blâme pas mon père. On sait assez bien que chez l'homme l'habitude tue le désir. (58)

And, in 1970 she wrote, in La Vieillesse:

Sexuellement, on sait que même jeune l'homme éprouve le besoin de changer de partenaire: la monotonie tue chez lui le désir. (59)

To explain a cultural phenomenon, such as this, in terms of biological differences is surprising from the author of Le Deuxième Sexe. Indeed, Simone's own attitude, in this respect, does not differ vastly from her mother's. Furthermore, although she accepted the prospect of Sartre's promiscuity with good grace, she confesses that she continued, for a long time, to be shocked by women who were promiscuous:

les femmes trop faciles ou trop libres me choquaient. (FA, 40).

It would appear that Simone's spontaneous reaction - like her mother's, although less so - was puritanical. However, just as her mother was obliged to do before her, Simone tended to soften various blows for herself by accepting a double standard of sexuality and making excuses for the behaviour of the man she loved.

Sartre's sexual career must have shocked Simone. He told Catherine Chaine, in an interview in 1977, that he started having sexual encounters at seventeen, "avec des filles qu'on rencontrait au Luxembourg". (60)

---

(58) Une Mort très douce, p. 54.

(59) La Vieillesse, p. 341.

(60) Interview with Catherine Chaine in Le Nouvel Observateur, 638, (31 janvier - 6 février 1977), p. 79.



190.

Shortly before he met Simone - he was twenty-three - he had been on the verge of marriage to a girl in Lyon, a marriage which her parents prohibited, after he had failed the agrégation the first time round. Sartre had also been having an intermittent affair with Simone Jolivet. Beauvoir tells us herself that he had met Mlle. Jolivet when he was nineteen, that their liaison continued for several years and that she kept herself by being a courtesan.

Because of the prevailing double standard, whilst bourgeois young men were gaining experience, bourgeois young women were preserving their virginity at all costs. Naturally, when she eventually did surrender her virginity, the event represented a great deal to a woman. More than a physical change, it was a psychological change. It meant a break with her past and inevitably altered the woman's self-image. In Le Deuxième Sexe, Beauvoir had described defloration as "une rupture abrupte avec le passé",<sup>(61)</sup> "un définitif sevrage"<sup>(62)</sup> and, hence, a "crise".<sup>(63)</sup> In the autobiography she writes that when she was reunited with Sartre, in October 1929, after the summer holidays -: "j'avais liquidé mon passé" (FA, 18).

As she indicates, losing her virginity, at twenty-one and a half did mean "liquidating" her past. It made her unacceptable for marriage in many circles. Not only would the news have horrified her parents, but many more ostensibly broadminded people of her own generation - such as René Maheu - would have been shocked that she had "abandoned" herself outside "légitimes noces". (MJFR, 324). Her courage was all the more

---

(61) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 132.

(62) *ibid.*, p. 248.

(63) *ibid.*, p. 247.

remarkable when one bears in mind that there was no discussion of marriage at this stage, and furthermore, Simone had to accustom herself to the fact that Sartre "se plaisait dans la compagnie des femmes" and that "il n'entendait pas [ ... ] renoncer pour toujours à leur séduisante diversité". (FA, 26). It is true that Sartre was the first person Simone had met who maintained that she should preserve herself from marriage. Like the Nizans, who "revendiquaient, entre époux, une entière licence sexuelle", (MJFR, 290), Sartre believed that he and Simone had an equal right to enjoy the "séduisante diversité" of other people. Nevertheless, - although Beauvoir has never admitted this herself - given social attitudes and their conditioning as a male and a female, Sartre certainly had an advantage.<sup>(64)</sup> I will return to this point when I discuss their sexual relationship later in this chapter.

Other than sexism, another negative influence which impaired Simone's capacity to regard sex as a wholesome activity was puritanism. She writes:

Sartre, la plupart de mes amis, moi-même, nous étions des puritains. (FC, 306).

and she uses this word to describe herself on a number of occasions -

---

(64) Indeed, when I asked her, in an interview in November 1976, whether she thought, given cultural conditions, that their arrangement placed her at a disadvantage vis à vis Sartre, she emphatically refuted the suggestion and changed the emphasis of the question from meeting a partner to leaving a partner:

"Une femme peut quitter un homme beaucoup plus facilement en bonne amitié qu'un homme ne peut quitter une femme, qui se sentira toujours, elle, rejetée, minimisée, etc. Je crois que c'est plus facile pour la femme."

This strange answer can only be explained by an unwillingness to face certain unpleasant truths about her own situation. Why does Beauvoir concentrate on the woman who leaves the man, referring to the relative ease with which she can do this, when what she describes is the situation of the woman left by a man? She makes it appear as if she were always the one to leave her men, but in the case of Algren and Lanzmann, it was they who initiated the end of their liaison. And it is obvious that she felt "rejetée" and "minimisée" - as she says women do, "toujours".

throughout the autobiography. After her sheltered and straitlaced upbringing, she was shocked - as we have seen - by any sign that sexuality was being taken lightly. She gives us numerous examples of this. At twenty, she was so disconcerted when Fernand told her that his painting of a nude woman hanging on Stépha's wall was Stépha herself, that the couple - not yet married - ended up having to deny it. (MJFR, 289). Just before she met Sartre, Beauvoir tells us that she was horrified by Nizan and his wife advocating sexual "licence" within the couple, and the very term "licence", which she uses, is disapproving, suggesting an excessive licentiousness. In the early thirties, she and Sartre were shocked by Freud's "pansexualisme", (FA, 25) by D.H. Lawrence's "cosmologie phallique" (FA, 52) and the way in which Malraux used the idea of eroticism in La Condition humaine, which appeared in 1933. (65)

The last occasion in the autobiography in which Beauvoir writes in detail about sexuality, describes the conflict between her sexual desires and her puritanical attitude. This passage, situated in La Force de l'âge, reveals the self-loathing she felt at a period when her body was unable to accept a given situation with the grace she expected of it. At the beginning of November, 1929 - a month or so after they had first become lovers - Sartre began his military service at Saint-Cyr. In January he was transferred to a meteorological station at Tours. Apart from Sundays, he was free for one week every month. Simone de Beauvoir explains, with great candour, one effect this schedule had on her: "le besoin" tormented her and, in turn, she was plagued by self-disgust:

---

(65) Nous détestons la notion d'érotisme - dont Malraux usait abondamment dans La Condition humaine - parce qu'elle implique une spécialisation qui à la fois exalte exagérément le sexe et l'avilit. (FA, 144).

Un mal secret pourrissait mes os. Un mal honteux. J'avais secoué mon éducation puritaine juste assez pour pouvoir me réjouir de mon corps sans contrainte, pas assez pour consentir à ce qu'il m'incommodât; affamé, mendiant, plaintif, il me répugnait. (FA, 68).

When they were together, on Sundays in Tours, both of them were too embarrassed to suggest a hotel room "en plein jour". Such a calculated act would have appeared to them almost indecent. Simone explains:

je refusais que l'amour prît la figure d'une entreprise concertée: je voulais qu'il fût libre, mais non délibéré. Je n'admettais ni qu'on cédât contre son gré à des désirs ni qu'on organisât de sang-froid ses plaisirs. (FA, 67).

It is the same sort of dilemma which Beauvoir describes in Les Mandarins. The thirty-nine year old heroine, Anne, is shocked by her sudden longing to be in the arms of a man again:

je me suis considérée avec scandale: [ ... ] Qu'est-ce que ces moeurs de femelle en chaleur? (66)

The violence of physical desire was something Beauvoir knew well, but because, to her mind, impregnated as it was with Catholic thinking, lust without love was an ignominy, she merely resented her body whenever its desires did not accord with her will. Her puritanism was reinforced by the sexual double standard: had she been a man she would doubtless have brought herself to heed the body's desires, as did the men around her. Since she was a woman, she reproached herself for what she considered to be animalistic lust.

Finally, in order to understand Simone's attitude to sex, we need to look at the question of misogyny. The disgust Simone felt for female physicality as an adolescent was later reinforced by the attitude of certain males - particularly, I would suggest, by the attitude of Jean-Paul Sartre. This is borne out by the fact that, in 1949, in Le Deuxième Sexe,

Beauvoir wrote at length about l'horreur que l'homme éprouve à l'égard de la femme".<sup>(67)</sup> She went so far as to reinterpret the phenomenon known as the Oedipus complex in this light. Thus, according to her, the young boy gradually becomes aware of his mother as flesh and this horrifies him:

il lui paraît gênant, obscène de la découvrir comme chair, il évite de penser à son corps; dans l'horreur qu'il éprouve à l'égard de son père ou d'un second mari, ou d'un amant, il y a moins de jalousie que de scandale. <sup>(68)</sup>

This interpretation of the male Oedipus complex probably tells us as much about Jean-Paul Sartre as about Beauvoir. It is apparently a description of Simone's own adolescent repudiation of her mother's body, for which, we remember, she felt "une répulsion inquiète",<sup>(69)</sup> when she began to realize what was involved in having a female body. The fact that Beauvoir took the trouble to spell out "un second mari" strongly suggests that it also describes Sartre's reaction to his mother when he was eleven years old and his mother remarried.<sup>(70)</sup>

In L'Être et le néant (1943) which Sartre discussed with Beauvoir at length in the thirties, Sartre referred to the "obscénité" of the female

---

(67) Le Deuxième Sexe I, p. 261.

(68) *ibid.*, p. 307. (italics mine).

(69) Une Mort très douce, p. 28.

(70) In the film about him, Sartre, referring to the crisis in his life when his mother remarried, talks of a "rupture intérieure". He claims: "je n'ai jamais imaginé quelque chose de sexuel, ce qui tient à ce qu'ils se tenaient très bien et que par ailleurs ma mère était plutôt une mère qu'une femme". Nevertheless, it seems most likely that he did, in fact, become painfully conscious of his mother as a "femme" - a sexual being - around this time. Soon after the marriage, his mother and M. Mancy went to live at La Rochelle, where Jean-Paul was sent to school for a time. In this port environment, the boys were more sexually precocious and liked to boast of their exploits - more often than not imaginary. Jean-Paul told them that he had a girl in Paris with whom he used to go to a hotel. Soon, too, he started to steal money from his mother with which to buy cakes for schoolmates whom he wanted to impress.

sexual organs. In accordance with the Freudian idea of women's "genital deficiency"<sup>(71)</sup> and their penis envy, Sartre suggests that a feeling of inferiority in women (which was stressed by Adler) is based on their actual anatomical inferiority:

L'obscénité du sexe féminin est celle de toute chose béante: c'est un appel d'être, comme d'ailleurs tous les trous; en soi la femme appelle une chair étrangère qui doit la transformer en plénitude d'être par pénétration et dilution. Et inversement la femme sent sa condition comme un appel, précisément parce qu'elle est "trouée". C'est la véritable origine du complexe adlérien.<sup>(72)</sup>

Sartre's discussion of "le visqueux" and its association, in his mind, with female genitalia which "suck in" the penis, does not betray a great fondness for the female body. He writes:

Jetez une substance visqueuse [sur le sol]: elle s'étire, elle s'étale, elle s'aplatit, elle est molle; touchez le visqueux, il ne fuit pas: il cède. [...] Le visqueux est docile. [...] Je veux lâcher le visqueux et il adhère à moi, il me pompe, il m'aspire; [...] c'est une activité molle, baveuse et féminine d'aspiration.<sup>(73)</sup>

In Sartre's Huis clos (1944), Estelle, the embodiment of seductive femininity, suddenly appears to Garcin in this odious light, and he pushes her away, revolted:

Tu me dégoûtes; [...] Tu es moite! tu es molle! Tu es une pierre, tu es un marécage.<sup>(74)</sup>

In a psychoanalytical interpretation of La Nausée, Serge Doubrovsky claims that Sartre reveals "une très forte angoisse de castration", accompanied by "une très forte angoisse complémentaire de sodomisation".<sup>(75)</sup>

(71) Freud: "Femininity" in New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, Pelican, 1977, p. 166.

(72) L'Être et le néant, p. 676.

(73) ibid., p. 671.

(74) Huis clos, p. 69.

(75) Serge Doubrovsky. "Le Neuf de Coeur. Fragment d'une psycholecture de La Nausée in Obliques, 18-19, 1979. (Numéro spécial sur Sartre) p. 71.

Both castration and sodomization are experienced as "féminisation" (3) and, according to Doubrovsky, Sartre's "dégoût radical du sexe féminin"<sup>(76)</sup> reflects a fear of being transformed into a woman. He reminds us that Sartre told Beauvoir in an interview:

j'ai toujours pensé qu'il y avait en moi une espèce de femme.<sup>(77)</sup>

It may well be that in the case of Sartre, as much as in the case of Beauvoir, the repulsion each felt towards female sexuality was actually a horror of his/her own "feminization" and the passivity which this implied to them. This would greatly support my claim, at the beginning of the chapter, that cultural influences are decisive - and not the ontological and biological explanations which Sartre and Beauvoir both occasionally put forward.

Whatever the reasons for it, it is generally agreed<sup>(78)</sup> that sexual desire was mixed, for Sartre, with a certain disgust for the female body. This must have reinforced Simone's own horror of female sexuality. As she says herself, a woman's response to eroticism is inevitably influenced by her first lover:

Tous les psychiatres s'accordent sur l'extrême importance que prennent pour elle ses débuts érotiques: ils ont une répercussion dans toute la suite de sa vie.<sup>(79)</sup>

It is quite striking to observe, in Le Deuxième Sexe, the extent to which Simone takes over Sartre's personal phobia to describe women's impression of themselves. Using the same images as Sartre, she writes:

(76) *ibid.*, p. 69.

(77) "Simone de Beauvoir interroge Jean-Paul Sartre" in L'Arc, 61, 1975, p. 3 - 12.

(78) As well as Doubrovsky's work, there is a commentary on this aspect of Sartre in William Barrett's Irrational Man (N.Y. Doubleday Anchor Books, 1962) and an article entitled "Holes and Slime: Sexism in Sartre's Psychoanalysis" in Women and Philosophy. Toward a Theory of Liberation. (Ed. C. Gould and M.W. Wartofsky) N.Y. Putnam's Sons, 1976, p. 112-127.

(79) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 130.

L'homme fond sur sa proie comme l'aigle et le milan; elle guette comme la plante carnivore, le marécage où insectes et enfants s'enlisent; elle est succion, ventouse, et visqueux: du moins est-ce ainsi que sourdement elle se sent. (80)

The idea of a "plante carnivore" dramatically reflects Sartre's fear of castration, but to imply that all women see sexual intercourse in this way is an unjustified generalization.

Sartre was not alone amongst Beauvoir's contemporaries to manifest fear of and disgust for the female body. In Le Deuxième Sexe, Beauvoir draws our attention to Michel Leiris' attitude to female sexuality, which he described in L'Age d'homme. Leiris, who had become a good friend of Simone de Beauvoir and Sartre at the time of the Liberation, writes:

J'ai couramment tendance à regarder l'organe féminin comme une chose sale ou comme une blessure, pas moins attirant pour cela, mais dangereuse en elle-même, comme tout ce qui est sanglant, muqueux, contaminé. (81)

Hence, he writes, he tended to look upon coitus as "un acte [...] éminemment dangereux." (82)

Another aspect of the misogyny prevalent in French society at this time was the way it was taken for granted that bourgeois males have recourse to prostitutes. Both Sartre and Leiris casually refer to brothels and prostitutes in their writing. In Les Mandarins, Beauvoir writes of Robert Dubreuilh, a character closely resembling Sartre:

ça lui paraissait normal de ramasser dans un bar une jolie putain et de passer une heure avec elle. (83)

(80) *ibid.*, p. 148.

(81) Quoted by Beauvoir in Le Deuxième Sexe I, p. 271-272.

(82) Michel Leiris. L'age d'homme, p.114.

(83) Les Mandarins I, p. 115.



In a society where it was considered commonplace and not unrespectable for a man to be able to "louer une femme et lui faire tout ce qu'il [ ] plaît",<sup>(84)</sup> it would obviously be difficult for women to develop a healthy pride in their bodies.

Having gained some idea of the cultural conditioning: the sexism, puritanism and misogyny which surrounded Simone de Beauvoir, I propose to examine why it was that Beauvoir had written, in Le Deuxième Sexe, that "les problèmes les plus difficiles" for a woman aspiring to independence occur in "le domaine sexuel".<sup>(85)</sup>

Since she describes her love for Sartre as "un amour nécessaire" around which any other loves were mere "amours contingentes", (FA, 27), it behoves us to look first at this relationship - concentrating on its physical aspect - in order to see how it influenced Simone's sexual relationship with other men.

About her physical relationship with Sartre, Beauvoir tells us very little. However, what she has to say, in Le Deuxième Sexe, about the necessity of both spontaneity and fidelity for eroticism gives us an indication:

la fidélité est nécessaire à l'amour sexuel du fait que le désir de deux amants épris enveloppe leur singularité; ils refusent que celle-ci soit contestée par des expériences étrangères, ils se veulent l'un pour l'autre irremplaçables; mais cette fidélité n'a de sens qu'autant qu'elle est spontanée; et spontanément la magie de l'érotisme se dissipe assez vite. <sup>(86)</sup>

---

(84) Leiris. L'Age d'homme, p. 66.

(85) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 526.

(86) ibid., p. 226.

Beauvoir maintains that even independence within a couple cannot preserve "la magie de l'érotisme". She was obviously commenting on her relationship with Sartre when she wrote - in 1949:

L'attrait érotique [.] meurt presque aussi sûrement dans l'estime et l'amitié; car deux êtres humains qui se rejoignent dans le mouvement même de leur transcendance, à travers le monde et leurs entreprises communes, n'ont plus besoin de s'unir charnellement; et même, du fait que cette union a perdu sa signification, ils y répugnent. (87)

Beauvoir even goes so far as to use the word "inceste"<sup>(88)</sup> to describe the nature of eroticism in such a relationship. This idea of a bond between partners which is so strong as to make eroticism appear incestuous is a recurring idea in Beauvoir's work.<sup>(89)</sup> Sartre's work, on the other hand, reveals a fascination with the brother-sister relationship. In Les Mots, Sartre confesses that he had always dreamt of having a little sister:

---

(87) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 226.

(88) ibid.

(89) In another passage in Le Deuxième Sexe, Beauvoir quotes what Montaigne had to say, with his "charmant cynicism" about eroticism within marriage:

"Aussi est-ce une espèce d'inceste d'aller employer à ce parentage vénérable et sacré les efforts et les extravagances de la licence amoureuse." (Essais, L. III, ch. V). (Italics mine). Beauvoir comments that this idea of incest was a convenient justification for him:

"les mâles n'ont eu aucunement scrupule à dénier à leur compagne le bonheur sexuel: il leur a même paru avantageux de lui refuser avec l'autonomie du plaisir les tentations de désir." (Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 209).

Later, as we have seen, she uses a similar argument to Montaigne's herself, declaring: "le mot d'inceste que prononce Montaigne est profond." (Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 226): Was it not also a convenient justification for her, faced as she was with the end of her physical relationship with Sartre?

J'avais une soeur aînée, ma mère, et je souhaitais une soeur cadette. [...] J'ai commis la grave erreur de chercher souvent parmi les femmes cette soeur qui n'avait pas eu lieu. (90)

He adds, in a footnote:

Ce qui me séduisait dans ce lien de famille, c'était moins la tentation amoureuse que l'interdiction de faire l'amour: feu et glace, délices et frustration mêlées l'inceste me plaisait s'il restait platonique. (91)

In La Force de l'âge, Beauvoir explains that those who judge her relationship with Sartre tend to misunderstand its "particularité": "ces signes jumeaux, sur nos fronts". (FA, 30). (92) She adds:

La fraternité qui souda nos vies rendait superflues et dérisoires toutes les attaches que nous aurions pu nous forger. (FA, 30). (93)

Another argument Beauvoir uses to defend the inevitable death of eroticism within the couple is that, after a certain time, the individuals no longer appear to each other as two separate beings, but as one unity. One feels that she used, in thinking of herself and Sartre, the self-avowed romantic cliché: "on ne fait qu'un", (FA, 150) to explain the fact to herself that, after some years, they chose independence and companionship in preference to the life of a couple.

L'érotisme est un mouvement vers l'Autre, c'est là son caractère essentiel; mais au sein du couple les époux deviennent l'un pour l'autre le Même; aucun échange n'est plus possible entre eux, aucun don ni aucune conquête. Aussi s'ils demeurent amants, c'est souvent honteusement: ils sentent que l'acte sexuel n'est plus une expérience intersubjective, dans laquelle chacun se dépasse, mais bien une sorte de masturbation en commun. (94)

(90) Les Mots, p. 48-49. (Italics mine).

(91) *ibid.*

(92) Italics mine.

(93) Italics mine.

(94) Le Deuxième Sexe II, pp. 226-227. Another indication of Beauvoir's acceptance of contemporary cultural values is the way in which she associates masturbation with shame.

In the story L'Age de discrétion, the sixty year old woman reflects on her relationship with her husband, André:

Je nous croyais transparents l'un à l'autre, unis , soudés  
comme des frères siamois. (95)

Simone de Beauvoir does not conceal the fact that she and Sartre stopped sleeping together after a certain time. This was quite possibly around 1945, after Sartre's return from America, when he was enamoured of "M". (96) It was obviously before 1948-1949 when Beauvoir was writing Le Deuxième Sexe and explaining why it was that eroticism in a couple inevitably ceased. In their travels after 1945, it is clear that they had separate rooms, even when they were not staying in one place long enough to work. Simone, uneasy about the extent of Sartre's commitment to "M", asked herself, at this time:

Dans une union qui dure depuis plus de quinze ans, quelle part revient à l'habitude? (FC, 81).

Her diary at this period reveals her "drôle d'état d'angoisse". (FC, 89). In 1947, on a lecturing tour in America, Beauvoir writes that she felt the same "nostalgie" she had described Anne as having in Les Mandarins. (FC, 141). A fleeting kiss from Algren had revived "de brûlants souvenirs d'amour" (97) and she suddenly had an urge to walk arm in arm with a man who - for a time - would be hers. And we will see that she was plunged into depression, when her relationship with Nelson Algren was obviously coming to an end in 1950 and 1951, at the thought that she was growing older and would never again enjoy "la chaleur d'un corps". (FC, 274).

---

(95) La Femme Rompue. Paris: Gallimard, 1967. (Coll. Folio, 1972, p. 41).

(96) "M" was Dolorès V, who, Beauvoir tells us, was "une jeune femme, à demi séparée de son mari" and with "une situation brillante". (FC, 64).

(97) Les Mandarins II, p. 18.

At thirty-seven, Simone de Beauvoir was thus reliving her mother's experience: the man who had been her lover since she was twenty-one was no longer interested in her sexually. There is no indication of the extent to which he had ceased to interest her, or whether that developed as a reaction to Sartre's loss of interest. However, it is evident that it was not nearly so easy for her, as an independent woman, to lead a fulfilled sexual existence as it was for Sartre, as an independent man. (98)

As is always the case when she does not want to admit things to herself, Beauvoir gives us little insight into her actual situation. We have already seen that, rather than resenting Sartre, she was prepared to accept the double sexual standard herself, claiming that men's need for a variety of partners was greater. She also preferred to direct her anger at herself-whom she could control - than at a situation which she felt powerless to change. Thus she expresses horror at her own "moeurs de femelle en chaleur", (99) but never accuses Sartre of philandering.

In the chapter called "La femme indépendante" in Le Deuxième Sexe, Simone de Beauvoir is more explicit than anywhere else about the way in which the professional woman is "divisée entre ses intérêts professionnels et les soucis de sa vocation sexuelle." She continues:

elle a peine à trouver son équilibre; si elle l'assure c'est au prix de concessions, de sacrifices, d'acrobaties qui exigent d'elle une perpétuelle tension. (100)

Although she unfortunately does not elaborate on her own experience of this "perpétuelle tension", we can gain some impression of this from the vague indications which she does give us.

---

(98) Beauvoir makes this point emphatically herself in Le Deuxième Sexe: "il est encore beaucoup plus difficile à la femme qu'à l'homme d'établir avec l'autre sexe les relations qu'elle désire. (II; p. 528). She was referring to erotic relations.

(99) Les Mandarins II, p. 23.

(100) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 539.

One point Beauvoir makes in this chapter is that professional successes are not enough to satisfy a woman's ego. Her whole conditioning - "vingt ans d'attente, de rêve, d'espoir" - has made her dependent on the approbation of "l'Homme" (101)

Il faudrait qu'elle fût élevée exactement comme un garçon pour pouvoir surmonter aisément le narcissisme de l'adolescence: mais elle perpétue dans sa vie d'adulte ce culte du moi auquel toute sa jeunesse l'a inclinée; de ses réussites professionnelles elle fait des mérites dont elle enrichit son image; elle a besoin qu'un regard venu d'en haut révèle et consacre sa valeur. (102)

Part of her "valeur" as a woman is her femininity: the autobiography reveals the joy Simone felt when she was desired, physically, by men whom she respected. In Les Mandarins, comfortable in the arms of Lewis Brogan, Anne reflected:

Rien ne m'était demandé: il suffisait que je sois juste ce que j'étais et un désir d'homme me changeait en une parfaite merveille. (103)

It is surely not coincidental that the reason many of the women in Beauvoir's fiction encourage the attentions of a given man is to compensate for feeling neglected by the man they love. Thus, Françoise in L'Invitée, in love with Pierre, (who is caught up with Xavière), turns to Gerbert. Hélène, in Le Sang des autres, loves Jean Blomart, and since it is unreciprocated, she hopes to gain attention by turning to another man - and becomes pregnant. Anne, in Les Mandarins, seeks comfort from Lewis - for she no longer plays a significant role in the life of her husband, Dubreuilh. In La Femme rompue, Monique's husband is no longer interested in her (and is having an affair with another woman), so she rings up Quillan, because, as she says:

J'avais besoin de m'assurer qu'un homme peut encore me trouver à son goût. (104)

---

(101) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 538.

(102) *ibid.*

(103) Les Mandarins II, p. 41.

(104) La Femme rompue, p. 168.

It seems that, despite Beauvoir's emphatic assertion that a sexual relationship becomes, in the course of time, "une sorte de masturbation en commun", the admission made by the older woman in L'Age de discrétion was true of her:

Ce lien que crée dans un couple le bonheur physique, j'ai tendance à en sous-estimer l'importance. (105)

The need for a man - whether for approbation or to give vent to her sexual needs, or for both - presents another problem for an independent woman. In Le Deuxième Sexe, Beauvoir commented on the hasards - for a woman - of taking the sexual initiative with men. She saw it as less easy for women than for men to "assouvir leurs désirs" whilst preserving their "dignité d'être humain". (106) The woman who desires a man "ne peut guère faire plus que s'offrir; car la plupart des mâles sont âprement jaloux de leur rôle". (107) In public opinion, a "femme libre" was confused with a "femme facile". (108) Beauvoir, who tells us:

Souvent j'ai entendu des adultes déclarer: J'ai horreur qu'une femme prenne l'initiative. (109)

was bound to be affected by this attitude. Not only was she imbued with these prejudices herself - (she writes: les femmes trop faciles ou trop libres me choquaient (FA, 40))- but she knew that, by acting counter to convention, a woman risked "le dédain du mâle". (110)

It is interesting that in both L'Invitée and Les Mandarins it is the women - Françoise and Anne - who take the initiative. In both cases, they are anxious about the personal loss their daring step might incur,

---

(105) La Femme rompue, p. 26.

(106) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 531.

(107) *ibid.*

(108) *ibid.*, p. 532- 533.

(109) *ibid.*

(110) *ibid.*, p. 532.

and I have shown that both incidents were based on Beauvoir's own experience. In L'Invitée, several pages are devoted to Françoise's anguish, for she is anxious to seduce Gerbert without losing his respect or damaging her own pride. It is impossible for her to be devious, and yet she is too shy to be forthright:

Elle aurait honte d'user avec Gerbert de coquetterie maladroite; il aurait mieux valu poursuivre franchement: "Ca vous étonnerait bien si je vous proposais de coucher avec moi?" ou quelque chose de ce genre. Mais ces lèvres refusaient de former ces mots. (111)

She wonders whether Gerbert might possibly "ricaner d'elle en secret." (112) There is a similar scene between Anne and Lewis in Les Mandarins: twelve pages, written from Anne's perspective, of self-conscious plotting and anguish, climaxing in a touching scene in which both she and Lewis reveal how they were attempting to arrange events so that the act of seduction would look both spontaneous and dignified! Such were the problems of establishing a relationship between two subjects - of being a woman considered equal to men in a society in which women were not treated as equals.

Another problem with being considered equal to men - Beauvoir noted - is that such a woman intimidates men. Since his pride is also at stake, a man hesitates to attempt to "seduce" an independent woman. When Françoise eventually plucked up the courage to make a move - and she succeeded in realizing her intentions - Gerbert admitted that he had always been intimidated by her. He told her that he had wanted to kiss her for days: "Seulement je pensais que vous me ririez au nez". (113)

---

(111) L'Invitée, p. 459-460.

(112) ibid., p. 462.

(113) ibid., p. 467.



In Les Mandarins, Anne complains to an acquaintance, Scriassine, that men respect her too much to make advances:

Pour tout le monde, je suis la femme de Dubreuilh, où le docteur Anne Dubreuilh: ça n'inspire que le respect. (114)

In order to combat this problem, "l'intellectuelle" attempts to "nier sa cérébralité comme la femme vieillissante essaie de nier son âge: (115) in both cases, the woman tries to conform to the stereotype of seductive femininity. To Lewis, who only knew what Anne told him about herself, she was primarily a sensuous woman - only later did he discover that she was also extremely intelligent. Anne had been having a discussion with Murray, a friend of Lewis' and for the first time, Lewis glimpsed her acute mind:

Quand nous nous sommes retrouvés dans notre chambre, Lewis m'a dévisagée d'un air intrigué.  
 - Je vais finir par croire qu'il y a un cerveau dans ce petit crâne! m'a-t-il dit.  
 - C'était bien imité, n'est-ce pas? dis-je.  
 - Non: vous avez vraiment un cerveau, dit Lewis. Il continuait à me regarder et il y avait un peu de reproche dans ses yeux: "C'est drôle; jamais je ne pense à vous comme à une femme de tête. Pour moi vous êtes tellement autre chose!  
 - Avec vous, je me sens tellement autre chose! dis-je en venant dans ses bras. (116)

One imagines that this incident may well have taken place between Beauvoir and Algren. Certainly the conflict which arose from her professionalism and her femininity was one which Beauvoir felt deeply. In Le Deuxième Sexe, she wrote:

(114) Les Mandarins I, p. 116.

(115) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 527.

(116) Les Mandarins II, p. 274.

La femme indépendante - et surtout l'intellectuelle qui pense sa situation - souffrira en tant que femelle d'un complexe d'infériorité. (117)

As "une conscience, un sujet", the intellectual woman finds a seductive "feminine" role irritatingly servile and she is conscious of her clumsiness. (118) However, if she resorts to "des armes masculines" in order to seduce, (119) talking instead of listening and, where appropriate, contradicting instead of approving, she displeases the male who prefers "une esclave" to "une semblable". (120) At twenty-one, when René Maheu told her that hers was his first friendship with a woman, Simone replied - doubtless with a degree of mauvaise foi as well as a genuine need of reassurance -: "C'est peut-être que je ne suis pas très féminine". (MJFR, 322 - 323). And, in L'Invitée, Françoise declares ruefully to Gerbert: "Je sais bien que vous me prenez pour un homme." (121) Beauvoir also described in Le Deuxième Sexe the "complexe d'infériorité" which professional women, with less time and inclination to spend on their appearance, (in addition to the problem mentioned above) tend to feel towards other, more "feminine" women.

Sartre's frequent affairs with other women - who were, as far as one can ascertain, nearly all very beautiful and certainly less intellectual than Simone - doubtless exacerbated her complex about her own femininity. Sartre had told her about his ex-mistress, Camille, boasting of her beauty. According to him, she was "belle: d'immenses cheveux blonds, des yeux bleus, la peau la plus fine, un corps alléchant, des chevilles et des poignets parfaits." (FA, 71). When Simone first saw her, she was

---

(117) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 527.

(118) *ibid.*

(119) *ibid.*

(120) *ibid.*, p. 528.

(121) L'Invitée, p. 466.

shattered to discover a "grande poupée de porcelaine" with a round, childish face and a shrill voice "avec des inflexions puériles"! (FA, 77)..

Olga Kosakiewicz was eighteen, beautiful and had a decidedly undisciplined mind when Sartre became infatuated with her in 1935. He obviously told Simone of "M"'s charms and beauty, for when Simone met her briefly, in January, 1947, she writes: "Elle était aussi charmante que le disait Sartre et elle avait le plus jolie sourire du monde." (FC, 137). Later, in the early fifties, Sartre became intimate with Michelle Vian, who had then separated from her husband, Boris Vian. A very attractive woman, obviously very "feminine" in her behaviour, twelve years younger than Simone, with "longs cheveux de soie blonde", (FC, 73) Beauvoir describes her with real affection:

on l'aimait toujours parce qu'elle ne se préférait jamais. Gaie et un peu mystérieuse, très discrète et très présente, c'était un charmant compagnon. (FC, 277).

There were other women too - all of them seeming to possess an unusual degree of beauty - something that Sartre confessed to Francis Jeanson<sup>(122)</sup> and Catherine Chaine<sup>(123)</sup> in interviews that he found very important. Simone implies that Sartre went home, on occasion with Wanda Kosakiewicz, Olga's younger sister - known on stage as Marie Olivier.<sup>(124)</sup> Francis Jeanson suggests that Evelyne Ray, Claude Lanzmann's younger sister, was another girlfriend.<sup>(125)</sup> Beauvoir describes her at twenty-three:

blonde, mince, juvénile et élégante. Ce qui est rare chez les femmes, elle était drôle; et si jolie que son intelligence étonnait. (FC, 344).

---

(122) Interview with Francis Jeanson in 1965, published in Jeanson's book: Sartre dans sa vie. (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1974, p. 234).

(123) Interview with Catherine Chaine in Le Nouvel Observateur, N.639, 7-13 février, 1977), p. 75.

(124) See La Force de l'âge, p. 519, p. 547 and La Force des choses, p. 105. Sartre dedicated L'Âge de raison (1945) to Wanda Kosakiewicz.

(125) Jeanson: Sartre dans sa vie. p. 223.

It is clear that Simone was never fond of Camille. Nor does she hide the fact that she resented Olga vehemently at the time of the trio. (It is significant that it was Olga whom she felt the need to kill at the end of L'Invitée, not Sartre). Indeed it seems to have been a pattern in her life that she always directed any anger she felt towards herself or the other woman rather than at Sartre. She also reveals her impatience, after a time, with "M". Generally, however, she takes pains to give a flattering - if brief - portrait of some of the other women in Sartre's life. Almost everything about this aspect of her relationship with Sartre is left unsaid. And whenever asked directly about the subject by interviewers, she has avoided the question.<sup>(126)</sup> Given that Beauvoir has quite systematically avoided admitting her deepest vulnerabilities to herself, one suspects that the omissions conceal a number of crises. It is significant, for example, that Arlette El Kaim does not rate a mention in the autobiography - not even her name. Sartre met this seventeen year old Algerian student in mid 1956 when Beauvoir was almost fifty and very conscious of the improbability of ever again experiencing the joys of lovemaking. Axel Madsen, in his chatty book,<sup>(127)</sup> writes - without quoting his source of information:

A girl of frail beauty and nervous intellect, Arlette soon became his mistress and when, two years later, it was rumoured that she was pregnant and Sartre was ready to marry her, she nearly caused an unthinkable rift between Sartre and Beaver. [sic, "Le Castor"] (128)

Eight years later, because of the possibility that, as an Algerian national, Arlette could be deported, Sartre officially adopted her, so that, on the

---

(126) For example, she avoided the question when I asked her this in November, 1976. (See p. 187, n. 64)

(127) Axel Madsen. Hearts and Minds. The Common Journey of Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre. N.Y.: William Morrow And Co, 1977.

(128) *ibid.*, p. 194.

18th of March, 1965, she became Arlette El Kaim Sartre.<sup>(129)</sup> Both Arlette and Simone tended Sartre in hospital before his death in 1980.

In addition to her complexes about her own femininity - doubtless exacerbated by Sartre's partiality to younger and more beautiful women - Simone's own sensuality was further dampened by her ~~humor~~ of being reduced to an object - a body - in the eyes of the Other. In Les Mandarins, Beauvoir describes two scenes in which Anne, in the course of sexual intercourse, feels her freedom, as Beauvoir puts it elsewhere: "s'enliser dans ma chair". (FA, 69). At these times, Anne is deeply humiliated and feels alienated from herself - in the sense that she feels her body does not coincide with her chosen perception of herself.

One such occasion is the episode between Anne and Scriassine - recounted with such vividness and feeling that one can assume that Beauvoir was writing from experience. Anne was not at all emotionally drawn to Scriassine. Influenced by his cajoling - he told her that, as "une femme affranchie", she should take advantage of the freedom she and her husband Robert had accorded themselves, (since Robert did)<sup>(130)</sup> - and encouraged by the thought that both Robert and her daughter Nadine seemed to be able to enjoy casual sex, she agreed to his rather sudden request to go up to his hotel room. Immediately afterwards, she regretted her decision. Scriassine made no attempt to romanticize the situation and treated her as a body rather than as an equal person. Anne responded by trying desperately to dissociate the physical part of herself from the mental, attempting not to perceive herself in the situation, "repoussant toutes les pensées".<sup>(131)</sup>

---

(129) Now Sartre could really indulge his incest fantasies!

(130) Les Mandarins I, p. 116.

(131) *ibid.*, p. 119.

She concentrated her efforts on being a body, without "une tête" and "un coeur": (FA, 57) however, Scriassine did not allow her to slip away, even in her imagination, from the present moment:

"Ouvre les yeux, disait-il. C'est toi, c'est moi." [...] Il se tut un moment et puis il dit: "Regarde." Je secouai faiblement la tête: ce qui se passa là-bas me concernait si peu que si j'avais regardé, je me serais fait l'effet d'un voyeur. (132)

Feeling like a mere "instrument" (133) in his hands, Anne was embarrassed when he first observed her naked, ("je pensais que je n'avais plus un ventre de jeune fille", (134)) repulsed when he asked her, coarsely, if she was "bouchée", (135) and irritated when he pressed her: "As-tu du plaisir? Je veux que tu aies du plaisir". (136) Later, he insisted: "Je veux que tu jouisses en même temps que moi" (137) and she felt obliged to "soupirer" and to "geindre" as convincingly as she could. (138)

Later in the book, when Anne is in USA with Lewis, one episode in which he treats her like a sexual object, by divorcing sex from any emotion and thinking only of his own pleasure, angers and humiliates her:

Je retrouvai sa bouche et mon corps fondait de désir; [...] il me désirait lui aussi et entre nous le désir avait toujours été de l'amour; [...] Soudain, il fut couché sur moi, il entra en moi, et il me posséda sans un mot, sans un baiser. Ça se passa si vite que je restai interdite. Je dis la première:  
- Bonne nuit.  
- Bonne nuit, dit Lewis en se retournant vers le mur. Une rage désespérée m'a prise à la gorge. "Il n'a pas le droit", murmurai-je. Pas un instant il ne m'avait donné sa présence, il m'avait traitée en machine à plaisir. (139)

Simone's understandable resentment at being regarded as an object was not

(132) Les Mandarins I, p. 119-120.

(133) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 147.

(134) Les Mandarins I, p. 119

(135) *ibid.*

(136) *ibid.*, p. 120.

(137) *ibid.*, p. 122.

(138) *ibid.*

(139) Les Mandarins II, p. 393.

helped by her own attitude. The fact that she and Sartre tended to intellectualize the human sexual experience in existentialist terms meant that on a theoretical plane, too, she regarded female sexuality as humiliating. This exacerbated the conflicts which already resulted from being a woman in patriarchal society.

In Le Deuxième Sexe, Beauvoir had analysed woman's condition in existentialist categories such as subject/object, activity/passivity. Her assertion of women's erotic passivity is extreme. According to her, the woman:

se sent passive; elle est caressé, pénétrée, elle subit le coït tandis que l'homme se dépense activement. (140)

And again:

Le rut féminin, c'est la molle palpitation d'un coquillage; tandis que l'homme a de l'impétuosité la femme n'a que de l'impatience; son attente peut devenir ardente sans cesser d'être passive. (141)

The words "orgueil" associated with activity and "humiliation" associated with passivity recur throughout the book.

Applied to sexuality, these existentialist criteria appear somewhat limited. Not only are terms such as activity and passivity too abstract in this context, but the categories themselves raise certain problems. Passivity is a form of sexual activity and need not be judged negatively. (142) Using these concepts reduces sex to one dimension. Once again, Beauvoir seems unaware of the extent to which her observations are culturally bound. She is using sexist theoretical arguments to justify her denigration of female sexuality - an attitude which was the product of her situation. She is forgetting the point that she emphasizes elsewhere in Le Deuxième Sexe:

la situation ne dépend pas du corps, c'est lui qui dépend d'elle. (143)

To conclude these comments about sexuality, it is evident that Beauvoir

(140) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 147.

(141) ibid., p. 148.

(142) For a discussion of the way in which passivity in sexuality can be regarded as a form of freedom and something positive, see Herbert Marcuse: "The Affirmative Character of Culture" in Negations. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968).

(143) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 456.

was a warm and sensual person. In the episodes I have taken, both from her autobiography and fiction, she shows how delighted she was when she felt physically desired by a man for whom she felt affection, how relieved she was when she was able to acknowledge her bodily desires and satisfy them in an atmosphere of human dignity and love.

Her own ideal was harmony between "le corps", "la tête" and "le coeur", but throughout much of her life, these elements were in conflict. In her perspicacious comments in Le Deuxième Sexe, Beauvoir had claimed that any woman trying to live in society as a subject, an autonomous being, would be "divisée" between her "intérêts professionnels" and "les soucis de sa vocation sexuelle".<sup>(144)</sup> However, in her autobiography, she does not discuss this aspect of her experience. In interviews she repeatedly denies that her relationship with Sartre placed her at a disadvantage vis-à-vis him.

Just as her own mother had done, Simone preferred to absolve the man she loved of blame and to resign herself to a double sexual standard. She accepts her preference for eroticism within love and Sartre's preference for diversity as differences in temperament, although it is quite clear from her writing as a whole that many other factors were involved. Similarly, she directs her moral censure against herself - but never against him.

In Le Deuxième Sexe, Beauvoir maintained that women bury the conflicts which arise from their sexuality deep within themselves:

Les femmes ensevelissent au secret de leurs coeurs quantité de déceptions, d'humiliations, de regrets, de rancunes dont on ne trouve pas - en moyenne - d'équivalents chez les hommes.<sup>(145)</sup>

Beauvoir, whose ties to Sartre and relationships with other men have been as knotted and complex as any woman's ties to men, knows this well. The silences in the autobiography and the rationalizations in Le Deuxième Sexe betray what she is not prepared to admit herself - not even to herself.

---

(144) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 539.



### III. 2. Maternity.

Simone de Beauvoir has so often been questioned about her choice never to be a mother and so often "prise à partie", (FA, 82) that she has felt obliged - in the autobiography and in numerous interviews - to provide a number of rationalizations for her decision. As an existentialist she does not view childbirth as an act of creation; as a feminist she considers maternity a trap for women. I believe her fundamental reasons were more personal and linked with both the position of women in society and with her own choix originel .

Beauvoir herself says that her decision was affected by her negative picture of mothers - and we know, from Une Mort très douce, with what vigour she had repudiated her own mother, both as an adolescent and as an adult. As well, she writes that a child would have encroached upon the time and freedom she needed for her writing and would not have made a welcome addition to the couple she formed with Sartre:

Un enfant n'eût pas resserrée les liens qui nous unissaient  
Sartre et moi. (FA, 82).

I would like to suggest - more strongly than Beauvoir does - that a child would have been an intrusion in her life. She herself vaguely suggests that the experience of maternity threatened to restore an old vulnerability. Children could transform her into an object - a monster - in their eyes and her own. As they grew older, they would feel hostile towards her and would threaten her position of sovereignty - such as she had done with her mother:

je me sentais si peu d'affinités avec mes parents que d'avance les fils, les filles que je pourrais avoir m'apparaissaient comme des étrangers; j'escomptais de leur part ou de l'indifférence, ou de l'hostilité tant j'avais eu d'aversion pour la vie de famille. (FA, 82).

Her children would make her feel superfluous and cast aside - in which case she would be confronted again with the very essence of her crise originelle.

Indeed, it is quite possible that the link with her crise originelle was more than this. Beauvoir may well have also been unconsciously rejecting the baby who had once shattered her own security and taken her mother's attention from her when she was two and a half. Had she not written that, as an adolescent -:

Rougeauds, ridés, les bébés aux yeux laiteux m'importunaient. ?  
(MJFR, 57-58) (146)

She tells us that she had never derived any pleasure from cuddling either dolls or animals - both of which are commonly regarded as surrogate babies:

les poupons ne m'avaient jamais intéressée. [...] (FA, 82).  
A la campagne, j'aidais Madeleine à nourrir ses lapins, ses poules, mais ces corvées m'ennuyaient vite et j'étais peu sensible à la douceur d'une fourrure ou d'un duvet. (MJFR, 57).

Beauvoir may well have believed - whether consciously or not - that the arrival of a milky-eyed baby would have threatened her close entente with Sartre, just as her relationship with her mother had once been disturbed in this way.

In a general way, Simone de Beauvoir has always been conscious of her vulnerability. What she says about her frame of mind in the early thirties also sheds some light on her attitude towards maternity:

---

(146) Italics mine.

l'existence d'autrui demeurait pour moi un danger que je ne me décidais pas à affronter avec franchise. J'avais durement lutté, à dix-huit ans, contre la sorcellerie qui prétendait me changer en monstre: je restais sur la défensive. Sartre, je m'en étais arrangé, en déclarant: "On ne fait qu'un." Je nous avais installés ensemble au centre du monde; autour de nous gravitaient des personnages odieux, ridicules ou plaisants, qui n'avaient pas d'yeux pour me voir: j'étais le seul regard. (FA, 131).

Beauvoir is honest about her deep-rooted, ontological fear of "L'Autre", a problem which she outlines on numerous occasions in the autobiography, without ever tracing it to her crise originelle. Sexuality was an "intrusion" (MJFR, 291) because she could not always escape the hostile gaze of the Other: her female body made her frequently feel an object in the eyes of men. However, maternity was an intrusion which she could choose to avoid.

Beauvoir stresses that she had never considered that the act of having children represented real creativity. At fifteen, she had argued with Zaza that writing books and having children were totally incommensurable. (MJFR, 141). She continued to believe - as she argued in Le Deuxième Sexe - that motherhood could never represent "un accomplissement aussi essentiel qu'une oeuvre." (FA, 82). In her mind, the one choice justified her existence; the other did not:

Par la littérature, pensais-je, on justifie le monde en le créant à neuf, dans la pureté de l'imaginaire, et du même coup, on sauve sa propre existence; enfanter, c'est accroître vainement le nombre des êtres qui sont sur terre, sans justification. (FA, 83).

If her choice was "enfanter" or "écrire" - becoming like her mother, who only ever aspired to "la gloire [ . . . ] intime", or becoming a writer who would reap "la gloire la plus universelle et la plus intime", (MJFR, 142), Simone knew which she wanted.

In Le Deuxième Sexe, Beauvoir wrote that maternity was:

actuellement presque impossible d'assumer en toute liberté. (147)

In Tout compte fait and in interviews since the rise of the feminist movement, she has continued to call maternity "un véritable piège", (148) because of "l'esclavage imposé à la femme à travers les enfants". (TCF, 506). She believes that the situation in France has scarcely changed since 1949, when she wrote:

faute de crèches, de jardins d'enfants convenablement organisés, il suffit d'un enfant pour paralyser entièrement l'activité de la femme. (149)

Although Beauvoir does not mention this, it is significant that her sister, Hélène, for whatever other reasons, made the same choice: to devote herself to her work - painting - and to renounce motherhood.

In Tout compte fait, Beauvoir declares herself in agreement with Shulamith Firestone's radical critique of the family structure (150): to her the parent-child relationship is "une situation éminemment malsaine", in which parents frequently abuse their authority, as well as projecting onto their children their "fantasmes", "obsessions" and "névroses". (TCF, 506). It is interesting that in Simone's writing, her sympathies are nearly always with the child, rather than with the mother. Given this, how could she have come to terms with embodying this evil mother-figure herself? Where children are mentioned in the autobiography - and this is rare - Simone frequently shows them to be the victims of maternal tyranny.

---

(147) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 539.

(148) When I interviewed her, in November 1976, she stressed this point: "Je crois qu'à la date qu'il est, c'est un véritable piège".

(149) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 539.

(150) Shulamith Firestone. The Dialectic of Sex. N.Y.: William Morrow, 1970.

Apart from the picture of herself and Poupette, and of her friend Zaza, - all of whom suffered from this, there is Joan, the American student, a victim in the hands of "une mère israélite, infantile, dominatrice et agitée", (FC, 426)<sup>(151)</sup> and Sylvie Le Bon, whose mother was "possessive, jalouse et irritable". (TCF, 71).<sup>(152)</sup> Simone was horrified by the extent to which Lise Oblanoff was "capricieuse" and "despotique" towards her little girl; (TCF, 93) she also remarks with distaste that George Sand treated her daughter abominably. (TCF, 172).

Interestingly, there is no positive picture of maternity in the autobiography whatsoever.<sup>(153)</sup> We are told that Stépha and Fernand Gérassi's son, Jean, was born in July 1931;<sup>(154)</sup> we are given no information about Stépha as a mother. Simone does not mention that Colette Audry - who remains a close friend - had a boy, Jean-François, when she was married to Robert Minder. We know that Michelle Vian had two children<sup>(155)</sup> and that Sartre spent a great deal of time with Michelle, but we are given no indication of Michelle's relationship with her children, or - and this would be interesting to know - Sartre's relationship with the children.

---

(151) See also: La Force des choses, p. 433.

(152) See also: Tout compte fait, p. 69-75.

(153) The same is true of the fiction, although Les Belles Images, depicting a mother's fondness for her young daughter, is a totally new development for Simone de Beauvoir. Both Anne and her daughter, Nadine, in Les Mandarins, lack any strong maternal love for their child. Basically, the fiction is remarkable for its absence of children.

(154) He was to become a militant left intellectual in USA, and now lives in UK and France. See Tout compte fait, 67-68 and "John Gerassi: la longue marche d'un intellectuel américain" in Les Temps Modernes, n. 361-362, (août-sept. 1976.)

(155) When married to Boris Vian, from 1941 to 1949, Michelle gave birth to Patrick in 1942 and Carole in 1948. When they separated in 1949, Michelle had custody of the children.

Another reason Beauvoir gives for not having had children is that Sartre did not want to be a father any more than she wanted to be a mother:

il se suffisait, il me suffisait. Et je me suffisais. (FA, 82).

It is unclear how much Sartre influenced her attitude. Early in 1929, she had still visualized having children - as we know from her diary at the time.<sup>(156)</sup> And, in Tout compte fait, Simone de Beauvoir takes it for granted that if she had married Jacques, they would have had children.<sup>(157)</sup> It was after meeting Sartre that she had written emphatically that "enfanter, c'est accroître vainement le nombre des êtres qui sont sur terre, sans justification" (FA, 83) and her words echo those of Mathieu in L'Age de raison:

Un gosse: une conscience de plus, une petite lumière affolée, qui volerait en rond, se cognerait aux murs et ne pourrait plus s'échapper. (158)

Likewise, it is impossible to tell whether Simone recoiled as strongly from the physiological aspects of maternity before meeting Sartre - or, indeed, whether she influenced him in this. It is certain that each reinforced the other's attitude. In L'Age de raison, published in 1943, Sartre constantly likened the pregnant Marcelle, slow and bovine, to "une bête"<sup>(159)</sup> and Sartre's aversion to nature is well-known. Marcelle's belly is "grotesque et fascinant",<sup>(160)</sup> an "ample bassin fécond".<sup>(161)</sup>

Although she does not suggest, in the autobiography, that the physiological aspect of maternity actually revolted her, Simone had made this blatantly clear in Le Deuxième Sexe. Doubtless influenced by Sartre's attitude - as well as her own - she wrote of the disgust which pregnancy provoked in them in disarmingly general terms:

(156) See Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée, p. 319.

(157) See Tout compte fait, p. 27.

(158) Sartre. L'Age de raison. Paris: Gallimard, 1943, p. 51.

(159) *ibid.*, p. 74.

(160) *ibid.*, p. 163.

(161) *ibid.* p. 74

A travers tout le respect dont l'entoure la société, la fonction de gestation inspire une répulsion spontanée. (162)

Like Sartre, she associated the pregnant mother with nature:

La future mère [...] est [...] prise aux rets de la nature, elle est plante et bête, une réserve de colloïdes, une couveuse, un oeuf. (163)

If gestation makes women into a "plante" or "bête", breast-feeding, similarly, allows the mothers to assume with their babies "un intime rapport animal" (164) and Beauvoir quotes the reflection of a heroine of Colette Audry, who, when feeding her child, felt like a plant:

Il n'y avait qu'à attendre qu'il se détachât du sein comme une grosse abeille. (165)

It is true that Simone de Beauvoir was choosing her images to illustrate her point about the immanence of reproduction versus the transcendence of what she considers real production, but the many examples she uses to argue this also tell us a great deal about Beauvoir herself and her own associations with maternity.

Anne-Marie Lasocki, in her book on Simone de Beauvoir, (166) comments that Simone's horror of what she considers the passivity of maternity is apparent in a significant choice of words:

l'auteur préférera le terme "engendrer" à consonance masculine et transcendante à celui plus féminin d' "enfanter". (167)

Beauvoir uses this term when she compares the demands of a writer's life to that of a religious life:

On ne s'étonne pas qu'une carmélite, ayant choisi de prier pour tous les hommes, renonce à engendrer des individus singuliers. (FA, 83).

(162) Le Deuxième Sexe I, p. 240. (Italics mine).

(163) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 307.

(164) *ibid.*, p. 320.

(165) *ibid.*, p. 321. Quoted from On joue perdant.

(166) Anne-Marie Lasocki. Simone de Beauvoir ou l'Entreprise d'écrire. La Haye: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971.

(167) *ibid.*, p. 28.

Lasocki points out that Simone uses this term again, in La Force des choses. Again, it is associated with real production and creativity - a universal rather than an individual enterprise:

Cet ensemble unique, mon expérience à moi, [...] si du moins elle avait engendré [...] quoi? une colline, une fusée? Mais non. Rien n'aura eu lieu. (FC, 686).

In her desire to transcend nature, Beauvoir has always supported any moves to bring "la fonction reproductrice" under the control of "des volontés". (168) She comments that she and Sartre followed with interest the aims of "le congrès international pour la réforme sexuelle" which met in Brno in 1931, and which discussed the questions of "la conception dirigée" and "la stérilisation volontaire". (FA, 138).

Nous approuvions cet effort pour [...] affranchir [l'homme] de la nature en lui donnant la maîtrise de son corps: la procréation en particulier ne devait pas être subie, mais lucidement consentie. (FA, 138).

In 1934, when teaching in Rouen, Simone de Beauvoir was in trouble with "la commission départementale de la natalité et de la protection de l'enfance" for speaking out, in her classes, against Pétain's "propagande nataliste". (FA, 169).

Beauvoir also created a scandal by writing about abortion in Le Sang des autres and, a few years later, in Le Deuxième Sexe. In the autobiography, she writes about her support for the abortion reform campaign in France. In 1959, and 1960, she had prefaced two books by Dr. Weill-Hallé called Le Planning familial and La Grand' Peur d'aimer. (169) In 1965 she wrote

---

(168) Dr. Marie-Andrée Lagroua Weill-Hallé. Le Planning familial. Paris: Maloine, 1959, and La Grand' Peur d'aimer. Paris: Juillard-Sequana, 1960. (169) *ibid*.



a preface for La Majorité sexuelle de la femme - by the two doctors E. and P. Kronhausen.<sup>(170)</sup> In 1971, she signed the Manifeste des 343, which appeared in Le Nouvel Observateur, declaring that she had had an abortion.<sup>(171)</sup> In June, 1972, after the autobiography was completed, she became president of the association "Choisir" - the aims of which were to make contraception free and readily available and to defend and assist anyone on trial for abortion or complicity with abortion. In November of the same year, she gave evidence at the Bobigny trial of a seventeen year old girl and her mother, and in 1973 she wrote a preface for the book which Choisir presented on the trial.<sup>(172)</sup>

Although Beauvoir had declared, in the Manifeste des 343, that she had had an abortion, she does not make any allusion whatsoever to this crisis in her life. Her description of an abortion in Le Sang des autres (1945) and Sartre's preoccupation with abortion in L'Age de raison (1945) makes one suspect that they had experienced the trauma of an abortion in their circle, while they were writing these novels, around 1942-1943.

Unfortunately, because of the illegality of abortion in 1960, when her account of this period appeared in La Force de l'age, because of the moral climate, and doubtless also for personal reasons, Beauvoir did not give us any details about the experience of procuring an abortion at this time or - if it was herself involved - how she personally reacted to this crisis.

---

(170) E. and P. Kronhausen. La Majorité sexuelle de la femme. Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 1965.

(171) The list of 343 French women who declared that they had aborted (illegally) appeared in Le Nouvel Observateur (5-11 avril, 1971). Among them were Hélène de Beauvoir, Catherine Deneuve, Françoise d'Eaubonne, Anne Fabre-Luce, Gisèle Halimi, Violette Leduc, Jeanne Moreau, Christiane Rochefort and Françoise Sagan.

(172) Avortement: une loi en procès. L'affaire de Bobigny. Coll. "Idées actuelles", Paris: Gallimard, 1973.

If it was before the Liberation, the penalty for giving an abortion ranged from imprisonment to execution. After the Liberation, there was a return to the law of 1939, in which abortion was only accorded when three doctors testified that "la vie de la mère ne peut être sauvegardée qu'au moyen d'une telle intervention thérapeutique."<sup>(173)</sup> In Le Deuxième Sexe, Beauvoir gives us some impression of the moral climate in the early forties. Although, in 1941, it was estimated that there had been approximately one million illegal abortions in France in 1941 alone,<sup>(174)</sup> in 1943, a PhD thesis by J.E. Roy, which was dedicated to Pétain, was published. It pleaded for the retention of abortion as a crime - even when pregnancy endangered the life of the mother.<sup>(175)</sup>

If Simone did have an abortion around this time - and this is now speculation - she may have gone to Switzerland, where, as she tells us in Le Deuxième Sexe, abortion was "libéralement toléré".<sup>(176)</sup> She would have had support from friends who had no qualms about the morality of the issue, and - whether or not he was the potential father - from Sartre. The "épreuve"<sup>(177)</sup> would have been minimized for her. Nevertheless, Simone writes, revealingly, in Le Deuxième Sexe:

Les hommes ont tendance à prendre l'avortement à la légère; ils le regardent comme un de ces nombreux accidents auxquels la malignité de la nature a voué les femmes: ils ne mesurent pas les valeurs qui y sont engagées.<sup>(178)</sup>

This may well be a reflection of Sartre's attitude just as the following remark doubtless would have reflected her own:

---

(173) Quoted by Odile Dhavernas in Droit des femmes, pouvoir des hommes. Paris: Seuil, 1978, p. 147.

(174) Beauvoir gives us this figure in Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 293.

(175) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 292. Dr. Roy's thesis, from Poitiers University, was published in Paris by Jouve in 1943 and was entitled L'avortement, fléau national. Causes, conséquences, remèdes.

(176) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 295.

(177) *ibid.*

(178) *ibid.*, p. 300.

Même consentant à l'avortement, le désirant, la femme le ressent comme un sacrifice de sa féminité: il faut que définitivement elle voie dans son sexe une malédiction, une espèce d'infirmité, un danger. (179)

### III. 3. Menopause.

Menopause is the last specifically female psychological crisis and one which Simone de Beauvoir does not mention at all, by name, in the autobiography. Once again, if we study the memoirs in conjunction with the rest of her writing, we are left with some impressions of the form this crisis took in Simone's experience and in that of other women whom she knew well.

When Beauvoir described menopause, in Le Deuxième Sexe, as another "crise", (180) she was not concerned with the various "troubles organiques", but with "la valeur symbolique" of menopause. (181) At a psychological level, Beauvoir regarded menopause as a release, for the woman, from her body:

la femme se trouve délivrée des servitudes de la femelle; [ ... ] elle n'est plus la proie des puissances qui la débordent: elle coïncide avec elle-même. (182)

Since menopause brings the woman a certain "autonomie physiologique", (183), Beauvoir saw the crisis of menopause as being a "drame moral" (184) in which the woman suffers the loss of her "attrait érotique" together with her "fécondité": (185)

---

(179) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 300.

(180) *ibid.*, p. 406.

(181) *ibid.*, p. 399.

(182) Le Deuxième Sexe I, p. 68.

(183) *ibid.*

(184) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 399.

In Le Fait féminin,\* Claudine Escoffier-Lambiotte comments that the problem of menopause is cultural and "spécifique d'une société qui a dévalorisé les vieux - et plus spécialement les vieilles, car la femme âgée dans notre culture ne bénéficie même pas des compensations sociales dont jouissent les hommes âgés. (p.17)

\* Le Fait féminin. Ouvrage collectif sous la direction d'Evelyne Sullerot, avec la collaboration d'Odette Thibault. Paris: Fayard, 1978.

Tandis que le mâle vieillit continûment, la femme est brusquement dépouillée de sa féminité; c'est encore jeune qu'elle perd l'attrait érotique et la fécondité d'où elle tirait, aux yeux de la société et à ses propres yeux, la justification de son existence et ses chances de bonheur: il lui reste à vivre, privée de tout avenir, environ la moitié de sa vie d'adulte.

Simone de Beauvoir was only forty-one when Le Deuxième Sexe was published and so this book tells us nothing about her own experience of menopause. One might expect to find a general discussion of menopause in La Vieillesse, after Simone had crossed this hurdle herself, but this is not the case. In La Vieillesse, written when Simone was sixty-two, she again makes the point that she had made in Le Deuxième Sexe: that menopause "a lieu bien avant la vieillesse". Hence she pays no specific attention to the subject in her discussion of old age.

In Tout compte fait, when writing about her own experience, Beauvoir presents the crisis she underwent when she felt she was no longer a sexual being and attractive to men as her psychological initiation to old age. She was fifty in 1958 and she writes:

Entre 1958 et 1962, j'ai eu conscience de passer une ligne. (TCF, 40)

It was not actually her age so much as her circumstances which made Simone conscious of crossing a line at this stage of her life. It did not necessarily have anything to do with her hormonal changes. The "drame" was not losing the power to reproduce, but feeling that she had lost her sexual desirability. At puberty, she had been horrified to be regarded as a body; at fifty she was shattered to have to resort to being a "pur esprit".

Malgré tout, c'est étrange de n'être plus un corps; il y a des moments où cette bizarrerie, par son caractère définitif, me glace le sang. (FC, 685).

In her own case, there were actually two periods of crisis. The first was between 1949 and 1952 when she was between forty-one and forty-four. Well before actual menopause, these years of inner turmoil were caused by the end of her affair with Nelson Algren. Since she no longer had a physical relationship with Sartre, from around the age of thirty-seven she was, in effect, in the position of a single woman. After the end of her liaison with Algren she was acutely conscious that her age made it most unlikely that she would ever again attract a man physically.

To console herself in her predicament she told herself - resorting to puritanical and sexist prejudices - that women, at a certain age, were "beyond" sex:

Un certain amour, après quarante ans, il faut y renoncer. (FC, 301).<sup>(186)</sup>

With her customary pride, she assures us that it was not her body which found this situation difficult to accept, but her psyche. In fact, however, it was both. She was expecting her body to be prematurely asexual. This imposition, and the prospect of never again being desired by a man caused her to lose all joy in life:

Mon corps, peut-être par l'effet d'un très ancien orgueil, s'adapta aisément: il ne demandait rien. Mais quelque chose en moi ne se soumettait pas à cette indifférence. "Plus jamais je ne dormirai dans la chaleur d'un corps." Jamais: quel glas! Quand cette évidence me saisissait, je basculai dans la mort. (FC, 274).

Once again, Simone de Beauvoir saw herself confronted with a sudden and violent "rupture avec le passé"<sup>(187)</sup> - a presentiment related to the anticipation of menopause:

---

(186) Beauvoir always seems to have had an exaggerated sense of the impropriety of older women having sex. In Tout compte fait, she tells us: "Même à trente-cinq ans j'étais choquée quand des aînées faisaient allusion devant moi à leurs ébats conjugaux: il vient un moment où il faut avoir la décence de renoncer, pensais-je." (TCF, 43).

(187) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 130.

Soudain, d'un coup, tout un grand morceau de moi-même s'engloutissait; c'était brutal comme une mutilation et inexplicable car il n'eût rien arrivé. Mon image dans la glace n'avait pas changé; derrière moi, un passé brûlant était encore tout proche: cependant, dans les longues années qui s'entendaient devant moi, il ne refléurirait pas; jamais. Je me retrouvais de l'autre côté d'une ligne qu'à aucun moment je n'avais franchie. (FC, 274)

Evoking this same 1949-1952 crisis in Les Mandarins, Beauvoir associates the emotional void due to the lack of love with an awareness both of the end of the reproductive cycle and of the inevitability of physical decline:

Que j'étais donc fatiguée de soulever chaque matin le poids si vain d'une journée où je n'étais exigée par personne! (188) [...] Comme l'avenir était nu! (189) [...] Oh! je suis encore une femme, je saigne encore chaque mois, rien n'est changé; seulement maintenant, je sais... [...] Les saisons se recommencent, les défaites se réparent: mais il n'y a aucun moyen d'arrêter ma décrépitude. (190)

At the end of July 1952, when Simone was forty-two, she entered into a relationship with Claude Lanzmann, which meant that her anguish was submerged for a time in her happiness. Once more - she writes - "je ne me sentais pas vieille." (TCF, 43). It is thus clear that it was Simone's situation, rather than her actual age, which brought about the first crisis.

A second crisis occurred in 1958, when she and Lanzmann separated and she was fifty. Both times it was more than the sentimental torment caused by the end of a love affair. It was the consciousness that she was ageing and that this entailed the loss of her sexual desirability and a future without the joy and emotional warmth of physical love which made the crises so violent.

---

(188) Les Mandarins II, p. 358.

(189) ibid., p. 408.

(190) Les Mandarins I, p. 127.

Lanzmann left in May 1958 on a trip to North Korea as a journalist, and during this time Simone de Beauvoir kept a diary. Other factors obviously played a role, but it seems that Simone was aware that her relationship with Lanzmann was doomed to an end in the near future, and that this realization was largely responsible for the pervasive anxiety of the pages of her journal. The words "tension" and "angoisse" constantly recur, and Beauvoir records being unable to work, having nightmares and resorting to anti-depressants quite frequently. An entry on the 23rd of September, 1958, reflects her state of mind:

Je ne sais pas si c'est l'énervement ou le travail, mais je ne m'arrête pas d'avoir un excès de tension; ça se sent dans la nuque, les yeux, les oreilles, les tempes et ça rend le travail difficile. (FC, 466).

In her diary, Beauvoir mostly attributes the anxiety to external causes: to the distressing political events and to Sartre's bad health. She rarely mentions her relationship with Lanzmann she probably edited any such passages out of the diary extracts quoted in the autobiography. However, it is clear that, although Simone emphasizes the gloomy political situation, the reason for her torment was more than this. It was not only caused by worrying about the referendum organized for the 28th of September which was to legitimize de Gaulle's return to power. In the diary entry for the 14th of September, we sense the importance of her personal difficulties, although Beauvoir carefully refuses to admit that her tension was due to anything other than political events: (191)

---

(191) Elsewhere Beauvoir makes the point that a diary does not reveal the true situation:  
 "Curieuse chose qu'un journal: ce qu'on y tait est plus important que ce qu'on y note." (La Femme rompue, p. 128).

Le soir, Lanzmann m'a emmenée dîner à la Vanne Rouge. Je me suis retrouvée à Paris, si ensommeillée à la fois et si énervée que je n'ai même pas pu aller boire un verre au Dôme, je suis rentrée me coucher. Ce matin, je me sens encore tendue. Est-ce que ça va recommencer comme en mai?<sup>(192)</sup> J'en ai peur. J'ai peur jusqu'au 28 de rester crispée. Et après? Je n' imagine pas ce mois d'octobre. (FC, 464).

Simone de Beauvoir portrays the end of her relationship with Lanzmann as only one factor amongst several which made 1958 "cette accablante année". (FC, 477). One suspects, however, that her personal situation was more pervasive than she admits. It was the year in which she turned fifty and the year in which she first became conscious of having "franchi une ligne." (TCF, 43). Whereas she felt strongly that eroticism was destined to become a mere memory for her, if Axel Madsen is correct,<sup>(193)</sup> 1958 was the year in which nineteen year old Arlette El Kaim was thought to be pregnant by Sartre. It is clear that he did not share Simone's predicament.

In La Vieillesse, Beauvoir discusses at some length the problem, for women, in repressing natural sexual desires, in order to conform to culturally imposed sexual abstinence. In older women, writes Beauvoir, it is most often the case that "les pulsions sexuelles" are "refoulées, mais non éteintes":<sup>(194)</sup>

Les femmes demeurent capables de désir alors que depuis longtemps elles ont cessé d'être aux yeux des hommes désirables.<sup>(195)</sup>

In those cases where the constraints on the woman's sex life are not external, they are often internal. Their "narcissisme", writes Beauvoir, or their "souci de décence"<sup>(196)</sup> make women ashamed to expose their bodies<sup>(197)</sup> or

---

(192) It was May which saw de Gaulle's return to power because of the crisis in Algeria. It was also the month in which Lanzmann left for Korea. Because of her "anxiété générale". (FC, 412), Beauvoir started to keep her journal.

(193) Madsen. Hearts and Minds: The Common Journey of Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre, p. 205-206.

(194) La Vieillesse, p. 370.

(195) ibid., p. 369.

(196) ibid., p. 370.

(197) The sixty year old woman in L'Age de discrétion declares: Même devant André, je répugne à me montrer en costume de bain. Un corps de vieux, c'est tout de même moins moche qu'un corps de vieille. (La Femme rompue, p. 69).



ashamed of public ridicule. Even where abstinence is self-imposed, it does not make the "frustration" less "pénible", for many older women "restent tourmentées par des désirs." (198)

We know that some of Simone's female acquaintances did not adapt easily to this aspect of old age. Lise, who had been a beautiful young woman, displayed "une coquetterie" which, in her fifties, "la disgrâce de son corps rendait choquante." (TCF, 95). Beauvoir tells us that after her lover, Dullin's death, Camille (Simone Jolivet) did not easily adapt to her state of celibacy:

Plus d'une fois elle nous a confié combien sa chasteté lui pesait. Un jour qu'elle avait bu, nous a-t-elle raconté, elle est descendue dans la rue chercher un homme. Elle en a ramené un chez elle, mais le dégoût l'a prise et elle l'a mis à la porte. (TCF, 82).

Beauvoir writes of her mother's situation with great empathy: the premature cessation of sexual relations with her husband and the constraints which her puritanical upbringing imposed upon her made her situation particularly cruel:

L'alliance passée à son doigt l'avait autorisé à connaître le plaisir; ses sens étaient devenus exigeants; à trente-cinq ans, dans la force de l'âge, il ne lui était plus permis de les assouvir. (199)

Although Simone's sexual experience was wide-ranging, compared with that of her monogamous devouée mother, she must have sometimes felt, as she grew older, that she was in many ways reliving her mother's experience. Her need to curtail her sexual desire in order to coincide with her declining sexual desirability was the same as her mother's - despite the generation difference and their divergent attitude as to what constituted moral behaviour. Both

---

(198) La Vieillesse, p. 366.

(199) Une Mort très douce, p. 55.

resorted to biological explanations in order to justify their partner's attraction to other women, and both had a highly developed sense of what was not respectable or dignified for a woman. (200)

The sixty year old woman in L'Age de discrétion declares: "La sexualité pour moi n'existe plus" and adds that she had always regarded this "indifférence" as "sérénité" until she realized that, in fact, it was an "infirmité". (201) Thus, none of the older women in Beauvoir's writing are really satisfied with their lot.

Although she never suggests in her autobiography that this was so in the case of herself and Sartre, in Le Deuxième Sexe, and in La Vieillesse, Simone stresses a consequence of the vulnerability of an older woman: her increasing tendency to "la jalousie". (202) Vis à vis a man, she is in a weak position, for:

il garde des appétits sexuels alors qu'elle n'est plus un objet de désir. (203)

As for "l'homme mûr", he still holds an attraction to younger women:

puisqu'on ne lui demande pas les qualités passives d'un objet, l'altération de son visage et de son corps ne ruinent pas ses possibilités de séduction. (204)

---

(200) The extent to which Beauvoir as an older woman empathized and identified with her mother is apparent in the very significant episode, recounted in Une Mort très douce, in which she unconsciously imitated the movements of her dying mother's mouth. Beauvoir writes that this was the first crisis in her life which she could not comprehend: "Tous mes chagrins jusqu'à cette nuit, je les avais compris. [...] Cette fois, mon désespoir échappait à mon contrôle: quelqu'un d'autre que moi pleurait en moi. Je parlais à Sartre de la bouche de ma mère, telle que j'e l'avais vue le matin et de tout ce que j'y déchiffrais: [...] Et ma propre bouche, m'a-t-il dit, ne m'obéissait plus: j'avais posé celle de maman sur mon personne, toute son existence s'y matérialisaient et la compassion me déchirait. (p. 47).

(201) La Femme rompue, p. 27.

(202) La Vieillesse, p. 372.

(203) ibid., p. 373.

(204) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 400.

In La Vieillesse, Beauvoir makes the point that if women enjoy, biologically, "une plus grande stabilité sexuelle [...] que [...] l'homme", (205) and yet, in old age, fewer women than men have any form of sex life, it is because of social factors:

C'est que socialement l'homme, à tout âge, est sujet et la femme un objet, un être relatif. (206)

It is significant that, although Simone does not mention jealousy in the account of her later life in the autobiography - despite the fact that she sees jealousy as typical of the experience of the older woman - the theme does play a major role in the later fiction: the collection of stories entitled La Femme rompue. In a work which contains some of her most powerful writing, Simone de Beauvoir paints portraits of three different women: each is lonely, with a sense of life stretching behind rather than ahead of her, and each feels a sense of exclusion, jealousy and a degree of paranoia.

Murielle, the forty-three year old woman soliloquising in Monologue, lonely and paranoid, bitterly recollects her ex-husband dancing with another woman:

Il dansait avec Nina sexe à sexe elle étalait ses gros seins elle puait le parfum mais on sentait en dessous une odeur de bidet et lui qui se trémoussait il bandait comme un cerf. (207)

At forty-three, this woman's sexual experience seems to be over:

Moi je trouve que dès cinquante ans il faut avoir la décence de renoncer; j'ai renoncé bien avant depuis mon deuil. (208)

She likes to pretend she is "above" that sort of thing:

Ca ne m'intéresse plus je suis barrée je ne pense jamais à ces choses-là même en rêve. (209)

---

(206) La Vieillesse, p. 368.

(207) La Femme rompue, p. 91.

(208) ibid., p. 105.

(209) ibid.

Despite this claim, her monologue shows a veritable obsession with sex. Thinking about her mother, whom she calls "la dernière des putes",<sup>(210)</sup> she wonders:

A quel âge s'est-elle arrêtée? Peut-être qu'elle s'envoie des gigolos...<sup>(211)</sup>

Through the self-righteous attitude she has chosen to adopt - to justify what has not been her choice- her regrets and her envy are blatant.

Monique, the forty-four year old woman in the title story La Femme rompue, is ravaged by the jealousy she feels for her husband's thirty-eight year old mistress, Noëllie. At first she maintains that she is not "physiquement jalouse"<sup>(212)</sup> because she likes to think that she and Maurice are beyond needing sex to reinforce their bond, and the attraction of Noëllie can thus be conveniently reduced to "une histoire de peau".<sup>(213)</sup> However, it soon becomes clear to her that Maurice no longer desires her, and that he intends to leave her for Noëllie.

Looking back, Beauvoir - as we have seen - dates her second, major crisis from 1958 to 1962. During much of this time - from June 1960 to March 1963 - she was writing La Force des choses, and the tone of the concluding pages reflects the impact of "la crise de la ménopause". Previously, her denial of her body had been only partial- the denial of certain aspects of her femaleness. Now she felt that her body was betraying her wholly. It made her, in the eyes of others, into something which she did not yet feel herself to be: a non-sexual being, and she hated it for this. She writes:

---

(210) La Femme rompue, p. 105.

(211) ibid.

(212) ibid., p. 138.

(213) ibid., p. 137.

tant que j'ai pu regarder ma figure sans déplaisir, je l'oubliais, elle allait de soi. Rien ne va plus. Je déteste mon image: au-dessus des yeux, la casquette, les poches en dessous, la face trop pleine, et cet air de tristesse autour de la bouche que donnent les rides. (FC, 685).

In L'Age de discrétion, the woman refers to the "mauvaise période" when she was fifty and "dégoûtée" by her body.<sup>(214)</sup> The problem of coming to terms with her body made it difficult for her to decide what to wear: (Here again we see Beauvoir's own acute consciousness of what is "permis" or "défendu".<sup>(215)</sup>)

A cinquante ans, mes toilettes me semblaient toujours ou trop tristes, ou trop gaies.<sup>(216)</sup>

To conclude, Simone de Beauvoir describes her state of depression in her early fifties in the autobiography: she attributes this to circumstances, both external and personal. She does not mention the possibility that hormonal changes may have played any part in her depression.<sup>(217)</sup> The lack of any allusion to her own reactions to the experience of menopause is a disappointing omission from the account of her life. This is an area where an articulate and independent woman should have new light to shed on a universal facet of female experience.

She does write about the problem, for older women, of coming to terms with the loss of sexual appeal. Like her mother, after a certain age, Simone was denied the comfort of physical love. The jealousy which is associated with this distressing aspect of female experience in male dominated societies is treated with intensity in the later fiction and analysed in La Vieillesse, but remains unmentioned in the autobiography. It is apparent that behind the omissions in this last work lies not only discretion but also much anguish and pain.

---

(214) La Femme rompue, p. 16.

(215) ibid., p. 20.

(216) ibid.

(217) The only reference to hormonal changes is Monique's hemorrhage in La Femme rompue. She started to bleed at the time she would normally be ovulating and was still bleeding two weeks later.

IV. Old Age.

Old age is obviously not a specifically female problem, but, for Simone de Beauvoir, it represents the last of the phases which began with menstruation in which the woman experiences her body as alien to her. Once again, the body does not obey the will, but is apparently autonomous and, again, the individual is tempted almost to regard her/his body as "other" than the self:

L'individu âgé se sent vieux à travers les autres sans avoir éprouvé de sérieuses mutations; intérieurement, il n'adhère pas à l'étiquette qui se colle à lui: il ne sait plus qui il est. (218)

At fifty-five, at the time of the publication of La Force des choses, Simone considers that she was "au seuil de la vieillesse". (219) Since she did not yet identify with the figure she cut in the eyes of others, she felt extremely rebellious. Her choice of epigraph for Une Mort très douce, written at this time, is significant:

Do not go gentle into that good night.  
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light...

She was unable to believe that she was the person whom others saw as an ageing woman:

Je n'arrive pas à y croire. Quand je lis imprimé: Simone de Beauvoir, on me parle d'une jeune femme qui est moi. (FC, 684).

In Tout compte fait, she writes of the difficulties in coming to terms with the "rétrécissement de l'avenir". (TCF, 44). The consequences of this: a feeling of uselessness, a detachment from commitment and a certain intellectual inertia - all this is portrayed in L'Age de discrétion - in which the sixty year old woman is facing up to the reality of being old.

---

(218) La Vieillesse, p. 310.  
(219) Introduction to La Vieillesse.

In Tout compte fait, Simone de Beauvoir, at sixty-three, is resigned to her appearance:

Maintenant je me soucie peu de mon aspect physique: c'est par égard pour mes proches que j'en prends soin. (TCF, 40).

The woman in L'Age de discrétion claims:

Je me suis résignée à mon corps. (220)

However, she complains that she cannot ignore her body as she would like to:

Moins je me reconnais dans mon corps, plus je me sens obligée de m'en occuper. Il est à ma charge et je le soigne avec un dévouement ennuyé, comme un vieil ami un peu disgracié, un peu diminué qui aurait besoin de moi. (221)

Her preoccupation is now less with her appearance<sup>(222)</sup> and more with her decline in physical strength. One passage expresses her current perception of herself as she struggles up a cliff, in the hot sun, after André:

Il marchait à longues enjambées; et moi qui grimpais si gaillardement autrefois, je me traînais, loin derrière lui, c'était vexant. (223)

Despite this - or because of this sense of fatigue - Beauvoir's attitude in both Tout compte fait and L'Age de discrétion is far more resigned than at the end of La Force des choses, where she was confronting the psychological torment of her loss of sexual attraction. Perhaps, too, it helped her to reach an age where cultural sexual differences no longer played a role - for surely it is easier to come to terms with natural disabilities when everyone is - at least potentially - in the same position. Between the age of fifty-four and sixty-three, no new crisis had changed her relationship to her body; she felt she had retained her level of physical vitality:

---

(220) La Femme rompue, p. 16.

(221) ibid., p. 21.

(222) The woman in L'Age de discrétion says she no longer finds it difficult to decide what to wear:

"je sais ce qui m'est permis ou défendu, je m'habille sans problème. Sans plaisir non plus. Ce rapport intime, presque tendre que j'avais autrefois avec mes vêtements a disparu. (La Femme rompue, p. 20).

(223) La Femme rompue, p. 70.

Si je considère les dix années qui se sont écoulées depuis que j'ai achevé La Forcè des choses, c'est que je n'ai pas l'impression d'avoir vieilli. [...] avoir soixante-trois ans ou cinquante-trois, cela ne fait pas à mes yeux une grande différence; ... Je me trouve en somme installée dans la vieillesse. Je suis comme tout le monde incapable d'en avoir une expérience intérieure: l'âge est un irréalisable. Etant en bonne santé, mon corps ne m'en livre aucun indice. (TCF, 40).

As for the possibility of another crisis associated with her body - crossing yet another line - Beauvoir writes:

Peut-être une maladie ou des infirmités m'en feront-elles franchir une autre; je n'ignore pas les menaces que contient l'avenir, mais je n'en suis pas obsédée. (TCF, 40).

After finishing Tout compte fait, Simone suffered from excruciating arthritis and Madsen's book<sup>(224)</sup> informs us that she took cortisone to stop the pain, which also caused a fattening of the facial tissues. Once again she must have felt that she was reliving her mother's experience, for she had written, in La Vieillesse:

Ma mère a cruellement souffert d'une arthrite, dans les dernières années de sa vie, en dépit des dix cachets d'aspirine qu'elle avéait chaque jour.(225)

In 1978, Beauvoir collaborated with Marianne Ahrne and Pépo Angel to a film called Promenades au pays de la vieillesse, a film which embarrassed the French government by showing the condition of old people in French society. As for Beauvoir herself, it seems that having examined the situation of old people in La Vieillesse and having exposed their plight in the film, she has faced old age with her habitual stoicism and courage.

---

(224) Axel Madsen. Hearts and Minds. The Common Journey of Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre, p. 279.

(225) La Vieillesse, p. 323.



In this chapter I have used evidence external to the autobiography to show the extent to which cultural prejudices towards women influenced Beauvoir's own thinking. Indeed, her "existential" approach to the question of female sexuality in Le Deuxième Sexe was based on sexist assumptions. In this essay she used existential rationalizations to explain and justify what was actually her personal ambivalence towards her female body - an ambivalence which was the product of social attitudes.

In the autobiography she does not dwell on painful areas of her experience. And yet, in Le Deuxième Sexe, she is candid about "ce conflit qui caractérise singulièrement la situation de la femme affranchie":

Elle refuse de se cantonner dans son rôle de femelle parce qu'elle ne veut pas se mutiler; mais ce serait aussi une mutilation de répudier son sexe. (226)

I have argued that, in order to achieve her idea of liberation, Beauvoir was frequently in the position of having to renounce her sexuality. There is no doubt that this constituted a "mutilation" - and she felt this herself, quite acutely at times.

It is unfortunate that in the autobiography she is not open about this dilemma. On the contrary, from reading the autobiography alone we have little inkling of the problems she faced. Once again, her unwillingness to confront her own difficulties squarely and her desire to be a model for women aspiring to independence have meant that she has not told us the whole truth about her experience.

---

(226) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 524.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE THREE IMAGES OF WOMEN.

In Le Deuxième Sexe, Beauvoir described women in their various roles: "la femme mariée", "la mère", "la narcissiste", "l'amoureuse" and "la femme indépendante". Although she herself does not say so, these roles can be reduced to three fundamental choices open to women: what she calls dévouement, narcissism and independence. In the autobiography, Simone de Beauvoir makes brief reference to a great number of women, but portrays very few in depth. Of these, all are shown to have sought self-justification by making one of these three choices of being. The dévoüée is shown to live for others, the narcissist is supremely concerned with herself. The independent woman struggles to find a balance between these two extremes.

In the autobiography, it is just as clear as in Le Deuxième Sexe that Beauvoir condemns the first two types for attempting:

l'impossible poursuite de l'être à travers le narcissisme, l'amour, la religion. (1)

The various dévoüée and narcissist figures in the autobiography are shown to be looking to others to justify their life, thus abdicating responsibility for their own existence. In Le Deuxième Sexe, Beauvoir argued that only the woman struggling to be a "femme indépendante" is able to lead a fulfilled and "authentic" existence:

productrice, active, elle reconquiert sa transcendance; dans ses projets elle s'affirme concrètement comme sujet; par son rapport avec le but qu'elle poursuit, avec l'argent et les droits qu'elle s'approprie, elle éprouve sa responsabilité. (2)

---

(1) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 521.

(2) *ibid.*

In the autobiography, too, it is evident to us that it is only this last choice of which Beauvoir wholeheartedly approves.

There is, however, a major disparity between Le Deuxième Sexe and the autobiography. In the former, Beauvoir described the situation of the independent woman as the most difficult of the three choices - even if it brings personal satisfaction unknown to the dévouée or the narcissist. Indeed, in the chapter entitled "La Femme indépendante", Beauvoir discussed with great candour some of the difficulties which faced an independent woman in France in the forties. One passage summarizes particularly well how she saw the situation of the independent woman:

Si les difficultés sont plus évidentes chez la femme indépendante, c'est qu'elle n'a pas choisi la résignation mais la lutte. Tous les problèmes vivants trouvent dans la mort une solution silencieuse; une femme qui s'emploie à vivre est donc plus divisée que celle qui enterre sa volonté et ses désirs; mais elle n'acceptera pas qu'on lui offre celle-ci en exemple. C'est seulement en se comparant à l'homme qu'elle s'estimera désavantagée. (3)

Despite this statement, it is striking that in the autobiography Beauvoir dwells very little on the conflicts which are specific to the situation of a "femme indépendante". Indeed, there is only one independent woman whom she even portrays in any detail -: herself. Beauvoir does allude to several other women who lead independent existences, and she frequently expresses admiration for their courage or stamina, thus implying that their lives were not easy, yet without ever dwelling on what sorts of problems these vigorous friends and acquaintances were facing. The personal crises in her own life which she emphasizes are universal ones (such as the trauma of ageing and the fear of death), rather than products of her situation as an independent woman.

Once again, it is obvious to us that Beauvoir has not carried out her original aim: "tout dire". It is significant that the women to whom she was closest and

---

(3) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 528. (Italics mine).

whom she saw most often are the ones about whom we are told least. It is true that Zaza was dead when Beauvoir wrote about her in Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée and it was her mother's death which allowed Simone to write Une Mort très douce. Lise, Camille and Violette Leduc had died before the writing of Tout compte fait, thus giving Beauvoir new freedom to round off their portraits and to be far more candid about their pathetic situation than she could have been otherwise. However, I have already pointed out that discretion is an inadequate explanation: Beauvoir's frank portrayal of her mother in Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée was published while her mother was still living. A more weighty explanation is that Beauvoir regarded the autobiography as an opportunity to demonstrate her profoundly existentialist conviction that "la vie humaine" is "une partie que l'on peut gagner ou perdre".<sup>(4)</sup> As a consequence, she dwells on the downfall of those who lose the "game" and, in order not in any way to undermine the victory of those who win, she scarcely acknowledges the problems which they faced. As a result, Le Deuxième Sexe, which argues that every woman in society is "divisée" to a certain extent, is, paradoxically, often more revealing about the experiences of independent women, including Beauvoir herself, than her autobiography, in which she sets herself up as a model and only briefly alludes to other independent women.

In this chapter I use passages from Le Deuxième Sexe to show both the extent to which Beauvoir's own experience influenced what she wrote in Le Deuxième Sexe and to show that this essay profoundly influenced the way in which she depicted the experience of women in the autobiography. In a very real sense, too, it was Le Deuxième Sexe which shaped her self-portrayal, for, as I already commented in my introduction on Simone de Beauvoir, the reaction to this polemical essay made Beauvoir eager to show her accusers that she had not written about the female condition because she was embittered and frustrated. It is with these considerations in mind that we look at what Beauvoir says and does not say about "la dévouée", "la narcissiste" and "la femme indépendante".

---

(4) Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté, p. 32-33.

## I. The "Dévouée".

Raised in a bourgeois and strict Catholic milieu, Simone de Beauvoir was taught to appreciate "la grandeur du dévouement".<sup>(5)</sup> Indeed, surrounded and moulded by model dévouées, it was not until late in her adolescence that she even caught a glimpse of other values. Nevertheless, throughout her adolescence, Simone became increasingly aware of the negative aspects of dévouement. The two women whose lives made this most apparent to her were her own mother and her best friend, Zaza Mabilille.<sup>(6)</sup> Their experience made Simone determined to avoid their situation herself. By the same token, it was because her own upbringing had prepared her for a life of dévouement herself, that she understood these women so well and was able to portray their experience with great insight.

### 1) Dévouement.

Before looking at Simone de Beauvoir's portrayal of women in this situation in the autobiography, we need to see what is actually meant by the notion of dévouement and why it should be that many women in Simone's milieu accepted, or, as she sees it, voluntarily chose this subordinate situation.

In Le Deuxième Sexe, Beauvoir had described the strong tradition of dévouement in Catholic France. She cites Balzac, whose attitude represents that of the anti-feminist middle-class in nineteenth century France:

La femme n'est égale à l'homme qu'en faisant de sa vie une perpétuelle offrande, comme celle de l'homme est une perpétuelle action.<sup>(7)</sup>

---

(5) Une Mort très douce, p. 53.

(6) The surname "Mabilille" is a pseudonym.

(7) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 507.

He also proclaimed quite unashamedly:

La femme mariée est une esclave qu'il faut savoir mettre sur un trône. (8)

Amongst the French male authors whose conception of women Beauvoir described in Le Deuxième Sexe -: Montherlant, Claudel, Breton and Stendhal, she observed that despite the vastly different outlooks of these writers, all admired dévouement in women. Claudel, particularly, in accordance with Catholic tradition, saw women as being "vouées à l'héroïsme de la sainteté" - a saintliness which manifested itself in "le renoncement". (9) She characterizes Claudel's devoutly Catholic and mystical view of the ideal woman:

faite pour se donner, non pour prendre, elle est plus proche [que les hommes] du parfait dévouement. C'est par elle que se fera le dépassement des joies terrestres qui sont licites et bonnes, mais dont le sacrifice est meilleur encore [...]. Elle apparaît donc comme puisant sa grandeur dans sa subordination même. (10)

According to Beauvoir, whereas Claudel "exalte la vassale, la servante, la dévouée qui se soumet à Dieu en se soumettant au mâle", (11) Montherlant, in his writing, takes "le dévouement féminin" for granted, "comme un devoir". (12) Stendhal and Breton, less dogmatic, "l'admirent comme un choix généreux." These writers all regarded dévouement as a form of altruism and a positive and laudable virtue:

Sauf l'étonnant Lamiel (13) - toutes leurs oeuvres montrent qu'ils attendent de la femme cet altruisme que Comte (14) admirait en elle et lui imposait, et qui, selon lui aussi constituait à la fois une infériorité flagrante et une équivoque supériorité. (15)

(8) Le Deuxième Sexe I, p. 188. Both (7) and (8) come from Balzac's Physiologie du mariage (1830).

(9) Le Deuxième Sexe I, pp. 352-353.

(10) *ibid.*

(11) *ibid.*, p. 382. (Italics mine.)

(12) *ibid.*

(13) Lamiel was the title of Stendhal's last novel, (unfinished) published in 1889, in which the heroine, Lamiel, courageously stands up to society and struggles for what she believes in.

(14) Auguste Comte (1798-1857) aired his views on the inequality of the sexes in his correspondence with John Stuart Mill. He believed that women were naturally superior to men in morality and emotion and were inferior to them in intelligence. Thus the position of women in society reflected their "natural" status.

(15) Le Deuxième Sexe I, p. 382.

Beauvoir seems to have been the first in France to bitterly attack the glorification of dévouement. She insisted that to make a virtue of self-abnegation was to make a positive value out of the acceptance of oppression. Criticizing Claudel's "mystique de la femme",<sup>(16)</sup> she wrote:

Se dévouer aux enfants, au mari, au foyer, au domaine, à la Patrie à l'Eglise, c'est son lot, le lot que la bourgeoisie lui a toujours assigné; l'homme donne son activité, la femme sa personne; sanctifier cette hiérarchie au nom de la volonté divine, ce n'est en rien la modifier, mais au contraire prétendre la figer dans l'éternel.<sup>(17)</sup>

John Stuart Mill had attacked the idea of dévouement in The Subjection of Women, published in 1869. Although Beauvoir does not mention his attitude to dévouement, she had read his work before writing Le Deuxième Sexe and would have been acquainted with his ideas on the subject. He objected to the imposition on women of "the exaggerated self-abnegation which is the present artificial ideal of feminine character". He denounced the fact that women "are universally taught that they are born and created for self-sacrifice":

an instinct of selfishness made men avail themselves of it to the utmost as a means of holding women in subjection, by representing to them meekness, submissiveness, and resignation of all individual will into the hands of men, as an essential part of sexual attractiveness.<sup>(18)</sup>

Some years later, Nietzsche (whom Beauvoir records having read "avec ferveur" at university (MJFR, 232) ) associated the values of dévouement with religion, writing with great vehemence:

I condemn Christianity..<sup>(19)</sup>

He called Christianity "the greatest of all conceivable corruptions" and "the one enormous and innermost perversion".<sup>(20)</sup> According to him, Christian ideals such as self-abasement, humility and self-sacrifice were nothing other than an attempt by the individual to escape from the anguish of responsibility for the

(16) Le Deuxième Sexe I, p. 354.

(17) ibid., p. 355.

(18) John Stuart Mill. The Subjection of Women. London: Longmans, Green, Reader: Dyer, 1869, p. 77.

(19) Nietzsche. The Antichrist. (Twilight of the Idols and the Anti-Christ, (Penguin, 1968, p.186.)

self. For this reason, he criticized women for the way in which they loved - which he called a "désir d'abandon total".<sup>(21)</sup> Beauvoir quotes a passage from Le Gai savoir (The Joyful Wisdom) in Le Deuxième Sexe:

Ce que la femme entend par amour est assez clair: ce n'est pas seulement le dévouement, c'est un don total de corps et d'âme, sans restriction, sans nul égard pour quoi que ce soit. C'est cette absence de condition qui fait de son amour une foi, la seule qu'elle ait.<sup>(22)</sup>

And, in The Antichrist, Nietzsche violently attacked the idea of "foi":

The "believer" does not belong to himself, he can only be a means, he must be USED UP, he is in need of someone who uses him up. His instinct accords the highest honour to a morality of self-abnegation: everything in him, his prudence, his experience, his vanity, persuade him to adopt this morality. [..] If one considers how necessary a regulating code of conduct is to the majority of people, a code of conduct which constrains them and fixes them from outside; and how control, or in a higher sense, SLAVERY, is the only and ultimate condition under which the weak-willed man, and especially woman, flourish; one also understands conviction, "faith".<sup>(23)</sup>

Consequently, as Beauvoir points out, Nietzsche believed that "le héros doit s'insurger contre la Magna Mater".<sup>(24)</sup>

In her attitude to dévouement, Simone de Beauvoir borrows from, and goes beyond, both Mill and Nietzsche. Like Mill, she sees women as victims of their social circumstances. Like Nietzsche, she condemns the sanctification of dévouement by the Church. Describing her attitude at twenty, she writes:

Je détestais de plus en plus franchement le catholicisme; voyant Lisa et Zaza se débattre contre "cette religion martyrisante" je me réjouissais de lui avoir échappé; en fait j'en restais barbouillée. (MJFR, 308).

---

(21) Nietzsche. Le Gai savoir. Quoted by Beauvoir in Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 477. I quote Nietzsche in French, because Beauvoir does. Elsewhere I use the English translation.

(22) *ibid.*

(23) Nietzsche. The Antichrist. Penguin, p. 172.

(24) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 311.



As an existentialist, she believes - like Nietzsche - that there is a self-interested aspect to dévouement and an element of self-deception in women's flight from personal responsibility. In Pyrrhus et Cinéas, written in 1943, she described the way in which dévouement was a negation of personal autonomy:

Supposons qu'autrui ait besoin de moi; supposons que son existence possède une valeur absolue: me voilà justifié d'être puisque je suis pour un être dont l'existence est justifiée. Je suis délivré du risque de l'angoisse; en posant devant moi une fin absolue j'ai abdicé ma liberté. (25)

In Le Deuxième Sexe, where she applied this idea to the situation of women, Beauvoir again stressed that the dévouée was choosing a "carrière [ ] moins fatigante que beaucoup d'autres" by making "un membre de la caste supérieure" her "fin absolue". (26) The woman chooses to become an "esclave dévoué", (27) because:

il est plus confortable de subir un aveugle esclavage que de travailler à s'affranchir. (28)

As a writer primarily interested in the individual's responsibility for his or her self, Simone de Beauvoir is also extremely conscious of the tyranny of dévouement: the fact that the dévouée is not only a victim but also an oppressor. She pointed out that the woman's apparent selflessness is actually a form of self-ishness, for the idea that "se dévouer, c'est agir pour autrui" is based on a contradiction, namely:

Il n'y a dévouement que si je prends pour fin une fin définie par autrui; mais alors il est contradictoire de supposer que je puisse, moi, définir cette fin pour lui. (29)

---

(25) Pyrrhus et Cinéas. Paris: Gallimard, 1944, p. 70.

(26) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 81.

(27) Pyrrhus et Cinéas, p. 70.

(28) Le Deuxième Sexe I, p. 395.

(29) Pyrrhus et Cinéas, p. 73.

Because of this paradox:

Beaucoup de prétendus dévouements contredisent donc dès le départ à leur prétention: ce sont en vérité des tyrannies.(30)

As well as highlighting the tyrannical side of dévouement within the family, Beauvoir supports John Stuart Mill's views about the negative political implications of this value. Mill had pointed out that, since women's education is "an education of the sentiments rather than of the understanding", they are indoctrinated to feel that:

the individuals connected with them are the only ones to whom they owe any duty - the only ones whose interest they are called upon to care for.(31)

Similarly, in Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée, Beauvoir commented:

Certes, autour de moi, on prônait le dévouement, mais on lui assignait pour limites le cercle familial; hors de là, autrui n'était pas un prochain. Les ouvriers en particulier appartenaient à une espèce aussi dangereusement étrangère que les Boches et les Bolcheviks. (MJFR, 180).

The selflessness of the dévouée is thus extremely restricted in scope and implies no broader social conscience or sense of social responsibility.

Beauvoir claims that such women:

sont par excellence les chantes de la bourgeoisie puisqu'elles représentent dans cette classe menacée l'élément le plus conservateur.(32)

Because of the dévouée's conviction that her role is the only respectable role for a woman, she has no sense of solidarity with other women, particularly not with women from other social classes - but not even with her own daughters. It is because of this that Beauvoir sees the mother-daughter relationship as the prime example of the oppressive side of dévouement.

(30) Pyrrhus et Cinéas, p. 74-75.

(31) Mill. The Subjection of Women, p. 163.

(32) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 552.

By depicting the mauvaise foi of the dévoué in Pyrrhus et Cinéas, and the situation of the dévouée, five years later, in Le Deuxième Sexe, and, finally, by describing her personal experience of this ten years later in her autobiography - Simone de Beauvoir did much to demystify the value of dévouement in the Catholic bourgeoisie in France.

A close look at Beauvoir's portrayal of the formation of the dévouée and then at her situation as a married woman, helps us not only to understand the dévouée but also to understand what Beauvoir had to struggle against, in her attempt to be an independent woman.

## 2) Formation of the "Dévouée".

In the autobiography, Beauvoir gives us two detailed portraits of young dévouées in their family environment: one is herself, the other is the girl who was her best friend between the age of ten and twenty, Zaza Mabile. A number of other young girls appear in the autobiography, but their portraits are incomplete and therefore not nearly as valuable as a picture of female experience. It is clear, nonetheless, that virtually all the girls with whom Simone came into contact during her years at school and university were destined to become dévouées. Their conflicts and aspirations are depicted in the series of stories in which Beauvoir described this milieu: Quand prime le spirituel. (33)

---

(33) Quand prime le spirituel. Paris: Gallimard, 1979. Beauvoir writes: "J'avais mis beaucoup de moi-même dans cet ouvrage. J'étais en révolte contre le spiritualisme qui m'avait longtemps opprimée et je voulais exprimer ce dégoût à travers l'histoire de jeunes femmes que je connaissais et qui en avaient été les victimes plus ou moins consentantes."

The first volume of the autobiography presents a picture of Simone's bourgeois and Catholic milieu in which all the young girls were exhorted to acquire the qualities of their dévouée mothers. Simone was the only one of them not to believe in God, and all of them were preparing to meet the man of their dreams. There was Simone, Zaza and Poupette. There were Simone's cousins: Jeanne, who, we remember, incarnated the "idéal" of "la jeune fille, la vraie", (MJFR, 178) and Madeleine, who appalled the whole family, from the time she was sixteen onwards by her timid attempts to wear make-up without being noticed by the relations. ("Maquillage", writes Simone ironically, was considered to be nothing less than "l'empreinte fourchue de Satan" in the prim, pious circles in which she was brought up. (MJFR, 268) ). There was Jaques' sister, Titite, who shocked her family by looking forward, a little too eagerly, to marriage to her handsome boyfriend. At school, there was Marguerite de Théri-court, the beautiful and very proper rich girl, who became engaged, at eighteen, to a wealthy business acquaintance of her father's. Another was Clotilde Gendron, whom Simone ardently admired at one stage. She was pious and romantic and she too married very young and "avec beaucoup de sentimentalité"; - it was an arranged marriage. (MJFR, 150). At university there were others. There was Suzanne Boigue, who was involved in good works at the Equipes Sociales, organized by Garric. She found "l'homme de sa vie" (MJFR, 272) and married him. Simone admits that she envied Suzanne her obvious happiness, but later adds that Suzanne's "félicité conjugale" made her rather uninteresting - at least to her. (MJFR, 334). There was also Lisa Quermadec, a boarder at Saint-Marie, the Catholic Institute at Neuilly.<sup>(34)</sup> Like Zaza, she was struggling to find some identity amid the values of what Beauvoir calls "cette religion martyrisante". (MJFR, 308). Unlucky in love and frustrated with her life, "la fatigue et le désespoir desséchaient son visage". (MJFR, 326).

---

(34) Beauvoir tells us that she portrayed Lisa in the story by that name in Quand prime le spirituel:  
 "Je décrivais l'étoilement d'une jeune fille timidement vivante qu'accablaient le mysticisme et les intrigues de l'institut Sainte-Marie. (FA, 230).

Unfortunately, Beauvoir tells us no more about these young women; we do not know whether they led lives of classical dévouées. For this reason, I will concentrate here on the more complete picture of Simone and Zaza - and their relationship with their dévouée mothers.

Of key importance in preparing the young girl psychologically for her role in life was the Catholic Church. Both the Church and convent education stressed the virtues of self-restraint, self-sacrifice and submission to a higher power - be it the Church, the girl's parents, or her future husband.

When Françoise de Beauvoir showed her daughter a photograph of her old convent school class from the 1890's, Simone was struck by the joylessness and lack of spontaneity in the girls' faces:

Toutes portent des guimpes montantes, des jupes longues, des chignons sévères. Leurs yeux n'expriment rien. (35)

Thirty years later, Georges de Beauvoir was similarly taken aback when he attended the prize-giving ceremony at the Cours Désir, the Catholic girls' school which Simone, Poupette and Zaza attended:

l'austérité des coiffures, les couleurs violentes ou sucrées des satins et taffetas éteignaient tous les visages. Ce qui dut surtout frapper mon père, ce fut l'air morne et opprimé de ces adolescentes. (MJFR, 152).

Françoise de Beauvoir, as we have seen, retained her convent morality in adulthood, and "sa conduite conformait à ses croyances" (MJFR, 41):

elle communiait souvent, priait assidûment, lisait de nombreux ouvrages de piété. (MJFR, 41).

She took charge of her girls' souls: mother and daughters said prayers together morning and evening, and she took them regularly to mass. Above all, she acted

---

(35) Une Mort très douce, p. 50.

in the name of religion to impress upon her girls the glory of dévouement :

Elle m'inculqua le sens du devoir, ainsi que des consignes d'oubli de soi et d'austerité. (MJFR, 43).

In the domain of morality, it was Simone's mother, not her father, who represented the force of censorship and repression, who taught her the code of feminine behaviour:

J'appris de maman à m'effacer, à contrôler mon langage, à censurer mes désirs, à dire et à faire exactement ce qui devait être dit et fait. (MJFR, 43).

The Mabile family was more entrenched in the Catholic bourgeoisie than the de Beauvoir family. Unlike Georges de Beauvoir, Monsieur Mabile, who held a very high post.- first as a railway engineer and then with Citroën - was a very pious man. Madame Mabile came from "une dynastie de catholiques militants". (MJFR, 92). Both of the Mabile parents gave up much of their leisure time to social work and charity and gave money to charitable works. Each year the whole family went to Lourdes at the time of the national pilgrimage, where:

les garçons servaient comme brancardiers; les filles lavaient la vaisselle dans les cuisines des hospices. (MJFR, 119).

It was Zaza who first became aware of the contradictions between bourgeois ideology and religion. It became apparent to her that the values of the Church negated the values of the bourgeoisie: religion valued selflessness; her class was based on self-interest.

Dans leur entourage on parlait beaucoup de Dieu, de charité, d'idéal; mais Zaza s'aperçut vite que tous ces gens ne respectaient que l'argent et les dignités sociales. Cette hypocrisie la révolta. (MJFR, 119).

However, whereas the adolescent Simone rejected religion and increasingly rebelled against the values of dévouement, the adolescent Zaza conformed to the image of the model dévoüée. Having decided that her "devoir de chrétienne" was to "se soumettre à sa mère", (MJFR, 274) she obeyed her mother regardless of the personal cost to herself and irrespective of whether or not she believed her mother to be right.

Indeed, religion, combined with the cult of dévouement, tended to lead to the exaltation of suffering as an end in itself. Young girls were encouraged in this at an early age by their reading of the lives of the saints, in which privation was regarded as a privilege. It is such thinking which made Zaza speak of "la valeur de la souffrance" and of her desire to "porter avec le Christ la Croix". (MJFR, 351).<sup>(36)</sup> The religious glorification of suffering, reinforcing the young girl's apprenticeship in "la soumission féminine"<sup>(37)</sup> led, very often, to a psychological disposition to masochism. Simone tells us that when she was eight or nine years old and "en humeur de sainteté", (MJFR, 82) she would occasionally sleep on the hard floor instead of in her bed. Around the age of twelve, she invented other "mortifications":

enfermée dans les cabinets - mon seul refuge - je me frottais au sang avec une pierre ponce, je me fustigeais avec la chafnette d'or que je portais à mon cou. (MJFR, 135).

We know that Zaza was capable of slashing her foot with an axe in order to escape a while - she told Simone - from the social round. One suspects that Zaza would have punished herself with other "auto-mutilations" on other occasions.<sup>(38)</sup> In La Force de l'âge, Beauvoir tells us she discovered that:

la plus dévouée de mes tantes se faisait vigoureusement fouetter la nuit par son mari. (FA, 230).

As she remarked in Le Deuxième Sexe:

C'est en tombant au fond de l'abjection que la femme s'assure les plus délicieux triomphes; qu'il s'agisse de Dieu ou d'un homme la fillette apprend qu'en consentant aux plus profondes démissions elle deviendra toute-puissante: elle se complait à un masochisme qui lui promet de suprêmes conquêtes. (39)

---

(36) Beauvoir tells us that Garric instructed his tutors at the Equipes Sociales to talk to the working class students about "la valeur de la souffrance". Simone refused: "j'aurais eu l'impression de me moquer d'elles." (MJFR, 223).

(37) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 89.

(38) *ibid.*, p. 110.

(39) *ibid.*, p. 40.

Young girls were thus psychologically prepared for marriage and motherhood: they were taught obedience and submission to higher powers, they were told of the beauty of motherhood. As well as this, the young girl was moulded for marriage in two main domains: care of a household and the acquisition of social graces.

As a young girl, Simone was taught some practical skills for her future role as mistress of the house, but, unlike Zaza, she was encouraged rather than forced. The "encouragement" beautifully demonstrates the weight of the contemporary socialization of females; as a little girl at primary school, Simone was taught that her worth lay in being pleasing and that she could best do this by being a genteel servant:

Bonne-maman réussit à m'intéresser à la tapisserie et à la broderie sur filet: [..] Mais je sabotais les ourlets, les surjets, les reprises, les festons, le point de croix, le plumetis, le macramé. Pour piquer mon zèle, Mademoiselle Fayet<sup>(40)</sup> me raconta une anecdote; on vantait devant un jeune homme à marier les mérites d'une jeune fille musicienne, savante, douée de mille talents: sait-elle coudre? demanda-t-il. (MJFR, 69).

Simone was fortunate in that she was one of only two girls - an unusually small family for the time. Madame de Beauvoir could cope quite well with the running of the household, especially since their new apartment was very small. Simone was asked relatively little to help in the house, and the small tasks were not so numerous that they could not easily be distributed between the two girls.

Zaza was less fortunate. As second oldest daughter in a family of nine children, she was expected to assume a large share of the burden of running the household. Madame Mabile ran the house in the nineteenth century

---

(40) Mademoiselle Fayet was the head of the elementary classes at the Cours Désir.



provincial tradition: as much as possible was produced in the house rather than bought and conservation of money, rather than time, was the absolute rule:

Madame Mabilie tenait l'épargne pour une vertu capitale; elle eût jugé immoral d'acheter chez un fournisseur les produits qui pouvaient se fabriquer à la maison: pâtisserie, confitures, lingerie, robes et manteaux. Pendant la belle saison, elle allait souvent aux Halles, à six heures du matin, avec ses filles, pour se procurer à bas prix fruits et légumes. Quand les petites Mabilie avaient besoin d'une toilette neuve, Zaza devait explorer une dizaine de magasins; de chacun elle rapportait une liasse d'échantillons que Madame Mabilie comparait, en tenant compte de la qualité du tissu et de son prix; après une longue délibération, Zaza retournait acheter l'étoffe choisie. (MJFR, 274).

Since there were vast numbers of people to entertain, especially since Monsieur Mabilie had taken up a very important position in the Maison Citroën, mornings were spent preparing for the afternoon's social rites. When Simone visited Zaza, on holiday with the family at Laubardon, she was horrified by the day's routine:

Les travaux ménagers dévoraient les matinées. On cueillait des fleurs, on arrangeait des bouquets, et surtout on cuisinait. Lili, Zaza, Bébelle confectionnaient des cakes, des quatre-quarts, des sables, des brioches pour le thé de l'après-midi; elles aidaient leur mère et leur grand-mère à mettre en boceaux des tonnes de fruits et de légumes; il y avait toujours des pois à écosser, des haricots verts à effiler, des noix à décortiquer, des prunes à dénoyauter. (MJFR, 253).

These household tasks were all in preparation for the afternoon's "mondanités" and in this respect, too, the life of the upper bourgeoisie had changed little from the previous century. For the Mabilie family, being on holiday meant a perpetual round of social ceremonies or preparations for such events:

pique-niques, thés, sauteries se succédèrent sans répit; la maison était largement ouverte: des nués de cousins et d'amis venaient déjeuner, goûter, jouer au tennis et au bridge. Ou bien la Citroën, conduite par Madame Mabilie, Lili ou Zaza, nous emmenait danser chez des propriétaires des environs. Il y avait souvent des fêtes au bourg voisin; j'assistai à des parties de pelote basque, j'allai voir de jeunes paysans, verts de frousse, planter des cocardes dans le cuir de vaches efflanquées: parfois, une corne acérée fendait leurs beaux pantalons blancs, et tout le monde riait. Après le dîner, quelqu'un se mettait au piano, la famille chantait en chœur; on jouait aussi à des jeux: charades et bouts-rimés. (MJFR, 253).

Zaza was quite natural in her worldly role. Indeed, for Simone's liking, Zaza "jouait avec trop d'aisance son rôle de jeune fille du monde" (MJFR, 277) and Simone wondered how long it would take before she completely identified with this role. As for Simone, much to her parents' disappointment, she felt ill at ease in society and was rebellious when her parents asked her to be present on social occasions:

Mes amies, et Zaza elle-même, jouaient avec aisance leur rôle mondain; elles paraissaient au "jour" de leur mère, servaient le thé, souriaient, disaient aimablement des riens; moi je souriais mal, je ne savais pas faire du charme, de l'esprit ni même des concessions. Mes parents me citaient en exemple des jeunes filles "remarquablement intelligentes" et qui cependant brillaient dans les salons. (MJFR, 178).

However, at this stage, in her late teens, Simone already aimed to be something quite different from a worldly type of dévouée : she aimed for a serious profession. Unlike the "amateurs" who shone in the "salons", she saw herself as "professionnelle". (MJFR, 178).

In this respect, Simone was much more fortunate than most of the other young dévouées she knew. Generally, marriage was considered the only serious vocation for a girl. Beauvoir considers it a stroke of luck that her parents had become "de nouveaux pauvres" in 1919. (TCF, 21). Without a dowry, she had to be able to earn a living, as she and her sister could no longer hope to marry into a moneyed milieu. Without this turn of events, her parents would have shown less understanding towards her studies and would have been more intransigent in their attempts to introduce her to society:

il m'aurait été plus difficile de poursuivre mes études. (TCF, 22).

Just how difficult it was to keep up studies, when destined to become a "dame", is apparent in the case of Zaza. It was because of the Mabile family that Zaza and Simone were sent to Catholic Institutes for their tertiary education - thus minimizing their contact with the dreaded Sorbonne. Monsieur Mabile still needed first to be reassured by Robert Garric, the girls' future

literature professor, that "on peut passer une licence sans se damner". (MJFR, 168). Very soon, Zaza's studies began to irritate her mother, who:

lui reprochait de consacrer trop de temps à l'étude, à la lecture, à la musique et de négliger "ses devoirs sociaux"; les livres que Zaza aimait lui paraissaient suspects; elle s'inquiétait. (MJFR, 220).

As orthodox Catholics, the Mabile parents were absolutely hostile to the "intellectuels":

les "biens-pensants" voulaient l'anéantissement des "intellectuels", et réciproquement. (MJFR, 287).<sup>(41)</sup>

As well as this, Madame Mabile was adamant that there was only one vocation for women: dévouement.

dans le milieu de Zaza, il fallait se marier ou entrer en religion. "Le célibat, disait-on, n'est pas une vocation." (MJFR, 153).

Because of this, Madame Mabile was determined to prevent her daughter from becoming "une intellectuelle" - or, worse still, "un bas-bleu disgracié". (MJFR, 288). She made sure that Zaza was kept too busy, with housework and social activities, to concentrate for long on her studies. Despite Zaza's obvious intelligence, and the fact that she had just achieved "le rare exploit de réussir du premier coup son certificat de philologie", (MJFR, 273), her mother was determined to block any chance of a career for her. When Zaza was twenty:

Madame Mabile refusait catégoriquement que Zaza entreprît l'an prochain un diplôme d'études, elle redoutait que sa fille ne devînt une intellectuelle. (MJFR, 274).

---

(41) We recall that Georges de Beauvoir shared the conservatives' hatred of "la dangereuse secte qui avait soutenu Dreyfus: les intellectuels", which he explains in the following terms:

Grisés par leur savoir livresque, butés dans leur orgueil abstrait et dans leurs vaines prétentions à l'universalisme, ceux-ci sacrifiaient les réalités concrètes - pays, race, caste, famille, patrie - aux billevesées dont la France et la civilisation étaient en train de mourir: les Droits de l'Homme, le pacifisme, l'internationalisme, le socialisme. (MJFR, 177-178).

This unwillingness to encourage a young woman to undertake studies and train for a career left her in a state of economic dependence, first on her family and then on her husband. It meant, too, that as a single woman she was very vulnerable both to feelings of guilt, because of being a financial burden on her father, and to overwhelming panic at the prospect of being left a spinster, a situation which carried with it the implication of personal failure.<sup>(42)</sup> Because she was aiming to become a teacher, this was not so in the case of Simone, but it did apply to the Mabilles girls.

The Mabilles family was "beaucoup plus solidement intégrée" than the Beauvoir family in the "bourgeoisie bien-pensante", and in this milieu at that time many marriages were still arranged by the families. (MJFR, 274). In their early twenties, the Mabilles girls were exposed to an assortment of eligible young men at various social gatherings and were then expected to consent willingly to marrying the one their parents chose. Lili Mabilles, three years older than Zaza, was the first candidate. At this time:

elle cuisinait et dansait, servait de secrétaire à son père, de couturière à ses soeurs. Sa mère la traînait d'entrevue en entrevue. (MJFR, 152).

At twenty-three, Lili was causing her mother some panic, and it was made quite clear to her that she was a financial burden to the family and had no choice but to consent to marriage:

Madame Mabilles multipliait réceptions et sorties, dans l'espoir de caser enfin Lili qui commençait à monter en graine. "C'est la dernière année que je m'occupe de toi; tu m'as déjà coûté assez cher en entrevues: maintenant c'est le tour de ta soeur", avait-elle déclaré publiquement au cours d'un dîner. (MJFR, 276)<sup>(43)</sup>

---

(42) Even if the woman did work, unequal pay still meant that she could not live in a way which corresponded to her social status. As Beauvoir pointed out in Le Deuxième Sexe: the young woman is "vouée à la galanterie du fait que ses salaires sont minimes tandis que le standard de vie que la société exige d'elle est très haut." (Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 433).

43) Simone de Beauvoir had "Anne's" mother saying the same thing in Quand prime le spirituel (p. 134). She quoted this threat again in Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 202.

Her mother eventually selected a husband for her, and Lili, although not at all inspired by the young man, realized that she had no alternative but to comply.

The choice of husband for Zaza caused several disruptions in the family. At fifteen, Zaza fell in love with André, a boy of the same age and the son of a cousin of her father's. André and Zaza corresponded for several years before Madame Mabile intervened. Because Zaza's parents had fallen out with André's parents, marriage between their offspring was out of the question and Madame Mabile forbade them to see each other again. Zaza was eighteen when she was obliged to confront André with this news. She later claimed she had been so upset that she was "à deux doigts du suicide", (MJFR, 247) and wrote to Simone:

Je me souviens d'un soir où, regardant le métro arriver, j'ai failli passer dessous. Je n'avais plus à aucun degré le goût de l'existence. (MJFR, 247).

Nevertheless, she apparently never thought of defying her mother.

Zaza was twenty when she and Jean Pradelle fell in love. Pradelle was "un jeune homme de bonne famille" (MJFR, 243) who attended the prestigious Ecole Normale Supérieure and thus looked forward to a brilliant career. He was also a practising Catholic. Indeed, he was not only eminently eligible; he had all the ingredients of the dévoué himself: he was devoted to his widowed mother and his sister and "acceptait de grand coeur la société bourgeoise" and its values. (MJFR, 245).

Madame Mabile, however, did not approve. As Zaza explained to Simone:

"Dans notre milieu, les mariages ne se font pas comme ça!" (MJFR, 333).

Meanwhile, her mother had selected another young man for her consideration.

When Zaza protested that she did not love him, her mother retorted:

"Ma petite, la femme n'aime pas; c'est l'homme qui aime!" (MJFR, 332).

Zaza, with her intensely romantic temperament, was only prepared to be a dévouée if she loved and respected the object of her devotion, whose existence had to have "une valeur absolue:"<sup>(44)</sup>

elle ne voulait pas accepter pour mari un homme qu'elle estimait moins que d'autres. (MJFR, 332).

Besides, as Beauvoir remarks, since the institution of arranged marriage was becoming outdated, even within its last bastion: the conservative middle and upper classes,<sup>(45)</sup> it was no longer an entirely positive sign that a young man should passively accept the choice made for him:

tous ces jeunes gens qui acceptaient de se laisser passivement marier étaient d'une consternante médiocrité. (MJFR, 274).

Matters were made worse by the fact that Pradelle had not asked Monsieur Mabile for Zaza's hand in marriage: he told Zaza he wanted to wait a while in order not to upset his own mother, whose other two children had recently left home. Madame Mabile believed that he had no intention of marrying her daughter and objected to her daughter meeting or even corresponding with Pradelle. She arranged to send Zaza for a second time to Berlin - this time with the aim of exiling her, for a year. When Zaza wrote to Simone telling her of her mother's latest decisions, she described her "grand désarroi" (MJFR, 333) but added:

je préfère que vous vous rendiez compte de cet état d'esprit auquel sans cesse je me heurte et que par ailleurs une idée chrétienne d'obéissance m'oblige à respecter. (MJFR, 286).

---

(44) Pyrrhus et Cinéas, p. 70.

(45) The Code civil protected the bourgeoisie even without marriages having to be formally arranged. Parental consent was necessary until the girl was twenty-one and the man twenty-five. Odile Dhavernas comments, in her book Droits des femmes, pouvoir des hommes:

"Au-delà de vingt et un ans pour les femmes et vingt-cinq ans pour les hommes, le consentement des parents demeure nécessaire; mais les jeunes gens peuvent passer outre au refus de leurs parents après avoir notifié à ceux-ci leur projet d'union par notaire, à trois reprises et en termes respectueux, d'où le nom d'"actes respectueux" donné à cette formalité. Celle-ci est assez révélatrice du profond degré de soumission dans lequel la loi civile place alors les enfants par rapport aux parents et les individus par rapport à la famille. (Paris: Seuil, 1978, p. 27-28).

It was not until Zaza was seriously ill and close to death that Madame Mabile agreed with Madame Pradelle that neither of them would oppose marriage between their offspring. On her last night, knowing that she was dying, Zaza comforted her mother:

"N'ayez pas de chagrin, maman-chérie, dit-elle. Dans toutes les familles il y a du déchet: c'est moi le déchet. (MJFR, 358).

After Zaza's death, Monsieur Mabile told his wife, consolingly:

"Nous n'avons été que les instruments entre les mains de Dieu."  
(MJFR, 358).

Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée closes with a great deal of bitterness.

It stands as an indictment of the values of dévouement. Beauvoir also suggests that it was Zaza's death which emphasized the necessity to struggle against these values herself and to fight for independence:

Les médecins parlèrent de méningite, d'encéphalite, on ne sut rien de précis. S'agissait-il d'une maladie contagieuse, d'un accident? ou Zaza avait-elle succombé à un excès de fatigue et d'angoisse? Souvent la nuit elle m'est apparue, toute jaune sous une capeline rose, et elle me regardait avec reproche. Ensemble nous avions lutté contre le destin fangeux qui nous guettait et j'ai pensé longtemps que j'avais pavé ma liberté de sa mort. (MJFR, 358-359).

### 3) Situation of the "Dévouée"

Having examined the formation of the dévouée, we turn to the way in which Simone de Beauvoir presents her as a wife and mother. The same factors which shaped her in her adolescence: religion, the idealization of feminine submission and passivity, her economic dependence and the double standard of sexuality continue to define her situation. However, Beauvoir stresses that there are two facets to the situation of the dévouée: that of the victim and that of oppressor. Let us take first what is perhaps the most obvious - her victimization.

a) The "Dévouée" as Victim:

Zaza did not live long enough to become a married woman, but, in love with Pradelle, she was already a confirmed dévouée and the portrait of her at twenty in many ways resembles the picture of Simone's mother, Françoise, at the same age. The most complete depiction of a married woman in the autobiography is of Françoise. Simone is even more candid about her mother's experience of marriage in Une Mort très douce, written after her mother's death - a slim volume which can be regarded as an addition to the autobiography. Beauvoir also gives us a sketchy picture of Madame Mabilille, of Sartre's mother, Madame Nancy, and of a woman she calls Mme. Lemaire. (46)

In addition to their conditioning as females, both Zaza and Madame de Beauvoir had suffered, in their childhood, from a feeling of rejection, which reinforced their sense of personal worthlessness, and made them throw themselves wholeheartedly into dévouement. Beauvoir writes of Zaza:

Moins appréciée par son père que sa soeur aînée, passionnément attaché à une mère affectueuse mais peu disponible, sous son apparente désinvolture elle était très vulnérable et manquait de confiance en soi. (TCF, 20).

As an adolescent, she spoke of the "grand délaissement" (MJFR, 256) which she had experienced in her childhood. A consequence of this was her inclination to humility and masochism:

elle ne se jugeait pas digne d'être aimée par quelqu'un de vraiment bien. (MJFR, 328).

Françoise, like Zaza, had felt unloved as a child. Born into a wealthy bourgeois family in Verdun and the eldest of three children, her father (like Zaza's) displayed an overt preference for her sister - who was younger than her.

---

(46) Her actual name was Madame (Louis) Morel. She is almost certainly "cette Dame" to whom Beauvoir dedicated Pyrrhus et Cinéas in 1944 and to whom Sartre dedicated his play Huis Clos, in 1947.



Her mother, devoted body and soul to her husband, merely exhibited "une affection très conventionnelle" towards her children.<sup>(47)</sup> Her parents both being very pious, Françoise was sent, as a demi-pensionnaire, to the Oiseaux convent, where she found some consolation in the "chaleureuse estime" (MJFR, 40) which the nuns showed her. Apart from this:

elle se jeta dans l'étude et dans la dévotion. (MJFR, 40).

At twenty, she fell in love with a cousin who - unfortunately - preferred someone else.<sup>(48)</sup> This only reinforced her "susceptibilité" and "rancune".<sup>(49)</sup> When she met Georges de Beauvoir, later in her twentieth year, she could scarcely believe his wanting to marry her. Her gratitude towards him was even greater after her marriage, when her husband did not hold it against her that she was unable to provide her promised dowry. Her father, a banker in Verdun, had lost his capital (and that of several others) in speculation. Françoise was so ashamed that she broke off all contact with the people she had known in Verdun. "Déclassée" as an object of exchange, she felt she had deceived her husband and that their marriage had taken place on false assumptions:

Elle se trouva sublime que [Georges] ne lui en tint pas rigueur et toute sa vie elle se sentit en faute devant lui.<sup>(50)</sup>

The insecurity and feeling of worthlessness of Zaza and Françoise made them all the more ready to worship the man they loved as a kind of god. Zaza wrote to Simone asking her to convey a message to Pradelle:

---

(47) Une Mort très douce, p. 49.

(48) He preferred Germaine, another cousin. They became the parents of Titite and Jacques. He died in a car accident when the children were still young.

(49) Une Mort très douce, p. 50.

(50) ibid., p. 53.

Another example of how her dependent economic situation contributed to the "dévouée's" material and psychological insecurity is Sartre's mother, Madame Mancy. Beauvoir recounts how she felt she was acting in the interest of her son by marrying again. She, too, felt "pleine de reconnaissance" because her second husband "l'avait prise en charge ainsi que son enfant." (Tout compte fait, p. 105).

Dites-lui, Simone, [7...7] qu'il n'y a pas un être au monde qui m'ait donné et qui puisse jamais me donner le bonheur sans mélange, la joie totale que je tiens de lui et dont je ne pourrai jamais, même si je cesse de le lui dire, que me juger très indigne. (MJFR, 353).

Similarly, Françoise, at twenty, despite her beauty, "manquait d'assurance et de gaiété", (MJFR, 40) and Georges seemed to embody everything she admired. A lawyer of twenty-eight, a worldly, cultured and talented man, his position and reputation as a "brillant causeur et charmeur" (MJFR, 37) lent him great prestige in her eyes. It seemed to her that she had chosen to be submissive to this god-like figure. Writing about the woman in love in Le Deuxième Sexe, Beauvoir commented that:

Puisqu'elle est de toute façon condamnée à la dépendance, [7...7] elle préfère servir un dieu; elle choisit de vouloir si ardemment son esclavage qu'il lui apparaîtra comme l'expression de sa liberté. (51)

At first it may well have seemed to Françoise that her "prison" was a "royaume". (52) Georges de Beauvoir had eight years advance on his wife as well as his male prestige and "à la maison, sa prééminence était indiscutée." (MJFR, 38). He enjoyed the pleasure of introducing his sheltered young wife to life, to books and physical love. She was rapidly "annexée à l'univers de son époux". (53) Françoise adapted herself entirely to her husband's world, sharing his name, his identity, his life. She stopped seeing her women friends, as Georges found their husbands boring, and she duly followed him into his world of "salons" and theatre.

At first Françoise enjoyed the novelty of an animated social life, but it was not the milieu to which she was accustomed, and she was out of place:

sa beauté ne la protégeait pas contre la malveillance; elle était provinciale, peu dégourdie; dans ce milieu bien parisien, on a souri de sa gaucherie. (54)

(51) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 478.

(52) ibid., p. 230.

(53) ibid., p. 199.

(54) Une Mort très douce, p. 52.

Not wanting to appear different, Françoise conformed as much as she could to attitudes around her, but the values of this ostentatious theatrical milieu were in stark contrast to the puritanism and timid-self-effacement she had learnt at the Oiseaux convent school. Her allegiances: husband and Church--propagated opposing and contradictory viewpoints on life. With a training in faith and obedience, rather than in critical, independent thinking, Françoise adopted the simpler solution of not thinking at all, and simply living with contradictions. She adopted her husband's opinions on everything except religion and in discussion with others: "le dernier qui parlait avait raison."<sup>(55)</sup>

It did not take many years for the newness of Françoise's glamorous marriage to fade, and she had little choice but to immerse herself deeper in the well-ingrained pattern of self-restraint and self-sacrifice. She was only twenty-one when Simone was born and the second daughter, Hélène, arrived two years later. Françoise had always nourished a desire to travel, and the best moments of her youth had been when her father had organized excursions across the Vosges and Luxemburg, but now she had a husband and children whose needs always came first, and travelling was not considered an important priority. Things rapidly worsened after the financial disaster of 1919. Françoise had to give up her help in the house, and housework had always bored her. Despite her belief in "la grandeur du dévouement",<sup>(56)</sup> she could not help feeling resentful about having constantly to check her will and her desires:

Constamment elle s'insurgeait contre les contraintes et les privations qu'elle s'imposait.<sup>(57)</sup>

---

(55) *Une Mort très douce*, p. 64.

(56) *ibid.*, p. 53.

(57) *ibid.*, p. 54.

Beauvoir writes that her father complained bitterly about the sacrifices inflicted on him by family life and poverty: "chaque fois que ma mère lui demandait de l'argent pour le ménage, il faisait un éclat; il se plaignait tout particulièrement des sacrifices que lui coûtaient ses filles: nous avions l'impression de nous être indiscretement imposées à sa charité." (MJFR, 177).

Motherhood - and the various sacrifices it entailed - was seen as an integral part of dévouement. The "formation morale" of the children (MJFR, 39) was considered the domain of women, and for guidance in this duty, Françoise demanda des conseils à la confrérie des "Mères chrétiennes." (MJFR, 41).

As well as this function, she catered for the children's welfare, a task which was especially time-consuming on a low budget:

Ma mère ne gaspillait jamais une seconde; en lisant, elle tricotait: quand elle causait avec mon père ou avec des amis, elle cousait, ravaudait ou brodait; dans les métros et les tramways elle confectionnait des kilomètres de "frivolité" dont elle ornait nos jupons. (MJFR, 67).

After some years, wrote Beauvoir in Le Deuxième Sexe, the dévouée is rarely able to retain her illusions about her perfect husband and the glory of motherhood. She realizes that marriage "la voue à la répétition et à la routine."<sup>(58)</sup> Her "dieu" becomes a tyrant, her "royaume" a "prison", her glory becomes mere servitude.<sup>(59)</sup> Her role loses its meaning; she no longer finds justification in it:

On lui a vanté le renoncement, le dévouement; mais il lui semble souvent fort vain de se consacrer "à l'entretien de deux êtres quelconques jusqu'à la fin de leur vie." C'est très beau de s'oublier, encore faut-il savoir pour qui, pour quoi. <sup>(60)</sup>

Marriage had seemed to promise Françoise happiness, fulfilment and sexual satisfaction, but the latter, too, gradually proved to be an illusion. When Beauvoir violently denounced marriage in Le Deuxième Sexe, calling it an "institution pervertie",<sup>(61)</sup> and calling the "principe de mariage" "obscène",<sup>(62)</sup> she was particularly vehement about the sexual aspect of marriage for women.

(58) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 284.

(59) *ibid.*, p. 230.

(60) *ibid.*, p. 285.

(61) *ibid.*, p. 286.

(62) *ibid.*, p. 225.

Beauvoir recalls an impression of her mother, when she was six or seven and her mother still young and very much in love with her husband:

Je la revois un matin - [7..7] pieds nus sur le tapis rouge du corridor, dans sa longue chemise de nuit en toile blanche; ses cheveux tombaient en torsade sur sa nuque et j'ai été saisie par le rayonnement de son sourire, lié pour moi d'une manière mystérieuse à cette chambre dont elle sortait; je reconnaissais à peine dans cette fraîche apparition la grande personne respectable qui était ma mère. (63)

After fifteen years of marriage, Simone tells us, her mother's situation was very different. "L'alliance passée à son doigt l'avait autorisée à connaître le plaisir" - and now, at thirty-five, she was expected to renounce this pleasure too. (64)

Elle continuait à dormir à coté de l'homme qu'elle aimait et qui ne couchait presque plus jamais avec elle: elle espérait, elle attendait, elle se consumait, en vain. (65)

Beauvoir comments that it is possible her mother genuinely did not know where her husband was going in the evenings, but that it is more probable that she deliberately chose to ignore it. She was, after all, entirely dependent on her husband, and the threat of losing him and what he stood for gave her very little bargaining power and made her extremely open to compromise. As Beauvoir pointed out in Le Deuxième Sexe, when discussing the dependence of "la femme mariée":

il s'agit de savoir "faire des concessions" à bon escient; que le mari donne quelque "coups de canif dans le contrat" on fermera les yeux [7..7] .. Si elle lui interdit toute aventure, si elle l'excède par sa surveillance, ses scènes, ses exigences, elle peut l'indisposer contre elle gravement. (66)

Françoise's life was defined and limited by her perpetual dependence, first on her father, then on her husband, then, after his death, on her two girls. Dependence brought with it subservience, self-effacement and a multitude of contradictions:

(63) Une Mort très douce, p. 51.

(64) *ibid.*, p. 55.

(65) *ibid.*

(66) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 269. The expression "donner des coups de canif dans le contrat" was one her father used to use, (MJFR, 189) and again shows the influence of Beauvoir's own experience on her ideas in Le Deuxième Sexe.

Elle faisait des scènes à papa pour des vétilles; mais elle n'osait pas lui demander de l'argent, elle n'en dépensait pas pour elle et aussi peu que possible pour nous; elle le laissait docilement passer toutes ses soirées hors de la maison et sortir seule le dimanche. (67)

After her husband's death, Françoise was largely dependent for financial help on her two girls → particularly Simone. Again, this meant that she lost the right to assert herself. Just as her dependence on her husband left her with no power to interfere with his activities, Simone writes that:

elle a eu à notre égard le même scrupule: ne pas nous déranger. Devenue notre obligée, elle n'avait plus d'autre manière de nous témoigner ses sentiments; alors qu'autrefois les soins qu'elle prenait de nous justifiaient à ses yeux sa tyrannie. (68)

She had said nothing when her husband had disappeared to visit other women; now she was obliged to accept (even if begrudgingly) Simone's free union with Sartre and the "irrégularité" of Simone's life style. (69)

Once again, notes Simone with ironical humour, she adapted herself to contradictions by not reflecting too much. She consoled herself that a "union libre" was "moins impie somme toute qu'un mariage civil". (70) As for Simone's writing:

Souvent choquée par le contenu de mes livres, elle était flattée par leur succès. (71)

As always, she subdued her inner disapproval in favour of the opinion of the majority, renouncing her own liberty.

Françoise revealed her actual potential after her husband died, in 1941, leaving her with no money. At fifty-four, despite her "violent chagrin", (72) she developed new initiative. She studied, took exams and passed an apprenticeship in order to obtain a certificate which enabled her to work as an assistant

---

(67) Une Mort très douce, p. 60.

(68) *ibid.*

(69) *ibid.*, p. 104.

(70) *ibid.*

(71) *ibid.*

(72) *ibid.*, p. 25.

librarian for the Red Cross. Later she worked - voluntarily - in the library of an observation sanitorium and, after that, in the library of a local Catholic group. She had intended to keep herself by sewing at home after the war, but Simone was then in a position to help her financially. She learnt again to ride a bicycle to get herself to work; she studied languages in order to visit Poupette and her husband Lionel - who worked in the diplomatic service and had various postings abroad. At last she was able to satisfy "un de ses désirs les plus obstinés": to travel.<sup>(73)</sup> She also made new women friends and resumed contact with old friends and relations who had been estranged because of her husband's morosity.

Sartre's mother, Anne-Marie Mancy, had led a life as a dévouée which resembled that of Françoise de Beauvoir. After her death, Beauvoir tells us of Sartre's impression of his mother:

Il a eu l'impression que la vie avait écrasé et affadi, sans cependant la briser, une femme que sa constitution disposait à la passion, à la ténacité et même à la violence. (TCF, 110).

Her first marriage had been "sans joie"; (TCF, 104) widowed, Anne-Marie married again for the sake of her son. In both marriages, she was "soumise" and "dévouée". (TCF, 105). After the death of her second husband, she persuaded Jean-Paul to share her apartment. She gaily talked of her "troisième mariage", (TCF, 105) and was "totalement dévouée à son fils, comme elle l'avait été à son mari." (TCF, 106). After some years of friction, "elle finit par adopter les opinions de son fils", (TCF, 106) - which were, of course, radically opposed to those of her ex-husband. However, in her case, Madame Mancy declared that, at eighty-four, she had finally liberated herself from her mother, who had been "une mère autoritaire et égoïste". (TCF, 104). With her new lucidity, she did not harbour romantic illusions about her two marriages.

---

(73) Une Mort très douce, p. 26-27.

Françoise de Beauvoir, however, never admitted that her marriage was anything other than a source of great happiness to her. Simone de Beauvoir comments:

Après la mort de papa, tante Germaine suggérant qu'il n'avait pas été un mari idéal, elle l'a violemment rabrouée: "Il m'a toujours rendue très heureuse." Et, certainement, elle n'avait jamais cessé de se l'affirmer. (74)

It is this mauvaise foi which Beauvoir sees as characteristic of the dévouée. To an outsider, her unhappiness is obvious; however, through her mothering role and her religious practice, the dévouée convinces herself that her lot is more than she could ever have wished for. Not only does she refuse to see herself as a victim: she also is unable to see herself as an oppressor.

b) The "dévouée" as oppressor:

Beauvoir shows that if the fate of the dévouée is dependence, and a life of illusions and disillusionment, the effect of the dévouée is to reinforce social oppression. Within the family she becomes a burden and a tyrant, both to her husband and her children. At a social level she is perpetuating the myth of femininity and reproducing the oppression of women with her own daughters.

In Le Deuxième Sexe, Beauvoir showed that the dévouée is, at the same time, a vassal and a burden. Whilst serving her master and her children, she

---

(74) Une Mort très douce, p. 57.



looks to them for justification for her existence. To ensure that her role continues to be necessary, she tries to tie her objects of devotion to her with bonds of guilt and gratitude. Thus, as an adolescent, Simone writes that:

la sollicitude de ma mère me pesait. (MJFR, 107).

Later, when she no longer feels desired by her husband or needed by her children, the dévouée may become increasingly obtrusive and tyrannical:

faute de se sentir indispensable, elle se rend importune, odieuse. (75)

We have seen that this was so in the case of Françoise de Beauvoir.

Simone, who writes about her mother with great compassion, also blames her for oppressing her two daughters as she herself was oppressed, thus perpetuating the condition of women and undermining the possibility of solidarity and understanding between them. Beauvoir has frequently stressed that the great danger for a child - particularly for a girl - is that the mother:

cherchera à compenser à travers l'enfant toutes ces frustrations. (76)

A daughter suffers from the mother's resentment of her feminine condition, for the mother:

projette en elle toute l'ambiguïté de son rapport à soi. (77)

In the autobiography, Beauvoir describes how Françoise and Madame Mabilie were loving and indulgent when their girls were young. This was because their daughters loved and respected them, and turned to them for advice and support, thus justifying their maternal sacrifices. However, as the girls grew up, becoming more independent of their mother and expecting to enjoy liberties which their mothers had not had, they began to pose a threat to their mother's raison d'être: which was to be needed, and to undermine their mother's glory.

(75) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 498.

(76) *ibid.*, p. 327.

(77) *ibid.*, p. 332.

Simone de Beauvoir obviously had her own mother in mind when she wrote, in Le Deuxième Sexe, about the jealousy a mother sometimes feels towards her daughter, whose life seems to be beginning, whereas her own is becoming meaningless:

A cette nouvelle venue s'offrent, contre la répétition et la routine qui sont le lot de l'aînée, des possibilités encore indéfinies: ce sont ces chances que la mère envie et déteste; ne pouvant les faire siennes, elle essaie souvent de les diminuer, de les supprimer: elle garde sa fille à la maison, la surveille, la tyrannise, elle la fagote exprès, elle lui refuse tous loisirs, elle entre dans des colères sauvages si l'adolescente se maquille, si elle "sort". (78)

Simone was "si mal habillée" by her mother (MJFR, 278) that she was an embarrassment to the Mabile family in the company of friends and, on one occasion, Zaza, without telling her why, discreetly lent Simone one of her dresses to wear. When Simone was nineteen, Zaza persuaded her to have her hair cut in the new style and the girls managed to procure Madame de Beauvoir's grudging consent. However, the latter was so annoyed that she had had her hand forced that she refused to allow Simone to have it permed into shape afterwards - so Simone had gained nothing. When Simone was twenty, her cousin Madeleine visited her in Paris. When Simone imitated her cousin by putting a little rouge on her cheeks, her mother created a great fuss, told her to remove it at once and administered her a "soufflet". (MJFR, 268). She rarely allowed Simone to go out in the evenings - alone or with friends.

We have seen how Madame Mabile was adamant that Zaza should not study further - despite her daughter's obvious intelligence, and how she obliged her daughters to marry the man she selected for them - a man they were unable to love. Her insensitivity to her daughters' happiness is particularly striking in the light of her own experience, which Zaza told Simone:

---

(78) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 336.

Elle me raconta que M. Mabile avait plusieurs fois demandé en vain la main de sa cousine; belle, ardente, vivace, Guite Larivière /Mme. Mabile/ redoutait ce polytechnicien sévère; cependant, elle menait au pays basque une existence retirée, et les partis n'affluèrent pas; à vingt-cinq ans, sous l'impérieuse pression de sa mère, elle se résigna à dire oui. (MJFR, 117).

It seems, indeed, that each dévouée took it upon herself to ensure that her daughter led as narrow an existence as she had done.

At the same time as vigorously reinforcing the different set of values applied to women and to men, we have seen that Françoise de Beauvoir's "selflessness" was only practised within the family. Identifying with the bourgeoisie meant accepting and propagating her husband's views, who, "par ses opinions, [...] appartenait à son époque et à sa classe." (MJFR, 38). Like him, Françoise was ardently nationalistic, xenophobic and anti-semitic. People were appraised according to their status: the mistress of a friend was shunned due to lack of respectability; Simone's cousin Jacques was encouraged because of his financial prospects:

Jacques était assuré d'une situation confortable: [...] quelle aubaine pour une fille sans dot! Chaque fois que ma mère prononçait son nom, elle esquissait un sourire d'une discrétion appuyée. (MJFR, 200).

With a complete lack of feeling for women in less privileged situations than herself, Françoise, shortly before her death, complained to Simone about her one night at the public hospital at Boucicaut:

"Les femmes du peuple, tu sais comment elles sont: elles geignent."<sup>(79)</sup>

She was implying that the bourgeois dévouée is superior because she does not make any noise. Religion and self-effacement had taught her the glory implicit in silent suffering and martyrdom.

---

(79) Une Mort très douce, p. 27.

Before concluding this section on "la dévouée", we turn to the woman whom Beauvoir calls Madame Lemaire. Since our author tells us very little about her as a wife and mother, she is neither portrayed as a victim or an oppressor. She was obviously a woman with a strong and independent personality.

Madame Lemaire was forty when Simone first met her, in 1929. Her upbringing made her a most unusual woman. Born of French parents in Argentina, she had escaped the narrow restrictions which would have been imposed upon her as a young girl living in Paris. Her mother had died when she was young, and her father, a doctor, was a "libre penseur". (FA, 39). She had enjoyed "une éducation résolument virile". Together with her elder sister, she had learnt "l'horreur des superstitions et la valeur d'un bon raisonnement". (FA, 39). They galloped their horses across the pampas and made the most of their unrestricted life. In their late teens, both girls were sent to Paris, where an aunt, "femme de colonel et dévote", introduced them to bourgeois Parisian customs. (FA, 39). Both girls, thoroughly bewildered, married.

Monsieur Lemaire was a wealthy doctor, and the couple had two children, Albert and Jacqueline. However, after the First World War, the doctor became an invalid and shut himself up in his room. From this time on, writes Simone:

Mme Lemaire se consacrait à lui, à ses enfants, à de vieilles parentes, à diverses épaves, elle avait renoncé à vivre pour son compte. (FA, 39).

Nevertheless, because of her emotional distance from French society and because she was not religious, Madame Lemaire remained what appeared to Simone a most unconventional woman. Outside her role as nurse to her husband and mother to her children, she had developed a very close friendship with Pierre Pagniez, <sup>(80)</sup> a friend of Sartre's, whom she had originally employed to give her son some extra tuition. This also made her an unusual and interesting woman in Beauvoir's eyes.

---

(80) "Pierre Pagniez" was actually Pierre Guille.

Madame Lemaire regularly invited Simone and Sartre to stay in her husband's country house, La Pouèze, near Angers, or at Juan-les-Pins, the house she had inherited from her father near Nantes. She was a benevolent hostess: the house was always full of guests and friends of her children:

à la campagne, comme à Paris, Mme Lemaire avait le don: on se sentait bien dans ses parages. (FA, 536).

During the war, Mme Lemaire, who resided at this time at La Pouèze, not only looked after a large house of people, but she and her daughter were always on call when her husband needed her:

M. Lemaire, depuis la déclaration de guerre, ne quittait plus son lit; il avait des accès d'angoisse qui le mettaient en sueur; à son appel, sa femme ou sa fille se précipitaient et, parfois, elles restaient des heures auprès de lui à lui dire des mots réconfortants. (FA, 537).

As well as this, the two Lemaire women spent a great deal of time preparing packages of food to send to their friends in Paris, such as Beauvoir and Sartre.

elles dormaient à peine et ne chômaient jamais. (FA, 537).

Madame Lemaire had always espoused conservative political opinions.

Beauvoir tells us:

Elle était contre la gratuité de l'enseignement (des boursiers, ça suffisait bien), contre la sécurité sociale (à cause des abus), contre les tarifs syndicaux (au nom de la liberté du travail). (FC, 159).

They all disregarded each other's political opinions, until, in the fifties, Beauvoir and Sartre became increasingly involved in politics and far more radical than before. Madame Lemaire particularly disapproved of their attitude to Algeria; she herself was "algérie française" and, like Pagniez, was disgusted by the Manifeste des 121 which both Sartre and Beauvoir signed.

To conclude, in the autobiography Simone de Beauvoir shows that the dévouée was a bundle of contradictions. As a Christian, she was taught humility, submission and goodness towards others. As a dependent and dutiful

daughter and wife, she was taught to love her parents or her husband unconditionally. However, as a member of the bourgeoisie, she ardently defended the privileges of her own class at the expense of the less fortunate. She also learnt to accept and reject people according to criteria such as status and respectability.

Beauvoir shows that, in this way, the dévouée becomes the very vehicle for transmitting the values which oppress not only the colonial peoples and the working class but also the female sex. An uncritical defender of marriage, the family and (except for Madame Lemaire), the Church, she represents the main force of censorship and repression to the next generation of females.

## II. "La Narcissiste"

As an adult, Beauvoir came into contact with women in very different situations from the dévouées of her childhood and adolescence. She found some of these women extremely narcissistic, and it is clear, from reading the autobiography that her remarks about about "la narcissiste" in Le Deuxième Sexe were also largely based on her own observations.

In Le Deuxième Sexe, Beauvoir comments that a woman's circumstances are more conducive to narcissism than a man's. She believes that all women - and men - are narcissistic to an extent. However, she shows that extreme narcissism has consequences for women's lives which are as negative - and tragic - as the consequences of extreme dévouement.

In the autobiography Beauvoir depicts some young women as narcissists. It is already clear that these young women were in love with the image of the brilliant future they predicted for themselves, without being prepared to put in the hard work - (without an audience) - which this future would involve. Camille, Olga Dominique (Kosakiewicz) and Lise Oblanoff were young women when Beauvoir first met them. Other young women mentioned briefly are Blanchette Weiss and Simone Labourdin. (81)

Camille and Lise reappear occasionally throughout the autobiography. Beauvoir is able to tell us more about their adult lives in Tout compte fait, after their death. Other adult narcissists who make brief appearances are Louise Perron and Violette Leduc - two women whose paranoia Beauvoir attributes to their narcissism.

---

(81) It is probable that all these names - other than Violette Leduc - were pseudonyms. "Olga Dominique" was actually her stage name. Her real name is Olga Kosakiewicz. "Camille" was really Simone Jolivet. "Lise" was probably Nathalie Sorokine, to whom Beauvoir dedicated Le Sang des autres.

Despite the detail with which she portrays these women, all - except for Olga, who was a life-long close friend - were marginal figures in Beauvoir's life. Even though Beauvoir saw Violette Leduc regularly after 1945, she certainly would not have considered her strange relationship with this woman a close friendship. Why, then, does she dwell on these women at some length in the autobiography? It is evident that Beauvoir describes their lives in order to make a point. Once again, she is showing the reader how not to "perdre la partie" which is life. (82)

1) Narcissism.

Sigmund Freud claims that the term "narcissism" was first used in 1899 and meant auto-eroticism. (83) The word was taken, of course, from the Greek legend of Narcissus. In Ovid's story, Narcissus caught sight of his reflection in the clear water of a pool and fell in love with the form he beheld, not realizing it was himself. The story ends in tragedy: by only being capable of loving himself, Narcissus brought about his own destruction.

Freud, who first used the term in 1914, saw narcissism as a purely sexual phenomenon, which, in its extreme form, became a perversion. He claimed that a narcissistic type of object love is characteristic of women and that this "type" loves either "what he is himself", "what he once was", "what he would like to be" or "someone who was once a part of himself." (84) He added that:

such women love only themselves with an intensity comparable to that of the man's love for them. (85)

---

(82) Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté, p. 32-33.

(83) The word was first used by Paul Näcke in 1899 "to denote the attitude of a person who [...] experiences sexual pleasure in gazing at, caressing and fondling his body, till complete gratification ensues upon these activities." Freud. "On Narcissism. An Introduction." (1914) in Collected Papers. Vol. iv. Translated under supervision of Joan Rivière. Hogarth Press, 1934, p. 30.

(84) Freud. "On Narcissism. An Introduction," p. 47.

(85) *ibid.*, p. 111.



Freud attempted to explain why it should be that such self-centred women should have great powers of seduction:

Such women have the greatest fascination for men, not only for aesthetic reasons, since as a rule they are the most beautiful, but also because of certain interesting psychological constellations. It seems very evident that one person's narcissism has a great attraction for those others who have renounced part of their own narcissism and are seeking after object-love; the charm of a child lies to a great extent in his narcissism, his self-sufficiency and inaccessibility. (86)

Before Beauvoir, Sartre had expanded the idea of narcissism from Freud's libidinal viewpoint. He had stressed the impact on the individual of the gaze of others. In L'Être et le néant, he had made the point:

à chaque instant autrui me regarde. [...] Si l'on me regarde, en effet, j'ai conscience d'être objet. (87)

Sartre maintained that a reaction on the part of the "objet", of "fierté" or "vanité" was "un sentiment sans équilibre et de mauvaise foi":

je tente, dans la vanité, d'agir sur Autrui en tant que je suis objet; cette beauté ou cette force ou cet esprit qu'il me confère en tant qu'il me constitue en objet, je prétends en user, par un choc en retour, pour l'affecter passivement d'un sentiment d'admiration ou d'amour. (88)

In Huis clos, which Sartre wrote immediately after the publication of L'Être et le néant, (89) the character, Estelle Rigault, is an extreme narcissist.

She needs mirrors and the gaze of others upon her to feel that she exists "pour de vrai". (90)

(86) Freud. "On Narcissism. An Introduction", p. 64.

(87) L'Être et le néant, p. 303, p. 318.

(88) *ibid.*, p. 338.

(89) L'Être et le néant appeared at the beginning of summer, 1943, and shortly afterwards Sartre wrote the play which was first entitled Les Autres and became Huis clos.

(90) Estelle declares:

"quand je ne me vois pas, j'ai beau me tâter, je me demande si j'existe pour de vrai." (Huis clos. Paris: Gallimard, 1947, Livre de poche, p. 36).

Describing her life before death, she says:

"Il y a six grandes glaces dans ma chambre à coucher. [...] Quand je parlais, je m'arrangeais pour qu'il y en ait une où je puisse me regarder. [...] Je me voyais comme les gens me voyaient, ça me tenait éveillée." (p. 37).

The portrait of Estelle could well have been inspired by Simone Jolivet. (Camille).

In an interview in 1976, Sartre summed up his understanding of narcissism:

Le narcissisme, selon moi, est une certaine manière de se contempler réflexivement, de s'aimer, c'est une façon de vouloir se retrouver tel qu'on s'imagine être dans ce qu'on fait, bref, c'est un rapport constant à soi, soi n'étant pas d'ailleurs exactement le soi actif qui parle, qui pense, qui rêve, qui agit, mais plutôt un personnage fabriqué à partir de lui. (91)

Beauvoir herself took up Sartre's emphasis on the gaze of the other and the "dédoublement" of the self, to reinterpret what Freud had observed was women's greater tendency to narcissism. She stressed the importance to both female and male infants of "les glaces" and "le regard de ses parents". (92) She agreed with Sartre that both sexes experience at an early age "la première tentation de l'inauthenticité". (93) However, she declared, with Freud, that the little boy finds a source of pride in his penis:

le pénis est posé par le sujet comme soi-même et autre que soi-même; la transcendance spécifique s'incarne en lui de manière saisissable et il est source de fierté. (94)

Unlike Freud, Beauvoir claimed that the value attributed to the penis is due solely to the social pre-eminence of the male and the father. She agreed with Freud that the little girl, without a penis, learns to regard her whole body as the equivalent of the phallus:

elle est conduite à se faire tout entière objet, à se poser comme l'Autre. (95)

According to Beauvoir, the girl's narcissism is encouraged, as she grows up, by the position of women in society as passive sexual objects.

la puberté lui a révélé ce corps comme passif et désirable. (96)

---

(91) Sartre. "Entretiens sur moi-même" in Situations, X. Paris: Gallimard, 1976, p. 198.

(92) Le Deuxième Sexe I, p. 88.

(93) *ibid.*, p. 89.

(94) *ibid.*

(95) *ibid.*

(96) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 460. (cf. Freud, p. 273. n85)

Thus, the narcissistic young woman, who, "depuis l'enfance [...] s'est apparue comme un objet", contemplates her own body "avec un regard d'amant."<sup>(97)</sup> This splitting of the self into the subject who gazes upon the "objet femelle"<sup>(98)</sup> extends to the woman's whole existence:

Sa vie tout entière se transfigure en un drame sacré.<sup>(99)</sup>

The narcissist, Beauvoir comments, is not necessarily beautiful. She may try to be the centre of attention through other means. Whether seeking admiration or pity, narcissists:

ont besoin de regards pour les contempler, d'oreilles pour les écouter; à leur personnage, il faut le plus grand public possible.<sup>(100)</sup>

Because of this absolute need for others, the narcissist neither escapes "dépendance" nor "esclavage".<sup>(101)</sup> What begins as complicity may easily become an inability to distinguish "le jeu" from "la vérité".<sup>(102)</sup> Freud's interest in narcissism had been sparked off by his preoccupation with the "paraphrenias", in which group he placed paranoia. Beauvoir similarly stressed that the narcissist's self-deception risked becoming real insanity:

elle s'enfonce dans la nuit de la mauvaise foi et finit souvent par édifier autour d'elle un délire paranoïaque.<sup>(103)</sup>

## 2) Formation of the Narcissist.

Blanchette, Camille, Olga and Lise - Beauvoir became acquainted with them in that order - were all in their late teens or early twenties when she

---

(97) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 460.

(98) *ibid.*

(99) *ibid.*, p. 467.

(100) *ibid.*, p. 468.

(101) *ibid.*, p. 475.

(102) *ibid.*, p. 465.

(103) *ibid.*, p. 476.

first met them. They seemed refreshingly different from the women she had known in the past; they seemed not only intelligent, but also lively and rebellious. They exhibited a scornful disdain for social conventions. Unmarried, they shocked Simone with their casual attitude to sex. It seemed that they were full of potential and that they would become unusual, independent women. It was only gradually that Simone realized that their rebelliousness was not intended to "vaincre le sort"; it was merely "une protestation symbolique".<sup>(104)</sup> The young narcissist, wrote Simone, remained "ancrée dans l'univers enfantin" from which she was unwilling to escape. Her attempts at revolt were more "spectaculaires" than "efficaces".<sup>(105)</sup> They remained what Sartre called "gestes" rather than being purposeful "actes".<sup>(106)</sup>

Beauvoir tells us very little about the girl she calls Blanchette Weiss. A fellow student of Simone's at the Sorbonne, Blanchette, whose appearance was not at all striking, impressed Simone with her apparent intelligence and knowledge. Beauvoir writes:

je fus médusée par son bagou philosophique; elle amalgamait les spéculations métaphysiques et les commérages avec une volubilité que je pris pour de l'intelligence. (MJFR, 237).

Living with her parents in a luxurious apartment on Avenue Kléber,

---

(104) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 111.

(105) ibid.

(106) For Sartre, actions which are undertaken in bad faith are not "actes" at all but merely "gestes". In Les Mots, he had described how his actions, as a child, became unreal because of his preoccupation with being seen: "Jusque dans la solitude j'étais en représentation". (p. 62). [...] J'étais un faux enfant [...]; je sentais mes actes se changer en gestes. (p.73-74).

Blanchette obviously considered herself someone very special.<sup>(107)</sup> Just as Simone did at that time, she "attachait le plus grand prix à sa vie intérieure". She told Simone "complaisamment":

"J'ai une âme de concierge proustienne". (MJFR, 237).

She also liked to believe she resembled Francis Jammes' heroine, Clara d'Ellébeuse, with her heavy golden curls:

sous ses frisons et ses pompoms, elle se prenait pour une soeur de Clara d'Ellébeuse. (MJFR, 238).<sup>(108)</sup>

Blanchette claimed imperiously that she "dédaignait la richesse", but disconcerted Simone by asserting that the only way to ignore money was to have sufficient, and with this in mind, she was prepared to have a "mariage d'intérêt" arranged for her. (MJFR, 238). Gradually, Simone became aware of Blanchette's "singulier narcissisme", (MJFR, 238) realizing that Blanchette was not as interesting as she thought she was. The two girls ceased to see each other and we hear no more of Blanchette.

Simone met Camille when she was twenty-one; the latter was twenty-five or six. Camille and Sartre had been lovers before Simone met Sartre and he painted a glowing picture of this rather extraordinary woman to Simone. This was the first of a number of occasions in her life in which Simone had cause to feel threatened by beautiful and confident, narcissistic women. Everyone who knew Camille, and particularly Sartre, was impressed with her

---

(107) Someone else who liked to consider herself someone very special was Simone Labourdin, who had been a lover of Marco's, and whom Beauvoir met when she was teaching in Rouen. She comments:

"Au jour le jour, elle m'agaçait par son souci de se construire une vie si riche, si "variée" que du haut de sa future gloire Marco ne pût pas la dédaigner: elle truquait la réalité, elle boursouflait ses expériences; [7..7] elle s'y appliquait avec un sérieux navrant. (FA, 165).

(108) Clara d'Ellébeuse is a story contained in Francis Jammes': Le Roman du Lièvre. Paris: Mercure de France, 1934.

beauty, her "indépendance", "la violence de ses ambitions" and her "acharnement au travail". (TCF, 76). Camille herself never lacked confidence in her future. When Simone met her, she had moved to Paris, was studying acting and had become the mistress of the famous Charles Dullin, who had created the Théâtre de l'Atelier, where he was now director. (109)

Elle se promet à un destin exceptionnel. (FA, 71).

Acting did not satisfy her, for - as she told people:

le travail de l'interprète est secondaire; elle voulait créer.  
(FA, 74).

She boasted that she intended to write plays with a major role for herself; in the meantime she was apparently planning a novel and writing some stories.

Beauvoir only knew what Camille herself had told her or Sartre about her childhood, and Camille always recounted events "sous une figure légendaire" so that the truth was never clear. (TCF, 88). Beauvoir was not able to account for the "faiblesse originelle" (TCF, 88) which made Camille the narcissist she was, headed, just like Ovid's Narcissus, towards her own downfall.

Camille's family did not belong to the wealthy bourgeoisie; her father owned a pharmacy in Toulouse. He took pleasure, however, in imparting to his daughter his enthusiasm for some great figures such as Michelet and George Sand and for certain periods of history. Camille was an only child until the family adopted a little gypsy girl, when Camille was still young. Zina became Camille's "complice"; indeed, she liked to call herself Camille's "esclave". (FA, 71). Camille read a great deal and dreamed an enormous amount. She was

---

(109) Charles Dullin (1885-1949) founded the Atelier in 1921, and abandoned it in 1940 to become co-director of the Théâtre de Paris.

intelligent but not dedicated, and she gave up the courses she began, rather desultorily, at university. Her opinion of herself was by no means impaired by this:

Elle s'émerveillait d'unir la beauté à l'intelligence et que l'une et l'autre fussent chez elle d'une qualité si singulière. (FA, 71).

It seems to have been her relationship with men which enabled her to lose touch thoroughly with her real self. As a child of nine, she had been "patiemment dépucélée par un ami de la famille". (FA, 71). At eighteen, she became a high-class courtesan, acting out various roles with a great deal of flair:

Camille avait un sens aigu de la mise en scène; attendant un client dans le salon qui lui était réservé, elle se tenait debout devant la cheminée, nue, ses longs cheveux dénoués, et elle lisait Michelet ou, plus tard, Nietzsche. Sa culture, ses subtilités, sa superbe éblouissaient les notaires, les avocats, et ils pleuraient d'admiration sur l'oreiller. Certains nouèrent des liaisons avec elle, la comblèrent de cadeaux, l'emmenèrent en voyage. (FA, 72).

Like Blanchette Weiss, Camille liked to think she resembled certain famous and cultured women. In particular, she saw herself as another George Sand - the woman her father had admired, and who, of course, had worked assiduously, written prolifically and was renowned as a seducer of men. Beauvoir tells us that she also liked to think of herself as the equal of Emily Brontë. Sartre, too, commented in an interview, that Camille "se voyait avec les soeurs Brontë."<sup>(110)</sup> Fond of art, she also fancied that her features resembled those of Albrecht Dürer.

The images she projected fascinated people and were an integral part of her art of seduction. Sartre had entered willingly into her games. When they

---

(110) "Sartre et les femmes." An interview with Catherine Chaîne, in Le Nouvel Observateur. N. 639, (7-13 février, 1977)

were lovers, they wrote each other letters which she signed Rastignac and he Vautrin.<sup>(111)</sup> Her "grand pouvoir de séduction" (TCF, 76) worked with others, too. Herbaud told Simone that Camille was "une surprenante personne". (FA, 71). Other friends were enchanted by her or, at the very least, surprised by her.<sup>(112)</sup>

For someone like Camille who "trouvait sa vie bien plate" (FA, 75), in comparison with her romantic conception of the lives of the great figures she idolized, it was far more feasible for her to make a spectacular impression by cultivating her image than by the hard work and commitment which was involved in becoming a great actress or a great writer. She was firmly caught in the trap of "narcissisme". (FA, 79).

Olga Kosakiewicz was a student in Beauvoir's philosophy class when the latter was teaching in Rouen. Other teachers pointed Olga out as a girl with "de la personnalité". (FA, 170). Although, to Simone, Olga who was nine years younger than her, "n'était qu'une enfant", (FA, 173) they saw each other a few times, in 1933, outside school hours.

---

(111) Sartre was very partial to such games himself - although the difference, of course, was that he was playing a game, which he then dropped, whereas Camille was acting out a role permanently. Sartre tells us in his preface to Nizan's Aden Arabie\* that he and Nizan would imagine they were Rastignac and Vautrin - characters in Balzac's Le Père Goriot - or other heroes from classical works. He explains that in so doing, they both flattered their own egos and showed off to each other their knowledge of literature. Beauvoir writes that in the first years of her relationship with Sartre, they would sometimes pretend to be different characters - a game they enjoyed, but which had nothing to do with narcissism.

\*See Sartre. "Paul Nizan" in Situations IV, p. 144.

(112) Pagniez (Paul Guille) "ne l'aimait guère, mais elle avait réussi à l'étonner". (FA, 71). (Later he was equally cynical about Olga.) Madame Lemaire (Madame Morel) "fut enchantée par la soirée qu'elle passa rue Navarin." (TCF, 76). "Marco avait pour elle une amitié étonnée". (TCF, 76). "Dullin l'idolâtrait". (TCF, 76).



Olga, blond and attractive, was known by the teachers as "la petite Russe", and with her Russian father - a nobleman who had fled Russia after the revolution - and her French mother who had met her father when teaching in Russia, she felt different from the other girls,

et elle avait toujours tenu cette différence pour une supériorité.  
(FA, 236).

Her parents, although politically conservative, were non-conformist and inculcated in Olga "le dégoût des conventions, des superstitions, de la bêtise et des traditionnelles vertus françaises". (FA, 236). Neither Olga nor her younger sister, Wanda, ever believed in God. The girls were sent to boarding school at Angoulême and then Rouen, while their parents were in Greece and then Beuzeville for Monsieur Kosakievicz's work as an engineer. Confronted with the discipline, the routine, the "préjugés: and "sottises" of a French boarding school for girls, Olga acutely felt the disparity between her image and what she felt was her real self:

du fond d'une Russie qui n'existait plus, une petite demoiselle, élevée à l'Institut des Jeunes Filles nobles, considérait avec hauteur l'écolière Olga D., confondue dans la masse des externes rouennaises; elle méprisait ce troupeau, elle n'y appartenait pas: et pourtant, elle se trouvait dans ses rangs, et nulle part ailleurs. (FA, 236).

Olga passed her baccalauréat brilliantly. Her parents, who did not believe that marriage was a career and who were aware of her capacities, wanted her to learn a profession. They chose medicine, "sans tenir compte du peu d'attrait que ces études avaient pour Olga". (FA, 236). Olga herself was more attracted to ballet or architecture, but these options were ruled out for various reasons. The result was that Olga lost interest in her studies and failed her medical entrance examinations twice in succession in 1935.

After this, Beauvoir and Sartre proposed that she study philosophy - since she had come top of her class in this subject at school. Her parents consented to them giving her private tuition. However, once again, Olga's

future was being decided for her without her being committed to the decisions made. It transpired that abstract speculations did not really interest her. Indeed, she lacked motivation altogether for her studies.

Il y a des gens que la difficulté stimule: elle décourageait Olga. Persuadée depuis son enfance qu'elle n'appartenait pas à la société qui l'entourait, elle n'escomptait pas qu'aucun avenir l'y attendît: demain, pour elle, existait à peine; l'an prochain, absolument pas; elle faisait peu de différence entre un projet et un rêve. (FA, 240).

Having abandoned philosophy, Olga attempted to elevate her failings to positive qualities:

tout effort lui semblait méprisable, la prudence une mesquinerie, la persévérance un mensonge à soi; elle n'accordait de prix qu'à ses émotions: ce qu'on comprend avec sa tête ne l'intéressait pas. (FA, 246).

However, it was not until Sartre decided that he was infatuated with Olga that "la petite Russe" ceased to be a charming companion to Simone.<sup>(113)</sup> Beauvoir's description of the way in which Olga was transformed by Sartre into an object makes it apparent that it was also impossible for Olga not to react narcissistically. Beauvoir admits that, since she could not bear any "désaccord" between her and Sartre, she tried to see Olga "avec les yeux de Sartre." (FA, 263).

au lieu de tranquillement nous complaire dans nos rapports avec Olga, nous lui substituâmes un mythe. [7..7] Nous la chargeons donc de valeurs et de symboles. Elle devint Rimbaud, Antigone, les enfants terribles, un ange noir qui nous jugeait du haut d'un ciel de diamant. (FA, 250).

Beauvoir stresses that Olga (unlike Camille) had not been responsible for creating these myths about herself:

Elle ne faisait rien pour provoquer cette métamorphose; au contraire: elle s'en agaçait; elle détestait le personnage merveilleux qui lui volait sa place. Mais elle était impuissante à empêcher qu'il ne la dévorât. (FA, 250).

---

(113) Sartre tended to like women who contested his very values, for, writes Simone, nothing threatened his values in his own mind.

"A Berlin, il s'était intéressé à Marie Girard en grand partie parce qu'elle ne tenait à rien, ne voulait rien, ne croyait à peu près à rien, et certainement pas à la suprématie de la littérature et de l'art." (FA, 248).

Olga had to respond somehow to the image of herself which the others projected onto her:

Quand nous sortions en trio, l'ancienne Olga s'escamotait tout à fait, car c'était une autre que Sartre réclamait; parfois, elle répondait à cette attente, elle se montrait plus féminine, plus coquette, moins naturelle qu'avec moi; parfois, elle s'en irritait et elle était alors maussade ou même acerbe; mais elle ne pouvait en aucun cas ne pas en tenir compte. (FA, 263).

Part of Olga's attraction for Sartre and Beauvoir was her refusal to accept social conventions. Beauvoir writes:

nous avons le culte de la jeunesse, de ces tumultes, ses révoltes, sa liberté, son intransigeance. Par son impetuosité, par son extrémisme, Olga l'incarnait avec éclat. Elle s'insurgeait - non seulement en paroles, mais dans ses conduites - contre les conventions, les institutions, les consignes, les routines et les limites; elle refoulait la faim et le sommeil, et se moquait de la raison. (FA, 250).

Once again, however, it became obvious to Beauvoir, after a time, that Olga's rebellion was stagy rather than effective - such as on the occasion when she held a lit cigarette to her hand "avec une patience maniaque". (FA, 266-267). (114)

In Le Deuxième Sexe, Beauvoir had commented:

La jeune fille se regarde souffrir: elle cherche dans son propre coeur le goût de la violence et de la révolte plutôt qu'elle ne s'intéresse à leurs résultats. (115)

Olga, like the other girls, was tempted by the apparent easiness of impressing simply by projecting a certain image. Being required much less effort than doing, and as long as she was young, she could still reap a certain glory from her potential for a brilliant future.

One other portrait of a narcissistic young girl is that of Lise Oblanoff. Lise was one of Beauvoir's pupils, whom she met in 1940 when she was teaching

(114) The same episode is recounted in more detail in L'Invitée, pp. 358-359.

(115) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 111.

at the Lycée Molière in Paris. With her hair parted severely in the middle, large shoes and skirts which were too long for her, she was not particularly attractive. However, like Olga, Lise, who was seventeen when Beauvoir first met her, was best in the class; she was a white Russian. She, too, believed herself different from those around her. She had only made one friend in all the years she had been at the Lycée Molière - another Russian:

Ses autres camarades, elle les trouvait fades et sottes; elle jugeait tout le monde avec une extrême sévérité; elle ne se sentait pas solidaire de cette société qu'elle observait de loin avec un détachement ironique. (FA, 356).

Lise's situation was not privileged. Rather, it was her sense of not belonging anywhere which made her so self-centred.

Apatriote, élevée sans tendresse par des parents qui ne s'entendaient pas, elle souffrait de frustration généralisée; par réaction, elle se croyait des droits absolus sur toutes choses et contre tout le monde. (FA, 489).

Her family was struggling financially. Because both her parents were Russian, they were not naturalized, and finding work in France was a problem for them. Lise was at first not able to enrol at the Sorbonne without a "carte d'identité" and she could not procure one without being enrolled. As a consequence of such difficulties, her attitude to the world was aggressive and embittered.

Lise's attitude typified the "attitude infantile" (FA, 489) of the young narcissists described by Beauvoir in Le Deuxième Sexe. In her behaviour one recognizes "cette inextricable confusion de la révolte et de la complicité"<sup>(116)</sup> observed by the author in her essay on women. Lise's "absence de respect humain" (FA, 475) was not so much genuine protest as a means of attracting attention:

elle cultivait délibérément le scandale. (FA, 475).

---

(116) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 113.

When she triumphantly declared to Simone that she had lost her virginity and when she later described her sex life to her with "une brutalité de soudard", (FA, 490) it was clear to Simone that Lise was attempting to persuade herself that sex was not important. (117)

Lise used other people for her own ends, and was extremely demanding. She was continually accusing Beauvoir of "égoïsme", (FA, 526) because the latter had other preoccupations besides her. Lise resented any rivals to her teacher-friend's attention - even the hours Simone spent writing and the time she spent with Sartre. In order to gain Simone's attention, Lise spun a series of stories about her misfortunes, which she admitted - much later - were complete untruths:

elle m'attendait devant ma porte, [..] la larme à l'oeil:  
"je me suis sauvée de la maison: mon père voulait me tuer!"  
gémissait-elle en reniflant un peu. Ou bien sa mère l'avait  
giflée; ou son père avait battu sa mère: en tout cas, elle  
avait droit à des consolations. (FA, 445).

Beauvoir doubtless had Lise in mind when she wrote, in Le Deuxième Sexe, of the need, evident in many young girls, to be "quelqu'un qui compte": (118) She had written:

C'est afin de compter qu'elle intervient dans le destin d'autrui;  
toute arme lui est bonne; elle livre des secrets, elle en invente,  
elle trahit, elle calomnie; (119)

As she grew older, it became easier for Lise to attract attention:

Lise était sortie de l'âge ingrat; elle marchait et se mouvait  
avec une lourdeur de moujik, mais son visage était devenu très  
beau, sous ses cheveux blonds et lisses. Elle faisait sensation  
quand elle entrait au "Flore". Partout où elle se passait on la  
remarquait, à cause de son éclat et de ses manières insolites.  
(FA, 489).

---

(117) Beauvoir discusses this sort of "comédie" on the part of the young girl in Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 113.

(118) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 115.

(119) *ibid.*

Lise, too, learnt to use seduction as an easy way of acquiring things. She moved in with her first lover because André, "qui appartenait à une riche famille de propriétaires", (FA, 489), made it possible for her - financially - to leave home. During the war, she impressed the sculptor Giacometti, who met her at the Dôme. He used to buy her sumptuous dinners there - and, after all, she was often hungry during this period. (120) She ate her fill and disappeared. The one time she seemed to have fallen in love was with Bourla, a young Spanish Jew. Soon afterwards, he was captured. His generosity to her had been unsurpassable and his adoration had temporarily given her a new confidence. After the Liberation, Lise resorted to her previous behaviour. This time, she flirted with American G.I.'s, in order to profit from their generosity with cigarettes and rations.

elle s'asseyait le soir à la terrasse du Café de la Paix ou sur les Champs-Élysées, attendant qu'un G.I. lui adressât la parole; les soupirants ne lui manquaient pas: si elle en trouvait un qui lui parût à la fois discret et distrayant, elle acceptait un verre, une promenade en jeep, un dîner; en échange d'une promesse de rendez-vous qu'elle ne tenait généralement pas, elle rapportait à l'hôtel du thé, des Camel, du café en poudre, des boîtes de spam. (FC, 26).

After the war, Lise "avait hâte de fuir la France où l'avenir lui était barré et où elle avait faim". (FC, 64). She decided to leave for America - again by means of a man:

S'étant liée, après la guerre, avec un séduisant G.I. qui était assistant metteur en scène à Hollywood, elle décida de l'épouser. Il n'avait pas envie de se marier, mais elle se trouva enceinte et elle le persuada de faire les démarches nécessaires pour qu'elle pût le rejoindre aux U.S.A. (TCF, 88). (121)

---

(120) It was through Lise that Beauvoir and Sartre made the acquaintance of Giacometti.

(121) Beauvoir tells us that the character of Nadine, in Les Mandarins, is partially based on Lise. She fell in love with Diégo, a Spanish Jew who was taken by the Nazis and put to death. Later, she deliberately became pregnant in order to make Henri, her lover, feel obliged to marry her.

It seems then, that all these young narcissists had certain things in common. Blanchette, Camille, Olga and Lise all wanted to be different and special. They all seemed to be struggling against a traditional submissive female destiny. Intelligent and capable of spectacular gestures of protest, they were not content with an ordinary marriage and all were promising students. However, already at this stage of their lives, it was becoming apparent to Beauvoir that their rebelliousness was chiefly aimed at effect and that their independence was a facade. All were tempted by the easier path of success: they were too concerned with their image in the eyes of others to be bothered with the very real effort and struggle required for genuine independence.

### 3) The situation of the narcissist.

In her autobiography, Simone de Beauvoir makes a point of showing the spectacular downfall of several extreme narcissists. It does seem as if she judges these women more harshly than the dévouées she knew. This is perhaps because their self-centredness had nothing admirable about it - whereas the dévouée at least believed in her own altruism. Another possible reason was that these women had no scruples whatsoever: everything was subordinate to their own interest.

We are given a reasonably detailed picture of Camille and Lise as adults. A woman whom Beauvoir calls Louise Perron entered her life fleetingly, but made a major impression on Beauvoir and is portrayed in some detail. Finally, we are given some information on Violette Leduc in Tout compte fait, after her death. It is unfortunate that Olga, to all intents and purposes, disappears from the autobiography, so that we are left merely with the picture of a somewhat narcissistic adolescent. Beauvoir only tells us that Olga became an

excellent actress, but that she was discouraged by criticism and abandoned the theatre. We are given no details about her marriage to Jacques Bost, and we are left wondering whether Olga led a happy life as a narcissist, in which case more information would conflict with Simone de Beauvoir's didactic intent in the autobiography. It must remain a conjecture; because the two are still close friends today, Simone is absolutely discreet.

Of all the women portrayed, it is Camille who best incarnates "la narcissiste", as described by Beauvoir in Le Deuxième Sexe. There is, understandably, a great deal of antagonism in Simone de Beauvoir's characterization of Camille. At a certain stage she saw Sartre and several of her friends, men and woman alike, fall under Camille's spell and as she freely admits:

j'avais bien de la peine à tenir tête à son image. (FA, 77).

We must remember, too, that not only Sartre, but also her father had been fascinated by beautiful actresses and alluring, sensual women. It was theatrical women, Simone observed, who had been her mother's rivals early in her marriage - and Simone must have often felt threatened by the same sort of women herself.

More than her beauty and her capacity to charm, it was Camille's reputed talent which Simone most envied, when she first became acquainted with her:

Déjà, cette belle femme pleine d'expérience, s'était frayé un chemin dans le monde du théâtre, des lettres et des arts, elle avait commencé sa carrière d'écrivain. (FA, 77).

Through Charles Dullin, Camille had easy access to the theatre and she did attend courses and do some acting. However:

elle ne se sentait pas une vocation d'actrice; elle refuserait toujours d'incarner des personnages en qui elle ne se reconnaîtrait pas. (FA, 74).

Beauvoir has commented in Le Deuxième Sexe that whereas:



des artistes authentiques [..] se transcendent dans le rôle qu'elles créent [..], la cabotine, au contraire, se soucie non de ce qu'elle accomplit, mais de la gloire qui en rejaillira sur elle; elle cherche avant tout à se mettre en valeur. (122)

Camille's solution to this problem was to write her own plays with the major role for herself. Her first play, L'Ombre, was set in her home town, Toulouse, in the middle ages. The heroine, played by Camille, was:

une femme extrêmement belle, à tous égards exceptionnelle. (FA, 112).

Her glory was of short duration: the public jeered the play. Camille's "culte du succès" (FA, 113) meant a total incapacity to stand criticism and she sequestered herself for several days in her room. Later, she had more success when she was content to help with productions: she had a particular flair for set-design, design and costume.

Camille still liked to boast about her writing. After the failure of her play, she told Sartre and Beauvoir that she had begun a novel that she had already entitled Le Lierre. Knowing how they were both impressed with a capacity for hard work, she told them that she worked on it every night "de minuit à six heures du matin". (FA, 123). During the war, Dullin directed a play which Camille had written: La Princesse des Ursins, which, Beauvoir comments mildly, "ne fut pas un succès." (FA, 522). One critic called it a "somp tueux navet". (TCF, 77). Later, writing in Tout compte fait, after Camille's death, Beauvoir tells us:

Nous avons compris à ce moment-là que Camille ne serait jamais un écrivain. (TCF, 77).

Even when Camille was old and an alcoholic, when it was obvious to all that she would never write anything worthwhile, she still spoke, in grandiose terms, of plays she was writing, of an "immense ouvrage" (TCF, 87) on Dullin, of a "romancero" "en plusieurs volumes où elle raconterait la vie de ses parents et la sienne". (TCF, 79). However, when Beauvoir was given her papers at Camille's death, she found "aucune trace de son oeuvre, pas même une page de brouillon."

(TCF, 86). Trying to understand Camille's fraudulence and mauvaise foi,

Beauvoir comments:

Sans doute son narcissisme contribuait-il à l'aveugler. Et puis, alors que nous l'avions crue acharnée à écrire, elle était en fait d'une extrême indolence: elle jouait à travailler et ne travaillait pas. (TCF, 77-78).

In Le Deuxième Sexe, Beauvoir made the point that women are often tempted to "jouer à travailler" rather than to commit themselves to the "travail solitaire"<sup>(123)</sup> necessary in order to succeed.

In fact, Camille's whole life was a game, an act, and Beauvoir is convinced that this was at first a conscious choice. Camille's sensitivity to "la mise en scène" was used by her to enhance her appearance. She decorated her living quarters "de manière ravissante" (TCF, 76) and "cet art qu'elle avait de créer des atmosphères" (FA, 80) was used not only in the actual theatre but also for her own personal theatre: her life. She liked nothing more than to organize extravagant "fêtes". For the duration of the party, her role of hostess enabled her to play out her fantasies in front of others, in the contrived reality of the group game. Herbaud told Simone about a "Roman orgy" to which he had been invited before Simone ever met Camille:

Camille donnait des fêtes dans la cave qu'elle transformait, selon les circonstances, en palais de la Renaissance ou en château de Moyen Age. Herbaud, habillé d'un peplum, y prit part à une orgie romaine; Camille présidait le festin, vêtue en patricienne de la décadence, à demi couchée sur un sofa, et Zina était assise à ses pieds. (FA, 72).

---

(123) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 470.

In L'Invitée, Elisabeth prefers considering herself a painter to the actual process of creation: "elle goûtait un grand plaisir à serrer les mains de ces écrivains, de ces artistes; elle avait toujours eu besoin d'un milieu sympathique pour prendre conscience d'elle-même: au moment où on peint, on ne sent pas qu'on est peintre, c'est ingrat et décourageant." (L'Invitée, p. 88).

Later, when she was living with Dullin, Camille was able to pose as the charming and gracious companion to the famous Charles Dullin. She was delighted when, on social occasions, others were there to admire her playing this role. Beauvoir describes one such occasion, on which she personally - not used to such "mondanités" - felt most uncomfortable:

les gens se ruaient sur Dullin, sur Camille, avec des vagissements, des rugissements, des roucoulements qui me laissèrent sans voix. (FA, 245).

The first time Simone met Camille, she was shocked by the way in which the latter watched herself talking in the mirror:

Tout en parlant, elle jouait avec ses bracelets, touchait ses boucles et envoyait à son miroir de tendres oeillades. Je trouvais ce narcissisme niais et, néanmoins, il m'offensait. (FA, 79).

Beauvoir was equally horrified by Camille's attitude to others, particularly men. Her sole interest was to induce others - using any means whatsoever - to admire her.

Elle affirma, au cours de la conversation, qu'une femme n'a jamais de difficulté à prendre un homme dans ses filets: un peu de comédie, de coquetterie, de la flatterie, du doigté et le tour était joué. (FA, 78).

To Beauvoir, the most irritating aspect of Camille's "comédie" and "coquetterie" was its success. Not only had she fascinated Sartre, but when Dullin became one of her heroes, she went to see him perform in Les Oiseaux, at the Atelier, and succeeded in charming him:

Vêtue de ses atours les plus flambants, elle s'assit au premier rang et le dévora des yeux de manière ostensible; elle recommença ce manège plusieurs soirs de suite et finit par solliciter une entrevue. (FA, 74).

Dullin was not unmoved by her admiration and persistence: he was married, but Camille became his mistress.

Camille used a similar strategy of flattery on women whom she wanted to impress. When Simone visited her in 1933, after Sartre had left for Berlin, Camille bent over backwards to charm her:

Camille me fit de grands frais. Elle portait une belle robe en velours noir, ornée à la ceinture d'un bouquet de petites fleurs noires, au coeur jaune. "Je veux vous séduire", me dit-elle gaiement; elle prétendit que ses sentiments à mon égard pourraient devenir impérieux, et même jaloux. (FA, 196).

Olga Kosakievicz was dazzled by this woman fourteen years her senior; Beauvoir described Olga's fascination in L'Invitée, again showing how "Paule" flattered and seduced "Xavière".<sup>(124)</sup> Camille was amply rewarded for her pains: it seems that she was admired whenever she made the effort.

Sartre reinforced in an interview what Beauvoir shows in the autobiography: he declared that Camille's life was "une vie imaginaire".<sup>(125)</sup> When Simone first visited Camille, she was astonished to observe the way the latter behaved towards the two dolls she had named after her heroes, Nietzsche and Dürer:

sur des chaises minuscules étaient assis deux grands poupons vêtus de sarraux d'écolier: ils s'appelaient Friedrich et Albrecht, et Camille parlait d'eux comme s'ils avaient été des enfants de chair et d'os. (FA, 78).

In 1940, during the general exodus from Paris, Camille left with her adopted sister, Zina, each with a rucksack full of their most precious possessions, "et Camille tenant à la main une valise contenant Friedrich et Albrecht." (FA, 471).

---

(124) (Note that "Paule's" dress is actually what Camille wore when Simone visited her in 1933.)

Paule "approchait, les mains jetées en avant de son corps, d'un pas vif qui contrastait avec la majesté de sa longue robe noire; un bouquet de velours sombre teinté de jaune soulignait sa taille. Elle saisit à bras tendus les mains de Xavière et les garda un moment dans les siennes, "Elle ressemble de plus en plus à un Fra Angelico", dit-elle.

And later:

"Vous devriez ôter votre manteau", dit Paule en touchant l'épaule de Xavière. Xavière sourit; depuis qu'on était monté dans le taxi, elle n'avait pas quitté Paule des yeux; elle enleva son vêtement avec une docilité de somnambule.

"Quelle charmante robe!" dit Paule. (L'Invitée, p. 353-355).

Beauvoir refers to this episode in La Force de l'Age, p. 266-267.

(125) J.P. Sartre. "Sartre et les femmes". Interview with Catherine Chaine in Le Nouvel Observateur, N° 638, (31 janvier - 6 février 1977.)

At first Camille's role-playing appeared harmless. Charles Dullin was used to the theatre and complied with her games willingly enough:

Camille faisait de sa vie un spectacle, et il la suivait. Ils jouaient des comédies, d'ailleurs très amusantes, de cajolerie, de bouderie, de rancune, de tendresse. (FA, 197).

However, Camille's ability to distinguish reality from fantasy was weakened by her mauvaise foi and further impaired by alcohol, which became a problem early in her adult life. Her desire to attract attention made her behaviour totally unreasonable when she was drunk. From the first, she was a thorough embarrassment to Dullin on occasions:

Elle buvait beaucoup. Un soir, elle était entrée en scène ivre morte et avec de grands rires elle avait arraché sa perruque au principal acteur; une autre fois, elle avait quitté le plateau à quatre pattes, toutes jupes relevées. (FA, 75).

After the failure of her play La Princesse des Ursins, when the disparity between her real self and the image she projected was becoming increasingly evident, Camille's outrageous behaviour could no longer be passed off as a joke by Beauvoir and Sartre.

Quand elle était ivre, elle faisait des avances à tous les acteurs et à tous les élèves. [...] Elle nous raconta elle-même [...] que s'étant enivrée à une réception officielle, très importante pour Dullin, elle avait tenu des propos consternants. Un autre soir, m'a-t-on dit, au cours d'une crise aiguë, elle jeta au feu par colère la liasse de billets qui devaient servir à payer la troupe. (TCF, 78).

In his last years, Dullin was a sick man, and Camille only added to his troubles. She made his life "infernale": (TCF, 78) she hardly ever visited him in hospital and was not present at his deathbed, in 1949. And yet, after his death, she constructed a macabre little altar to him and claimed that she communicated with him:

Elle avait dressé dans sa chambre un petit autel à Dullin: des photos, des fleurs, une rose artificielle dans un crâne. Elle disait que dans les moments difficiles, il la conseillait. (TCF, 79).

Camille had always had what Beauvoir calls her "relations d'outre-tombe". (FA, 75). She liked to imagine that she actually communicated with such figures as Nietzsche, Dürer and Emily Brontë. As well as what she referred to as "les présences", there were her dolls, Friedrich and Albrecht, to whom she talked aloud, and her dog, Nell. She told Beauvoir: "Avec Nell, je me dispute presque tout le temps". (TCF, 80).

When Camille spent time with Beauvoir and Sartre after Dullin's death, she talked for hours about her ailments and medications - her narcissism expressing itself in her hypochondria. She was never capable of a real conversation; essentially, "elle monologuait". (TCF, 81).

Despite her age, she still dressed to attract attention to her body:

Elle portait toujours épanchés sur son dos ses longs cheveux qui étaient devenus roussâtres et elle s'habillait de vieilles nippes très voyantes: elle attirait tous les regards. (TCF, 82).

Camille ended her life as a complete alcoholic. She was discovered in a semi-coma, lying amidst good bottles of red wine, rotten oysters and her own excrement, in what had become her foul-smelling apartment. She died in hospital, in December 1967.

In Le Deuxième Sexe, Beauvoir had described how the narcissist's mauvaise foi could lead to a real loss of the sense of reality. She doubtless had Camille in mind when she wrote:

c'est aux dépens de la vie réelle que la comédie narcissiste se déroule; un personnage imaginaire sollicite l'admiration d'un public imaginaire; la femme en proie à son moi perd toute prise sur le monde concret, elle ne se soucie d'établir avec autrui aucun rapport réel. (126)

Beauvoir continued:

la narcissiste refuse d'admettre qu'on puisse la voir autrement qu'elle ne se montre: c'est ce qui explique que, si occupée à se contempler, elle réussisse si mal à se juger et qu'elle sombre si facilement dans le ridicule. (127)

Camille had once still been able to revert to her normal self and confront the real world:

Elle était capable, à l'occasion, d'oublier ses mythes et son personnage pour s'intéresser au monde tel qu'il est: ce réalisme lui servait. (FA, 122).

However, the mauvaise foi and heavy drinking combined to make the real Camille disappear even to herself, except for fleeting moments. No woman in the autobiography cuts a more pathetic figure than Camille, in the last twenty years of her life. Beauvoir takes pains to show her readers that there were no rewards for such narcissism. Camille most definitely lost "la partie" which is life.

Lise Oblanoff, who had married a G.I. and gone to live in the United States, also had creative talent but not enough motivation.

Elle avait des dons, mais pas de vocation. (FC, 247).

She liked to write but could not see the point of working hard at it. Furthermore, Beauvoir believes that Lise was simply not interested enough in other people to find "la longue patience de leur parler, page après page":

son talent se marquait dans des nouvelles et des contes qui avaient paru dans des magazines, et surtout dans ses lettres; elle l'avait l'art des raccourcis et elle choisissait ses mots avec d'heureuses méprises; mais, seule devant une liasse de feuillets blancs, le coeur lui manquait. (FC, 247).

---

(126) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 473.

On this subject, Lou Andreas Salomé, who became interested in psychoanalysis and particularly in the subject of narcissism, in the last years of her life, wrote to Freud on 30.1.1919:

"It is indeed very characteristic of narcissism that both reality and phantasy should assume equal importance and not be felt as opposites." (Sigmund Freud and Lou Andreas-Salomé. Letters. Trans. W. and E. Robson-Scott. Ed. Ernst Pfeiffer. London: Hogarth Press, 1972.)

(127) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 473.

Later on, she took up studies at university - aiming first to become a teacher and then to become a lawyer. She did well, for she was very intelligent, but her studies never lead her to achieve her ambitions - nor did she become "une grande écrivaine", as she put it, (TCF, 92) - for she lacked any real commitment.

Lise's love-life was equally unsatisfactory. She admitted herself:

je ne peux aimer personne. (TCF, 91).

She was too self-centred and too aggressive and insensitive towards other people to have a good relationship with anyone else. Her first husband found living with Lise "insupportable"; (TCF, 89) the man whom she eventually persuaded to become her second husband, Bertie, admitted his "grande terreur d'être avalé vivant". (TCF, 92).

Lise was the only woman amongst the self-centred women in the autobiography whom I classify as narcissists to have children. She liked to tell Simone about the joys of maternity and to boast how much she loved her children. At the same time, she accused the children, bitterly, of tyrannizing her. Indeed, she proved to be "si capricieuse et si despotique" with her eldest daughter that a psychiatrist advised removing the girl, who suffered from "des troubles névrotiques", from her mother. (TCF, 93). The girl was sent to live with her father. Despite Lise's effusive claim that "elle adorait son petit garçon", (TCF, 95) he became a semi-delinquent and was sent to military school to be disciplined. The third child was adopted and also reacted to Lise's "sollicitude" by breaking and burning various objects. (TCF, 96). Lise certainly did not provide the love or attention which the children needed.

Until ill health and bad nerves ruined her physique, Lise exuded a certain "séduction". (TCF, 93). She liked to be able to use this as her power



over men and was most disconcerted (and fascinated) when she became friendly with a homosexual who refused her advances:

Elle voulait absolument coucher avec lui, non par désir physique mais pour avoir barre sur lui. (TCF, 90).

Loving to attract attention to herself, Lise did this by negative means. On a visit to Paris in 1967, she embarrassed Simone continually by her behaviour- which was intended to shock. Her attire was flamboyantly American (and Beauvoir has never concealed her dislike of the conventional "femme américaine";<sup>(128)</sup>) she expressed herself with "de grands gestes et une voix criarde" (TCF, 96) and lacked "respect humain" even more than she had done in her youth. (TCF, 98). In a restaurant, she horrified Simone by pulling a plastic bag out of her pocket for the stew which remained on her plate.

Beauvoir observes, too, that Lise developed a strange relationship to objects. Having reduced the humans around her to objects, she proceeded to attach exaggerated importance to things. Her house was filled with "un nombre impressionnant d'objets de toute espèce", (TCF, 93) and when she saw Simone again in 1967, for the first time for over a decade, Lise excitedly gave her a number of gadgets from America - which thrilled her somewhat more than Simone. When Simone last saw her, in Paris in 1968, Lise was about to take her husband to the Galleries Lafayette to buy herself a broom. Amazed, Beauvoir comments:

La vieille de leur départ, elle n'avait pas encore trouvé le balai de ses rêves: ils comptaient chercher encore le lendemain matin avant de prendre l'avion. (TCF, 98)

Just like Camille, Lise made her dog into a sort of human companion. A dog had the advantage of docility: the animal was more easily manipulated than a human being:

elle m'a parlé de sa chienne, une énorme bête qu'elle adorait; elle m'a dit fièrement: "Je lui ai appris à faire ses besoins sur le trône des cabinets, comme une personne. Ç'a été dur, mais je l'ai dressée. (TCF, 96).

---

(128) Beauvoir makes several scathing references to "la femme américaine" in Le Deuxième Sexe. (See for example vol. II, p. 418-419, 545).

Lise died very suddenly , in 1968, at the age of forty-five. Nothing in her adult life had become more important to her than her self. She was unable to commit herself to any work; she did not love either of her husbands, and she resented her children. Completely preoccupied with herself, she lost the limited capacity she had once had to communicate with others. Frustrated and caught up in her own trap, she continued to blame the rest of the world for her own unhappiness.

The woman Beauvoir calls Louise Perron was thirty when Simone knew her. Both of them were teaching at the time in Rouen. Louise is described in the autobiography as:

une grande noirette [7], laide, avec des yeux brillants et un corps élégant qu'elle habillait mal. (FA, 174).

Simone was quickly chosen, by her, to play "le rôle de confidente". (FA, 174). Louise's capacity for self-deception made a great impression on Simone, and she tells us that Louise Perron was the partial inspiration for the character of Paule in Les Mandarins and Elisabeth in L'Invitée.<sup>(129)</sup> In Le Deuxième Sexe, Beauvoir describes the behaviour of Louise Perron (without mentioning her name) under the heading of "l'Amoureuse". If I categorize her here as predominantly a "narcissiste", it is because Beauvoir intimates, in the autobiography, that Louise was consciously acting the part of the unhappy "amoureuse", rather than sincerely being one. Her "passion" needed a witness, which is why Simone was chosen as "confidente".

Louise had succeeded in seducing a well-known writer. She hardly knew the man, but was obviously impressed with his reputation. She admitted to him, when it was too late for him to retreat, that he was her first lover. For her,

---

(129) See La Force de l'âge, p. 350 and La Force des choses, p. 286.

this meant a great deal. He was married, but Louise "se persuada" that he would leave his wife for love of her, Louise. He explained to her that this was not the case. However:

Louise ne voulut pas croire à sa sincérité. (FA, 174).

This was the point of departure for months of misery, and a stubborn refusal, on Louise's part, to face up to reality. She wrote several letters to the man and she then spent days interpreting his replies and his actions. When he did not reply, she told Simone:

"Quand on veut rompre, on prévient: il m'écrirait." (FA, 175)

when he did write an obvious "lettre de rupture", she declared to her

"confidente":

"quand on veut rompre, on n'écrit pas." (FA, 175) (130)

She decided at one moment that he was jealous, at another moment that he had misunderstood her last letter, at another that he had been hurt by her and was paying her back. Her interpretations were often highly sophisticated:

Symboles psychanalytiques, clé des songes, langage des chiffres et des fleurs, calembours, anagrammes: tout lui servait à charger le moindre objet, l'incident le plus futile, d'une myriade d'intentions qui la visaient. Pas un temps mort, dans cet univers, pas un pouce de terrain neutre, pas un détail laissé au hasard; il était régi par une nécessité de fer et tout entier signifiant. (FA, 185).

Beauvoir writes that quite suddenly:

il se fit un déclic dans ma tête, et cette affaire cessa définitivement de me paraître drôle. (FA, 176).

---

(130) Beauvoir cites these same assertions in the chapter called "L'Amoureuse" in Le Deuxième Sexe (II, p. 497) referring to "une amie". In La Force de l'âge, Beauvoir also tells us about Cécilia Bertin, who believed herself loved by the famous theatre director, Louis Jouvet, with the same "mauvaise foi" as Louise Perron: Elle a construit autour de Jouvet un délire aussi caractérisé que celui de Louise Perron. Elle m'explique qu'il a peur de l'amour parce que quand il aime, il appartient pieds et poings liés à la femme aimée. [7..7] Chaque signe d'indifférence lui est une preuve de passion. (FA, 438).

In Le Deuxième Sexe, she had explained:

Il est souvent très difficile devant les confidences reçues de décider où commence le délire pathologique. (131)

Although Beauvoir describes Louise as temporarily losing touch completely with reality - and, indeed, she was sent for several months to a psychiatric clinic - to Beauvoir, Louise represents an extreme case of mauvaise foi. She writes of Louise's attempts to "ruser"; she considers that Louise "tricha [..] avec la vérité". (FA, 177). It is obvious that she believes Louise chose to deceive herself, for she tells us that she eventually chose to stop:

Elle persévéra assez longtemps dans ses délires, et finit par s'en dégoûter. (FA, 186).

The other aspect of Louise's mauvaise foi which struck Beauvoir was "l'impuissance de Louise à se dégager de la 'comédie'." (FA, 181). Louise herself became aware that she had been playing a role for a long time. She told Sartre and Beauvoir that she was going to look for a new job and start afresh:

Elle enfila son manteau: "Je descends acheter le journal pour consulter les petits annonces. [..] Elle nous dévisagea d'un air égaré: "Ah! voilà que je joue encore la comédie!" Elle jeta son manteau sur le divan: "Mais ça aussi c'est une comédie! dit-elle en collant ses mains contre ses joues. Est-ce qu'il n'y a aucun moyen d'en sortir?" (FA, 180-181).

Later, Louise told Simone that she had been experiencing "une espèce de dédoublement":

elle me dit combien il était horrible, sans répit, de se voir. (FA, 182).

Imprisoned by her own narcissistic role-playing, Louise had gone beyond the point at which it was comfortable to see herself as if through the eyes of others.

---

(131) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 497.

Beauvoir is quite open about the fact that she and Sartre judged Louise's behaviour according to their moral concept of authentic behaviour and mauvaise foi :

le tort de Louise, à nos yeux, c'était d'avoir voulu construire une image d'elle-même qui lui servit d'arme contre un amour malheureux; son mérite, c'est qu'à présent elle s'était percée à jour; son drame, c'est qu'elle réussirait d'autant moins à s'oublier qu'elle s'y acharnerait davantage. (FA, 181).

Beauvoir did not see Louise again after the latter left Rouen and returned to her family. She heard that Louise went back to teaching, that she took part in the Resistance movement during the war and joined the Communist Party. We do not know whether she changed fundamentally.

Beauvoir's comments in Le Deuxième Sexe on "l'érotomanie", which is the illusion of being loved, helps to elucidate Louise Perron's behaviour and shows that Beauvoir did associate her attitude with narcissism. She wrote:

Il est remarquable que sur dix malades atteints de "l'illusion d'être aimés", il y en a neuf qui sont des femmes. On voit très clairement que ce qu'elles recherchent dans leur amant imaginaire, c'est une apothéose de leur narcissisme. (132)

She goes on to describe "l'érotomanie":

L'érotomanie peut apparaître au sein de diverses psychoses; mais son contenu est toujours le même. Le sujet est illuminé et glorifié par l'amour d'un homme de grande valeur, qui a été brusquement fasciné par ses charmes - alors qu'elle n'attendait rien de lui - et qui lui manifeste ses sentiments de manière détournée mais impérieuse. (133)

In many ways, Violette Leduc resembled what we know of Louise Perron. In Le Deuxième Sexe, Beauvoir had written that the illusion of being loved easily changed into a "délire de persécution". (134) Indeed, in the case of

(132) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 472.

(133) *ibid.*

(134) Freud refers to the "delusion of being watched" in his discussion of narcissism. See: Freud. "On Narcissism: An Introduction." (1914), p. 53.

Louise, she eventually believed that everyone - particularly her friends - were plotting against her. For the last twenty or so years of Leduc's life, she, too, became "la proie des incohérents délirés" (TCF, 57). As Beauvoir points out, this is "la figure inversée" of the illusion of being loved, but is still narcissism and the woman is still at the "centre de son univers". (135)

La narcissiste ne peut admettre qu'autrui ne s'intéresse pas passionnément à elle; si elle a la preuve évidente qu'elle n'est pas adorée, elle suppose aussitôt qu'on la hait. (136)

Leduc never imagined that she was passionately loved. However, from around 1955 till the end of her life, her world was:

peuplé de symboles et de signes émis par d'invisibles persécuteurs. (TCF, 59).

In 1957, when her "interprétations" were such that Beauvoir had to persuade her to seek psychiatric help, Violette Leduc was convinced that the article Sartre had written in Les Temps Modernes on Tintoretto, in which he had discussed his ugliness, was aimed at her. She believed that "une organisation malveillante" was making a mockery of her. Every little thing - "bouts de ficelle, fragments de journaux, étrons de chiens, emballages de Gauloises bleues" - was interpreted by her as a sign from this organisation. (TCF, 58).

Once again, Beauvoir suggests that Violette's attitude was fundamentally a choice - even if her mauvaise foi had eventually got out of her control. She writes about Violette:

---

(135) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 473.

(136) ibid.

Beauvoir shows that this phenomenon does not apply solely to women. The young man she calls Marco was homosexual and a prime narcissist. His passion for Jacques Bost was not returned, nor did he show any signs of becoming the great opera singer he had envisaged. As well as this, he was losing his hair, and with it, his spectacular good looks. Beauvoir writes of his gradual descent into paranoia, which eventually landed him in a psychiatric ward.

Son inconscient était résolument optimiste, il ne croyait pas  
[...]  
aux délires qu'elle s'inventait. (TCF, 62).

This, Simone de Beauvoir believes, explains why, "si fragile, Violette ait  
été robuste." (TCF, 62).

Where Violette Leduc differed from the other narcissistic women  
mentioned here is that she did apply herself to her work:

non seulement elle avait le don, mais elle savait travailler.  
(FC, 30).

It is true that in her writing, Leduc described herself and her own experience.  
However, her aim was not to please. She did not have what Beauvoir considers  
to be a failing of many women writers: "une complaisance à l'égard d'elles-  
mêmes." (137)

Leduc did like to attract attention to herself. It was only in her  
fifties, after the success of La Bâtarde, that she had the money to dress as  
she had always wanted:

avec sa perruque blonde, ses mini-jupes, ses manteaux dernier  
cri, elle avait beaucoup d'allure; mais dans la rue on se  
retournait sur son passage parce que l'âge inscrit sur son visage  
contrastait d'une manière provocante sur sa silhouette juvénile.  
(TCF, 60).

And, in an interview, Beauvoir referred to Leduc's obsession with her ugliness  
as "une forme de son narcissisme". (138) As she showed in Le Deuxième Sexe, to  
play "un personnage de victime" is also a narcissistic role. (139)

To conclude, let us look again at what these four women, who in many  
ways were very different, had in common. All of them were self-centred. They  
were too obsessed with being loved themselves to be able to love anyone else  
with genuine feeling. Lise was the only one of them to be a mother and it is

(137) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 470.

(138) Personal interview with Beauvoir. November 1976.

(139) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 466.

significant that she was not a good one. She failed in maternity presumably for the same reasons that she failed to become a writer: she was not interested enough in other people to have the patience to communicate with them. Several of these women had a peculiar relationship with animals and with objects around them. (140) Camille and Lise had a dog, Camille also had her dolls - these things had the advantage, over humans, of not conflicting with the narcissist's self-centred universe. Camille carried her communication with inanimate objects to absurd lengths. Her fetichism was such that, at the end of her life, she lived as a hermit and talked almost exclusively with her "présences" and the "demi-vivants" which surrounded her - by whom she meant her dolls and her dog.

These women all had talent which went to waste because of their indolence, their lack of motivation and their incapacity to commit themselves to any projects outside themselves.

Above all, they were concerned to attract attention to themselves, and used any means to do this. Camille pretended to Sartre and Beauvoir that she was up half the night writing. She and Lise frequently resorted to exhibitionism, which was deliberately intended to shock. Louise Perron, playing her role of unhappy "amoureuse", managed to make a traumatic event of everything which happened or did not happen to her. Violette Leduc played her role of victim with similar complacency; both women eventually saw themselves as the target of an all-pervasive persecution.

---

(140) In her preface to La Bâtarde, Beauvoir wrote that Violette's "compagnons favoris" were "les objets familiers." (p. 14).



They all placed emphasis on their capacity to seduce. Camille and Lise, both beautiful women, used this to advantage. Louise and Violette were both unattractive but nevertheless used their bodies as a form of power. Louise seduced her famous writer, laying her virginity at his feet. Beauvoir stresses Leduc's preoccupation with her appearance and with "la toilette" (TCF, 60) and if she does not expand on Leduc's "séduction", it is because it is a major concern of Leduc in her own writing.

The lack of scruples of these women also extended to social issues. Beauvoir tells us that Camille enthusiastically supported Nazism;<sup>(141)</sup> Lise was indifferent to the German occupation of France until her own lover was abducted and killed; Violette Leduc lived for several years off the profits she made from the black market, during the war. It is true that Louise Perron took an active part in the Resistance movement - but this was after the time in which Beauvoir knew her - when she was completely preoccupied with her own affairs.

As an existentialist, Beauvoir believes that these women chose their lives. They chose narcissism rather than real independence and were rewarded accordingly. All were unhappy women, frustrated, because they were committed to no external cause, and vulnerable, because they were so dependent on the gaze of others. At a moral level, Beauvoir judges them. However, she is also aware of psychological factors and does show some understanding. She writes that only a knowledge of Camille's childhood would provide a key to her "faiblesse originelle". (TCF, 88). She emphasizes that Lise:

avait été marquée par son enfance, par sa condition d'apatride, par le terrible choc de la mort de Bourla. (TCF, 94).<sup>(142)</sup>

---

(141) "puisque le nazisme triomphait, il fallait s'y rallier; c'était à présent ou jamais que Camille devait conquérir la gloire: comment se faire de son époque un piédestal si elle la condamnait? elle y adhérerait du fond du coeur, estimant qu'enfin son heure était venue. (FA, 486).

(142) Bourla was the name of Lise's Jewish lover, who was killed by the Nazis.

In her preface to La Bâtarde, Simone de Beauvoir stresses the way in which her experiences in her childhood and adolescence had marked Violette Leduc. Nevertheless, throughout the autobiography, it is the emphasis on the individual's choice of self which sets the tone in which these women are portrayed.

### III. "La Femme Indépendante."

In both Le Deuxième Sexe and the autobiography Simone de Beauvoir presents "la femme indépendante" as a model woman. However, there is a significant difference in her attitude in the two works. Whereas, in the 1949 essay, Beauvoir was candid about the difficulties facing the professional woman, in the autobiography she avoids any direct comment on the conflicts which confronted her and other independent women she knew.

Before looking at the picture Simone de Beauvoir presents of "la femme indépendante" in the autobiography, it is revealing to turn to Le Deuxième Sexe, to see what she had to say on this subject in 1949.

It is striking that the entire chapter called "La Femme indépendante" sets out the problems and conflicts facing the independent woman. Beauvoir stated quite emphatically:

il est certain qu'elles ne sont pas tranquillement installées dans leur nouvelle condition: elles ne sont encore qu'à moitié du chemin. (143)

She opened the chapter by discussing the obstacles to independence which faced the working class woman - problems which, in 1949, appeared almost insurmountable. However Beauvoir was primarily interested in another group of women - women whose profession did give them "une autonomie économique et sociale"<sup>(144)</sup> and who seemed from the outside to have achieved genuine liberation. These women were, of course, "des privilégiées",<sup>(145)</sup> like Beauvoir herself, who, as a teacher, was in one of the few professions in which women in France in the nineteen-thirties were paid the same as men. Beauvoir proceeded to argue, in this chapter, that even in this group, women faced considerable problems. Indeed, she wrote:

Le fait d'être une femme pose aujourd'hui à un être humain autonome des problèmes singuliers. (146)

(143) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 53.

(144) *ibid.*

(145) *ibid.*

(146) *ibid.*, p. 524.

Beauvoir used the central thesis of Le Deuxième Sexe to explain why the "femme affranchie" was particularly torn by conflicts:

Le privilège que l'homme détient et qui se fait sentir dès son enfance, c'est que sa vocation d'être humain ne contrarie pas sa destinée de mâle. Par l'assimilation du phallus et de la transcendance, il se trouve que ses réussites sociales ou spirituelles le douent d'un prestige viril. Il n'est pas divisé. Tandis qu'il est demandé à la femme pour accomplir sa féminité de se faire objet et proie, c'est-à-dire de renoncer à ses revendications de sujet souverain. C'est ce conflit qui caractérise singulièrement la situation de la femme affranchie. Elle refuse de se cantonner dans son rôle de femelle parce qu'elle ne veut pas se mutiler; mais ce serait aussi une mutilation de répudier son sexe. (147)

Whatever the independent woman chooses, according to Beauvoir, involves a degree of self-mutilation. Aspiring to be a "sujet souverain", she has difficulties fulfilling herself as "un être humain sexué". (148) There is an absolute conflict between her sovereignty and her femininity - her desire to be a subject and her status, as a woman, as an object. Because of this, "la femme qui cherche à se suffire" (149) is "plus divisée" (150) than the conventional woman who seeks glory "par la médiation de l'homme", (151) and, in comparison with men, she feels "désavantagée". (152)

It is important to bear in mind that Beauvoir was writing in a feminist tradition which questioned male supremacy but not male values. Not until very recently has feminist consciousness begun to view "femininity" as something which has the potential to be positive. Writing before the seventies, Beauvoir did not hesitate to regard femininity as a "mutilation" (153) and to look to males for a model for the "femme affranchie". She declared:

la femme "moderne" accepte les valeurs masculines: elle se pique de penser, agir, travailler, créer au même titre que les mâles; au lieu de chercher à les ravalier, elle affirme qu'elle s'égalé à eux. (154)

---

(147) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 524.

(148) *ibid.*

(149) *ibid.*, p. 541.

(150) *ibid.*, p. 528.

(151) *ibid.*, p. 541.

(152) *ibid.*, p. 528.

(153) *ibid.*, p. 561.

(154) *ibid.*, p. 562.

The idea that "masculinity" is another sort of "mutilation" did occur to her, but to dwell on this would have conflicted with her binary polarisation: the male subject and the female object. (155)

In her life, Beauvoir tended to regard with impatience those aspects of herself and others which she considered to be typically "feminine" weaknesses. The way in which she seems to have dwelt with these "weaknesses" in herself was not to make an issue out of them, but rather to make herself change - in true existentialist fashion. The consequence of this tactic, for the autobiography, is the lack of attention paid to those conflicts in her life which were specific to her situation as an independent woman.

Furthermore, by the time she came to write the autobiography, Beauvoir saw herself as a feminist and a model independent woman. Consequently she fell into the very trap of the "féministes" whom she had criticized in Le Deuxième Sexe who, she had written:

exagèrent les résultats qu'elles obtiennent et s'aveuglent sur leur désarroi. (156)

What, then, was the cause of the "désarroi" which she had described in her earlier essay? The independent woman, Beauvoir had shown, faced two major obstacles:

elle n'a pas derrière elle le même passé qu'un garçon; elle n'est pas considérée par la société avec les mêmes yeux. (157)

(155) Beauvoir does mention some male conflicts in Le Deuxième Sexe. For example: "il est lui-même esclave de son double; quel travail pour édifier une image dans laquelle il est toujours en danger! Elle est malgré tout fondée sur la capricieuse liberté des femmes: il faut sans cesse se rendre celle-ci propice; l'homme est rongé par le souci de se montrer mâle, important, supérieur; il joue des comédies afin qu'on lui en joue; il est lui aussi agressif, inquiet; il a de l'hostilité pour les femmes parce qu'il a peur d'elles, et il a peur d'elles parce qu'il a peur du personnage avec lequel il se confond. (Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 564).

(156) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 523.

(157) ibid., p. 524.

Thus, not only is she expected, for example, to pay attention to her external appearance and her living quarters; her conditioning is such that the chances are that she will want to do this herself. She has learnt to "s'exhiber" and "charmer"; she has acquired "le goût du nid."<sup>(158)</sup>

It is in "le domaine sexuel" that her biggest problems arise.<sup>(159)</sup> In order to successfully seduce a man, writes Beauvoir, "il faut être une proie spontanément offerte".<sup>(160)</sup> It is an essentially passive enterprise, and goes against the grain of a woman who sees herself as "une conscience, un sujet".<sup>(161)</sup> Apart from this, society "confond avec entêtement femme libre et femme facile"<sup>(162)</sup> so that her reputation is in jeopardy. If "les difficultés d'une libre vie sexuelle" induce her to live in a state of monogamy, she must beware of becoming a "vassale" to her husband or lover.<sup>(163)</sup> Even if she and her partner share an "amour réciproque", love, stresses Beauvoir, is a danger:

Même dans l'amour réciproque, il y a entre les sentiments des amants une différence fondamentale [..]. Il faut bien que l'homme soit capable de se justifier sans elle puisqu'elle espère être justifiée par lui. [..] La dépendance qu'accepte la femme vient de sa faiblesse: comment trouverait-elle une dépendance réciproque dans celui qu'elle aime dans sa force? (164)

As for maternity, Beauvoir described it as "une fonction féminine qu'il est actuellement presque impossible d'assumer en toute liberté",<sup>(165)</sup> and best avoided.

For all these reasons, according to Beauvoir, "la femme indépendante" experiences "une perpétuelle tension".<sup>(166)</sup> Despite the enormity of her struggle, she suffers from feelings of inadequacy - both as a woman and as a professional.

---

(158) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 526.

(159) *ibid.*

(160) *ibid.*, p. 527.

(161) *ibid.*

(162) *ibid.*, p. 532-533.

(163) *ibid.*, p. 536.

(164) *ibid.*, p. 497-498.

(165) *ibid.*, p. 539.

(166) *ibid.*

En tant que la femme se veut femme, sa condition indépendante crée en elle un complexe d'infériorité; inversement, sa féminité lui fait douter de ses chances professionnelles. (167)

The picture of the independent woman which emerges from the autobiography is much more positive. Of all the women portrayed in the autobiography, it is the independent ones who appear to be fulfilled and genuinely occupied, leading rich and rewarding lives. Beauvoir never hints that they may be deeply divided by the various conflicts which help define their situation.

There are no detailed portraits of independent women in the autobiography; for the most part, Simone de Beauvoir merely makes fleeting references to women she admired. For this reason, they remain distant figures, rather than emerging as multi-dimensional characters. However, Beauvoir's comments - sparse though they are - do tell us something about herself: the qualities she admired in other women and the sort of person she wished to be herself. The fact that she likes to see herself as an exemplary independent woman is clear from the way in which she rarely refers to a woman she esteems without comparing her own life with that of the other women. Mostly the comparison is positive; sometimes, as in the case of Simone Weil, and Camille, we recollect, our author felt threatened by the other woman.

Simone de Beauvoir frequently points out that she has always had difficulty accepting that:

la vie eût d'autres volontés que les miennes. (FA, 97).

Exemplary women who were older than herself had the effect of inspiring Simone; younger women whom she respected reinforced the validity of her own choices.

However, Simone Weil, who was a year younger than Beauvoir and who had beaten her in the philosophy examinations at the Sorbonne, pursued a path which placed Simone's own achievements in question or even in doubt. (168) In Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée, Beauvoir writes that her one encounter with Simone Weil made her realize that the latter classified her as "une petite bourgeoise spiritualiste", (MJFR, 237) an image she did not care for at all. When she was teaching in Rouen, Colette Audry used to talk about Simone Weil, whom she vaguely knew, and Beauvoir comments:

Son intelligence, son ascétisme, son extrémisme, son courage, m'inspiraient de l'admiration et je savais que, m'eût-elle connue, elle n'en eût pas éprouvé pour moi. Je ne pouvais pas l'annexer à mon univers et je me sentais vaguement menacée. (FA, 132) (169)

Other independent women, however, who made choices similar to her own, and whose existence did not threaten her choix originel are described with warmth and generosity. Indeed, Beauvoir mentions a number of distant figures whom she respected or admired for the life they lead. As a girl of eighteen, a newspaper article about a philosopher called Mademoiselle Zanta made an impact on her. Here was a woman who was an intellectual; she was unmarried and yet she seemed to lead a fulfilled domestic life:

---

(168) Simone Weil (1909-1943) was at the time a pacifist and a communist, whereas Beauvoir was not interested in politics. Beauvoir writes that "elle déambulait dans la coeur de la Sorbonne, escortée par une bande d'anciens élèves d'Alain". (MJFR, 237). She was sent to teach at Le Puy, where Beauvoir heard that "elle habitait dans une auberge de rouliers et que le premier jour de mois elle déposait sur la table le montant de son traitement: chacun pouvait se servir. Elle avait travaillé sur la voie ferrée avec les ouvriers du rail afin de pouvoir prendre la tête d'une délégation de chômeurs et présenter leurs revendications." (FA, 132). Later, she enlisted in the Spanish Civil War. Beauvoir does not mention this, but she died in England of tuberculosis and voluntary undernourishment.

(169) When Beauvoir was planning the novel which was to be L'Invitée, she tells us that she first thought of making the Olga-figure a Simone Weil figure: "une conscience se dévoilait à moi, dans son irréductible présence; par jalousie, par envie, je faisais une faute qui me mettait à sa merci: et je trouvais mon salut en l'anéantissant. A cause du prestige lointain qu'elle avait à mes yeux, j'avais pensé à dresser en face de moi une protagoniste inspirée de Simone Weil. (FA, 325).



elle avait passé son doctorat; elle était photographiée devant son bureau, le visage grave et reposé; elle vivait avec une jeune nièce qu'elle avait adoptée: ainsi avait-elle réussi à concilier sa vie cérébrale avec les exigences de sa sensibilité féminine. Comme j'aurais aimé qu'on écrivît un jour sur moi des choses aussi louangeuses! (MJFR, 160).

In 1931, when she was teaching and living alone in Marseille, Beauvoir tells us that she was inspired by reading about the life of Katherine Mansfield:

J'aimais Katherine Mansfield, ses nouvelles, son Journal et ses Lettres; /.../ je trouvais romanesque ce personnage de "femme seule" qui lui avait tant pesé. Je me disais que moi aussi, je l'incarnais. (FA, 106).

Beauvoir's comments remind us how unusual "independent women" were at the time. In the mid nineteen-thirties, Beauvoir and Sartre used to admiringly observe a business women who would often come to one of their favourite cafés in Rouen:

La directrice d'une importante maison de modes venait souvent discuter avec des fournisseurs ou des clients, autour d'un des tonneaux qui servaient de table; nous l'observions avec sympathie; les femmes de tête, les femmes d'affaires n'abondaient pas, à l'époque; nous apprécions son élégance, sa désinvolture, son âpreté, son autorité. (FA, 241).

It seems that Beauvoir particularly admired women who could successfully combine what had traditionally been regarded as a masculine authority and business acuity with an elegance and gaiety which she associated with femininity.

Beauvoir was especially interested in other women writers. She admired the young George Sand for her

volonté d'indépendance, son ardeur à lire, à s'instruire, à courir la campagne, et la netteté de ses décisions. (TCF, 171).

Sand had had "l'audace" to leave a bad marriage, to strike out on her own to Paris, to provide for her own needs. However, although Beauvoir greatly respected Sand's life-long "énergie" and "puissance de travail" - qualities

which never failed to impress her - she was impatient with the "masque vertueux" which Sand adopted later in life. (TCF, 172).

In her youth, Beauvoir had been fascinated by Colette. Later she held major reservations about the elderly author.<sup>(170)</sup> When she met Colette in person, in the early nineteen-fifties, she seemed to Simone like a "formidable Déesse-Mère". (FC, 255). However, Beauvoir was genuinely impressed with her flow of words and "l'acuité de ses mots". (FC, 256).

Having read a biography on her, Beauvoir professes feeling "la plus chaleureuse sympathie" for "cette femme étonnante que fut Lou Andréas-Salomé". (TCF, 164-165).<sup>(171)</sup> She does not expand further here, but in La Vieillesse she had described

cette femme remarquable qui fut aimée de Nietzsche, de Rilke, de beaucoup d'autres, et qui devint à 50 ans la disciple et l'amie de Freud. Dès sa jeunesse, elle avait conquis son indépendance; elle avait beaucoup travaillé, écrivant des romans médiocres, qu'elle ne surestimait pas mais qui avaient remporté de grands succès. Curieuse, active, volontaire. elle aimait passionnément la vie et quand - à 35 ans seulement - elle eut découvert la sexualité, elle lui accorda une énorme place dans son existence.<sup>(172)</sup>

In 1948 in Berlin, Beauvoir met the East German writer Anna Seghers. Although she was only eight years older than Beauvoir - thus forty-eight at the time - her composure and calm beauty made an impression on Beauvoir and made her feel better about the prospect of ageing:

Anna Seghers se trouvait là, si rayonnante avec ses cheveux blancs, ses yeux très bleus et son sourire qu'elle me réconcilia presque avec l'idée de vieillir. (FC, 161).

---

(170) "Sa complaisance à soi-même, son mépris des autres femmes, son respect des valeurs sûres ne m'étaient pas sympathiques". (FC, 255).

(171) The biography was H.F. Peters: My Sister, My Spouse. Norton, Norton lib, 1974. Beauvoir calls it a "livre assez maladroit." (Tout compte fait, p. 164).

(172) La Vieillesse, p. 544.

Han Suyin, another writer, half western and half Chinese, impressed Beauvoir, who met her in 1958, with her capacity for hard work and her unusual beauty:

j'ai diné avec Han Suyin, très séduisante [...] : tailleur clair, longue, mince, le visage à peine asiatique, belle pour ses quarante ans. [...] Elle vit à Singapour et de 9 heures du matin à 5 heures du soir, chaque jour, elle soigne des femmes chinoises (elle est médecin gynécologue); puis elle rentre en auto chez elle et elle écrit. (FC, 472).

It is striking that the qualities Beauvoir admires in other women are those on which she generally prides herself. In 1962, on a trip with Sartre to Russia, Beauvoir met Léna Zonina, their official interpreter. On a trip to Japan, in autumn 1966, Tomika Asabuki, Beauvoir's Japanese translator, acted as their guide and interpreter. Both of these women, writes Beauvoir, approached life with "les mêmes exigences" as herself. (TCF, 52).

Since Beauvoir returned to Russia each year between 1962 and 1966, she became quite close friends with Léna, who was some fifteen years younger than her. Léna, who was, Beauvoir writes, "d'une culture et d'une intelligence exceptionnelles", (TCF, 317) had studied French at Moscow university, hoping to become a teacher and a writer. Once "farouchement stalinienne", (TCF, 317), she had since become disillusioned with stalinism and showed considerable courage by not hiding this attitude to fellow Russians. Twice married, "elle souhaitait son indépendance" (TCF, 318) and when Beauvoir knew her, she was living with her daughter only, and working very hard to support then both. Simone comments:

Nous avons tout de suite sympathisé et par la suite mon estime pour elle n'a fait que grandir. J'admire sa force de caractère. [...] : jamais elle ne s'apitoyait sur elle-même. Elle n'esquivaît aucune responsabilité et se refusait à tout compromis. [...] Rien de tiède en elle. Elle avait la passion de la justice et de la vérité. Mais elle ne donnait ni dans le dogmatisme ni dans le pédantisme: elle était gaie, ironique, et parfois très drôle. (TCF, 319).

Tomiko Asabuki had shown similar courage and determination in the face of hard times. She had come from a rich, aristocratic Tokyo family and had reached an advanced stage in her studies when she married. After the Second World War she found herself (like the rest of her family) financially ruined, and she was pregnant. After the birth of her daughter, she opened a tea room, divorced and left for France, thinking of establishing herself there as a dressmaker. Beauvoir comments:

le voyage a été long et intéressant [̄..] . Elle l'a raconté dans un reportage qui a eu beaucoup de succès. Elle a renoncé à la couture pour faire du journalisme et ensuite des traductions. Elle est restée à Paris pendant quinze ans et s'est mariée avec un Français; mais elle a gardé son nom de jeune fille. (TCF, 280).

In early 1967, when Sartre and Beauvoir were travelling in Egypt, Beauvoir made the acquaintance of Loufti and Liliane el-Kholi. They stand out in the autobiography as "un couple où semble régner une parfaite égalité et qui la revendiquait". (TCF, 418-419). About Liliane, Beauvoir comments, in the context of Egyptian society:

Elle était très représentative d'une catégorie encore peu nombreuse de femmes vraiment libérées. Jolie, élégante, très "féminine", elle s'occupait de son enfant, de son foyer mais aussi elle avait un métier. (TCF, 419).

Liliane had been a Christian, but, like Simone herself, she had lost her faith at the age of fourteen. Her father had stood in the way of her ambitions, but she had made the most of her situation:

Elle avait fait de fortes études et elle aurait voulu aller à Paris pour préparer l'agrégation de philosophie: son père le lui avait interdit parce qu'on s'y embrassait dans la rue. Elle n'en connaissait pas moins admirablement la langue et la littérature française. (TCF, 419).

As well as these energetic women whom she met abroad, Beauvoir was friends with a number of French women who led busy, professional lives. However, she discloses very little about these friends - some of whom she saw a great deal. In Tout compte fait, Beauvoir writes that she was still

seeing Gisèle Halimi and Gégé "avec régularité", (TCF, 51) even if not frequently. Earlier she had given us a fleeting picture of Gisèle Halimi in 1958. A conscientious lawyer, she was also a defender of the Algerian F.L.N.

elle avait fait un meeting la veille à Toulouse, passé la journée en train, elle allait le lendemain matin demander une grâce au président de la République, elle a des enfants et un métier qui doit éprouver les nerfs et le coeur: encore une de ces jeunes femmes superactives à qui je tire mon chapeau.  
(FC, 486).

In October of the same year, they met for lunch and Gisèle told Simone about her life. Afterwards, the latter remarked in her journal:

Ah! ce n'est pas encore réglé le sort des femmes... (FC, 473)<sup>(173)</sup>

In 1960, Halimi took on the defense of Djamila Boupacha, a young Algerian girl and a member of the F.L.N. who had been tortured. She contacted Beauvoir to ask her to write about the case.<sup>(174)</sup>

Beauvoir saw Halimi professionally again at the Russell Tribunal, in 1967. In Stockholm, she gave "un excellent rapport" on two provinces that she had visited in Vietnam: "tout était d'une remarquable précision." (TCF, 385). Before the last meeting of the Russell tribunal, in Brussels, in September of that year, Halimi went to U.S.A. to collect material for the tribunal. She came back with taped testimonies as well as three witnesses in person. According to Beauvoir, it all consisted of a "requisitoire écrasant" against the American government. (TCF, 393).

We are told much less about Gégé, whom Simone de Beauvoir had originally met when Gégé was seventeen and taking a commercial art course at the same place as Poupette. She struck Simone as being "souple et hardie", (MJFR, 306) and, unlike the Beauvoir girls, she was allowed to go out in the evenings

---

(173) Gisèle Halimi outlines her life in La Cause des femmes. Paris: Grasset, 1973.

(174) Beauvoir wrote an article entitled "Pour Djamila Boupacha" which appeared in Le Monde on June 2, 1960. Later Beauvoir wrote the preface to the book written by Halimi: Djamila Boupacha. Paris: Gallimard, 1962.

as much as she liked. Later, Gégé married one of her art teachers, divorced and married again. She was at the anti-Gaullist demonstration on the 30th of May 1958, "avec sa famille et son atelier". (FC, 415). It seems, therefore, that she had managed to keep up her art as well as having a family. However, she remains an essentially mysterious figure - a mere name in the autobiography.

At least up until 1972, when she wrote Tout compte fait, Beauvoir saw Olga, Bianca and Violette Leduc "fréquemment". (TCF, 51). We know virtually nothing about Olga in her maturity, about her marriage to Jacques Bost or her activities. Bianca Bienenfeld, who, like Olga, was an ex-pupil of Beauvoir's, is another enigma. They grew to be friends in the late thirties, when Bianca started to study philosophy at the Sorbonne and became friendly with a group of Sartre's ex-pupils - all interested in "la méthode phénoménologique." (FA, 355).

Bianca apportait à son travail beaucoup de passion, et elle réagissait avec violence à ce qui se passait dans le monde. (FA, 355).

As a Jew, Bianca was obliged to leave Paris during the war. She spent a terrible year in hiding in the Vercors region, with her parents and her husband - a fellow-student. After the war, she became a teacher and Beauvoir indicates that she too, was engaged in left-wing politics, very involved on various committees.

Beauvoir certainly did not consider Violette Leduc, who died before the publication of Tout compte fait, an exemplary independent woman. Nevertheless, she writes with great respect of her "si persévérante énergie" - especially since Violette "s'acharnait [...] sur un fond d'insuccès". (TCF, 59). She adds:

J'ai souvent admiré son courage: (TCF, 59).

Other friends have been Colette Audry and Stépha Avdicovitch. Beauvoir first met Colette in 1932 when both were teaching at the same school in Rouen.

Nizan had talked enthusiastically about Colette to Simone; like him, she was committed to the left. Colette was active, in the four years in which Simone taught in Rouen, in a Trotskyist group. During those years, Beauvoir and Sartre often used to discuss Colette - with great interest:

nous nous interrogeons sur ses rapports avec la politique, avec l'amour, avec sa soeur, avec elle-même. (FA, 130).

However, Beauvoir does not reveal the content of these ruminations. Nor does she disclose whether she ever regarded Colette as a rival or a threat - which she may well have done. She does say that although, in those years, she found herself sometimes with "[du] temps à tuer", she did not see much of Colette, "qui avait ses occupations, ses soucis". (FA, 173). We are told that Colette married during the war; we are not told that she had a son and later divorced. (175)

In the early days of Les Temps Modernes, Colette Audry was among the regular contributors who met twice weekly in Sartre's study. She supported Beauvoir in the uproar which resulted from the publication of Le Deuxième Sexe, and she was active in the fifties and sixties in campaigning for making birth control legal and effective in France. Beauvoir writes that she enjoyed seeing Audry's successful play Soledad, in 1956, and reading her novel Derrière la baignoire, which won the Prix Médicis in 1962. Other than brief references, however, Beauvoir leaves it to Colette Audry - as a well-known figure in France in her own right - to tell her own story.

Simone was in her late teens when she met Stépha Avdicovitch, a Ukrainian student whom the Mabile family had engaged as a governess for their children for the holidays. She was entirely different from any girl Simone had ever

---

(175) She married Robert Minder and had a son, Jean-François.

met before. In the Ukraine, she had spent a few days in prison because of her militant advocacy of Ukrainian independence. Her father, a wealthy manager of a sweets factory, had been able to afford to send her to Berlin and then Paris to complete her education. It was Stépha, Beauvoir tells us, who converted her to "l'internationalisme" and "l'antimilitarisme". (TCF, 28). When Simone first met her, Stépha was hesitating about marrying Fernando, a Spanish Jewish painter, "parce qu'elle tenait à sa liberté". (MJFR, 285). What Simone did not realize until later - and she was thoroughly shocked by the revelation - was that Stépha and Fernando were already sleeping together, before Stépha had even decided to marry him. At this time, too, she was "en train de liquider un vieux fonds de religiosité". (MJFR, 284). Before they married, in 1929, Beauvoir comments:

jamais je n'avais vu entre un homme et une femme une entente aussi aussi entière: ils répondent exactement à mon idéal du couple.  
(MJFR, 298).

However, we are told nothing about their relationship after marriage. Stépha had a son in 1931, but again we are given no indication of her attitude towards maternity. Nor are we told how she reacted when Fernando went off to fight in the Spanish Civil War in 1936.<sup>(176)</sup> In 1940, the trio escaped from France and took refuge, eventually, in New York. Here, Stépha undertook "divers métiers" until she turned to teaching, which she found extremely satisfying. (TCF, 57). Beauvoir was full of admiration for her when they met again in Paris in 1969, and writes:

La conversation était aussi aisée que si nous ne nous étions jamais quittées: nous avions les mêmes opinions, les mêmes goûts. Et tout l'intéressait. J'admirais sa vitalité et son courage. Ses jambes la faisaient beaucoup souffrir.<sup>(177)</sup> et cependant elle était toujours gaie. [...] C'est une de ces rares personnes qui ont tant investi dans leurs activités que la vieillesse ne les abat pas: le monde demeure pour elles peuplé d'intérêts, de valeurs, de fins jusqu'au terme de leur vie. (TCF, 57).

(176) Beauvoir merely tells us how she and Sartre reacted:

"Nous approuvions Fernand de tout notre coeur; nous l'accompagnâmes à la gare, avec Stépha et de nombreux amis." (FA, 286).

John Gerassi, Stépha's son, tells us that she broke down when she heard Fernando's intentions, and soon followed her husband to Spain, having placed her son in a school for orphans.

(John Gerassi. "Sartre et son premier homme d'action" in *Obliques*, n. 18-19, 1979. Numéro spécial sur Sartre, p. 37.)

(177) She suffered from arthritis and could only walk with a stick.



Another person Simone has often admired for her stamina and cheerfulness is her sister, H el ene de Beauvoir. From time to time in the autobiography, we have a fleeting glimpse of her - always hard at work on her painting. The following is a description of her in 1934, the year in which she met Lionel de Roulet, whom she was later to marry:

Elle vivait encore chez nos parents, mais elle avait lou e, rue Castagnary, un petit cagibi glacial en hiver, torride en  t e, o u elle peignait. Elle gagnait un peu d'argent en travaillant l'apr es-midi comme secr etaire   la galerie Bonjean. [...] Sa vie  tait mat eriellement difficile, et tr es aust ere; ell e la supportait avec une bonne humeur que j'admirais. (FA, 195).

Shortly afterwards, H el ene moved into her own "atelier", where she continued to live "avec une extr eme austerit e, car les couleurs co utent cher, et elle n'avait pas le sou." (FA, 255). Already, writes Simone, her landscapes and portraits revealed "des dons certains". (FA, 255). In 1939, H el ene went to Portugal to stay for two or three weeks with Lionel de Roulet. They ended up being stranded there for the duration of the war, and they married there, in 1942. Again, Beauvoir stresses:

Pendant toutes ces ann ees elle avait beaucoup travaill e. (FC, 47). They lived a great deal abroad and H el ene held exhibitions of her paintings all over the world, some very successful. They had no children. In Tout compte fait, Simone tells us about H el ene's life at the time, with a pride in her sister which is obviously reciprocated:

Ma soeur n'habite plus   Paris. Son mari fait partie   pr esent du Conseil de l'Europe qui si ege   Strasbourg; ils ont achet e dans un village une vieille ferme alsacienne dont ils ont fait une confortable et charmante maison. Du matin au soir, m eme l'hiver o u il y fait tr es froid, elle s'enferme dans son atelier et elle peint. Elle a toujours refus e   la fois les contraintes de l'imitation et l'aridit e de l'abstraction: elle a trouv e un  quilibre de plus en plus savant entre les inventions formelles et les r ef erences   la r ealit e. Depuis longtemps ell e fait d'excellents burins [...]. R ecemment, elle a invent e une int eressante technique de peinture sur altuglass et polyester, mais sans abandonner la peinture   l'huile. Elle peut mener de front ces activit es parce qu'elle ne prend presque jamais de vacances. (TCF, 55).

It is clear that Beauvoir particularly respects self-discipline, perseverance, determination and an ability to face adversity or material deprivation with good cheer. In addition to these forms of stoicism, she admires in women a passion for their work.

In Tout compte fait, she makes brief reference to two other women who have impressed her with these qualities: Claire Etcherelli and Dénise Brébant. After having read her novel Elise ou la vraie vie, published in 1967, Beauvoir was eager to meet Claire Etcherelli. She found a woman who had retained her independence and written books despite tremendous material and personal difficulties. Writing had been her "passion" since the age of fourteen, and she managed to discipline herself to write despite her "divers métiers", two broken marriages and her two sons, with whom she lived. (TCF, 66).

Towards the end of the Algerian war, Dénise Brébant wrote to Beauvoir and asked to meet her, persisting in the face of several refusals. About the same age as Simone, she was a "fille de paysans" and despite her brilliance at school, she had been forced to leave at the age of fourteen. It was her own determination and struggle which enabled her to become a social worker, and she was "passionnée" par son métier": (TCF, 65).

elle travailla bien au-delà de ses heures de service, aidant de sa poche les nécessiteux. (TCF, 65).

She was horrified by the conditions in which the Algerian workers all too frequently lived, and she took up their cause. When she first met Beauvoir, Dénise was helping with the F.L.N.:

Par la suite, son petit appartement a souvent servi d'abri à des Algériens: elle risquait sa situation et n'avait aucune autre ressource. (TCF, 64).

One final example of a "femme independante" is Sylvie Le Bon - to whom Beauvoir dedicated Tout compte fait. Here again it is striking that what Beauvoir finds reassuring is Sylvie's very similarity to herself.

The two women first met in 1960, when Sylvie was a mere nineteen. Sylvie, like Simone - although to a much more damaging degree - had been "transformée en brebis galeuse" during her adolescence by her parents. (TCF, 74). Her studies had become "son seul recours":

Elle s'y était donnée non par une docilité de bonne élève mais par ressentiment, par défi, avec une sombre furie. (TCF, 74).

Like Simone's parents, Sylvie's parents, and particularly her mother:

voulaient la "mater", elle était indomptable. (TCF, 74).<sup>(178)</sup>

When Beauvoir first knew her, Sylvie was at the Ecole Normale Supérieure at Sèvres, to prepare for her agrégation:

Elle s'y plaisait beaucoup. Elle n'avait rien d'une bête à concours et travaillait avec désinvolture. Elle s'entendait très bien avec quelques camarades que l'administration tenait pour de fortes têtes [7..7]. Souvent blâmées pour leur indiscipline, elles avaient cependant du prestige parce qu'elles réussissaient avec éclat leurs examens. (TCF, 72).

Having passed her agrégation with a very good mark, she was sent to teach first to Le Mans, and then to Rouen - to the very school at which Beauvoir had taught - and finally to a school, at the outskirts of Paris. Simone de Beauvoir adds that with Sylvie, she sometimes has had "l'impression d'être réincarnée." (TCF, 75).

In the decade before the publication of Tout compte fait, Simone and Sylvie had become very close friends. Beauvoir comments:

Mieux je connaissais Sylvie, plus je me sentais d'affinités avec elle. Comme moi c'était une intellectuelle et elle aussi tenait passionnément à la vie. Sur beaucoup d'autres points elle me ressemblait: avec trente-trois ans de différence, je retrouvais en elle mes qualités et mes travers. (TCF, 75).

---

(178) Beauvoir uses Colette Audry's term. See p.113 of the present study.

At the time of the publication of Tout compte fait, Sylvie was thirty-one. However, Beauvoir is entirely discreet about her existence outside her teaching and her friendship with herself. We are not told, for example, whether Sylvie's passion for a girlfriend at school has proved to be a sexual predilection for women or whether this was to remain an adolescent passion. Knowing this could shed some light on her life as a "femme indépendante". (179)

Like the other portraits of independent women, Sylvie remains the vaguest of characters. We are given very little concrete detail on any of these women's lives. We know nothing about their daily struggles, their problems and areas of conflicts. We do not know whether they experienced the "désarroi" which Beauvoir described in Le Deuxième Sexe, as the lot of "la femme indépendante". Whereas the dévouée and the narcissist figures in the autobiography illustrate the 1949 essay, there is not one independent woman, in the autobiography, who serves as an example of the chapter "La Femme indépendante". What does emerge from Beauvoir's brief references to various independent women are the qualities which she admired in women. It is significant that she prided herself on these same qualities herself.

---

(179) It might also shed some light on Sylvie's relationship with Simone de Beauvoir - a relationship which seems to be platonic love.

The Model Independent Woman: Simone de Beauvoir.

After writing Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée, Beauvoir did not intend to pursue her autobiography - at least not immediately. However, she explains that she was compelled to continue by a need to show the sense of her adolescent struggle for independence:

un point d'interrogation est dessiné dont je n'ai pas pu détourner ma pensée. La liberté: pour quoi faire? Tout ce branle-bas, ce grand combat, cette évasion, cette victoire, quel sens la suite de ma vie devait-elle leur donner? (FA, 9).

The very words Beauvoir uses: "branle-bas", "combat", "évasion" and - above all - "victoire" point to the direction of the autobiography. The woman who has the courage to assume her "liberté" is regarded by Beauvoir as a model for other women. As she wrote in 1949, in Le Deuxième Sexe, such a woman was still considered "une singularité". (180)

The picture of Simone de Beauvoir which emerges from the four volumes of autobiography is of a remarkable independent woman. Some passages do indicate various difficulties or crises in her life and she does not portray either her self or her life as perfect. However, just as the young Simone found with her mother, who she realized was not "une sainte", the reader of the autobiography might well comment - about Simone:

son exemple ne m'en semblait que plus convaincant. (MJFR, 41).

The fact is, too, that the difficulties and crises which Beauvoir faced are minimized, defused. Even if the language used to describe them betrays their intensity, Beauvoir mentions them incidentally and quickly changes the subject to other aspects of her life, so that the reader's overall impression, even if he or she is sometimes a little bewildered, is emphatically positive.

---

(180) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 544.

As I have suggested before, Simone de Beauvoir seems to want to hide certain things from herself as much as from the reader. She wants to see herself and her life in a certain way. Once more, this tendency appears to derive from her choix originel.

Although Beauvoir states firmly:

Construire une image de moi-même: cette vaine et d'ailleurs impossible entreprise ne m'intéresse pas, (TCF, 48)

she does, of course, create an image of herself in the autobiography. By writing about herself, she is creating a self on paper. Furthermore, Beauvoir admits that she likes the image she has of herself. At an early age she had chosen to create an exemplary self whom other people would admire and wish to emulate. And we must bear in mind that the autobiographical self is a carefully chosen, filtered representation of the real self. Beauvoir herself is honest about her bias, and demonstrates it spectacularly in the following passage:

Quant à moi je m'accepte sans réticence. [...] Injustifiés, les critiques et les blâmes ne m'atteignent pas. Fondés, je les tiens pour des compliments. [...] Analysant mon écriture, une amie graphologue fit de moi un portrait que je jugeai flatteur. "Il vous plaît parce que vous vous choisissez telle que vous êtes, me dit-elle, mais on pourrait le prendre en négatif." En effet, on peut appeler volonté, ténacité, persévérance ma manière de me concentrer sur mon travail et de mener à bout mes projets. On peut aussi y voir un entêtement aveugle, une opiniâtreté bornée. Mon désir de connaître, est-ce de l'ouverture d'esprit ou une curiosité frivole? (TCF, 47).

Beauvoir wrote the autobiography with the intention of portraying herself as an independent intellectual woman. She did not wish to contemplate her vulnerability any more in her memoirs than she had done in her life. Thus, when she does indicate moments of "weakness" or periods of crisis, she uses various evasion techniques, so that the reader (along with the author) is persuaded to think either that the crisis was less significant than it actually was, or that the problem once existed but no longer does. In this way, the reader finishes the autobiography with an impression of a splendidly

successful life. A brief re-examination of some of Beauvoir's remarks will demonstrate the author's intentions, as well as showing up some of the conflicts which she wished to understate.

In the autobiography, Beauvoir presents her personal and intellectual evolution in relation to the criteria of liberty and responsibility, always demonstrating that her evolution was necessary and right. In Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée, Beauvoir shows how she emerged from her conventional female upbringing with an open and exciting future. Having described Zaza's tragic death, she concluded this volume with the words:

j'ai pensé longtemps que j'avais payé ma liberté de sa mort.  
(MJFR, 359).

La Force de l'âge opens with the same theme: Beauvoir's freedom:

Ce qui me grisa lorsque je rentrai à Paris, en septembre 1929, ce fut d'abord ma liberté. J'y avais rêvé dès l'enfance. (FA, 15).

Beauvoir had left home to live in a room at her grandmother's - where she was free to come and go as she pleased. She had the prerequisites which Virginia Woolf had deemed essential for a woman's independence: a room of her own and a sufficient income - which she earned by teaching. This volume, which spans the years 1929-1944, depicts her exhilarating acquisition of liberty and her sudden awareness - due to the war experience - of its counterpart: responsibility. In La Force des choses, and Tout compte fait, Beauvoir portrays herself as a mature and responsible woman. In these last two volumes there is no longer the disparity in consciousness between the woman writing and the woman she is writing about.

Beauvoir emphasizes that her meeting with Sartre was crucial to her independence. She writes - as an older woman, who had found such a relationship - that her image, as an adolescent, of her future partnership with a man was as follows:

il fallait que l'amour me justifiât sans me borner. L'image que j'évoquais, c'était celle d'une escalade où mon partenaire, un peu plus agile et robuste que moi, m'aiderait à me hisser de palier en palier. (MJFR, 146).

This is the way she liked to think Sartre helped her to independence. She describes Sartre's attitude to her from the very first:

je devais préserver ce qu'il y avait de plus estimable en moi: mon goût de la liberté, mon amour de la vie, ma curiosité, ma volonté d'écrire. Non seulement il m'encourageait dans cette entreprise mais il proposait de m'aider. (MFJR, 339).

When she discusses her relationship with Sartre, Beauvoir makes it clear that its form was basically a product of Sartre's ideas, rather than her own. However, she emphasizes that she regarded Sartre's influence as absolutely salutary to herself. There is no suggestion that Sartre's interests might ever have conflicted with her own, or that it was a difficult and hazardous enterprise for the man she loved to help her to be independent from him by providing a model of independence himself. The pain which such a project would inevitably involve is rarely mentioned. Furthermore, Beauvoir never judges the man she elected to be her "jûge suprême" (MJFR, 107) - which would indicate a real independence. Any difficulty she had in coping with the "entreprise" of being independent was regarded by her as a personal weakness, for which she blamed herself, for it meant that she fell short of her aim: to be considered by those she respected as exemplary.

Beauvoir explains that Sartre, who "n'avait pas la vocation de la monogamie", (FA, 26) was against the sort of monogamous relationship which she had envisaged until then:

Entre nous, m'expliquait-il en utilisant un vocabulaire qui lui était cher, il s'agit d'un amour nécessaire: il convient que nous connaissions aussi des amours contingentes. (FA, 26-27).



Sartre suggested "un bail de deux ans", (FA, 27) during which time they would live "dans une intimité aussi étroite que possible". (FA, 27). After that, Sartre thought that they should both aim to teach for some time abroad and be two or three years apart before resuming their "vie plus ou moins commune". Beauvoir is honest about her reaction:

La séparation qu'envisageait Sartre n'était pas sans m'effrayer; mais elle s'estompait dans les lointains, et je m'étais fait une règle de ne pas m'encombrer de soucis prématures; dans la mesure où tout de même la peur me traversait, je la tenais pour une faiblesse et je m'efforçai de la réduire. (FA, 27). (181)

About Sartre, she adds, with a sudden burst of the typically feminine mauvaise foi which she observes with such lucidity at other times:

je savais qu'aucun malheur ne me viendrait jamais par lui, à moins qu'il ne mourût avant moi. (FA, 28).

Writing this, she appeals to the reader to accept this romanticism, just as she does herself.

When, in 1931, Sartre's application for a teaching post in Japan fell through, Simone admits that she was enormously relieved. As for Sartre, "il fut très déçu". (FA, 80). Although she does not dwell on it, here was an obvious conflict of interests. The problem of their physical separation arose again when Sartre was assigned to a school in Le Havre and she to a school in Marseille. Beauvoir tells us that she was "atterrée". (FA, 81).<sup>(182)</sup> In the face of her "panique" at their separation, Sartre suggested they should marry, in order to be able to teach in the same town. Again, Beauvoir is honest about her main reason for refusing this offer: she knew that the idea of marriage appalled Sartre far more than it disturbed her:

(181) Italics mine.

(182) Ten years later, in 1940, Beauvoir tells us about a letter from Sartre, who had just been transferred to Germany:

"comme d'habitude, il disait être en bonne santé et très gai. Mais j'avais tellement escompté son retour que je m'effondrai." (FA, 476).

je voyais combien il en coûtait à Sartre de dire adieu aux voyages, à sa liberté, à sa jeunesse, pour devenir professeur en province et, définitivement, un adulte; se ranger parmi les hommes mariés, c'eût été un renoncement de plus. Je le savais incapable de m'en avoir de la rancune, mais je savais aussi combien j'étais accessible aux remords et combien je les détestais. La plus élémentaire prudence m'interdisait de choisir un avenir qu'ils eussent risqué d'empoisonner. (FA, 82).

It is clear that Beauvoir was thinking of her own relationship with Sartre when she wrote in Le Deuxième Sexe:

Même dans l'amour réciproque, il y a entre les sentiments des amants une différence fondamentale qu'elle s'efforce de masquer. Il faut bien que l'homme soit capable de se justifier sans elle puisqu'elle espère être justifiée par lui. S'il lui est nécessaire, c'est qu'elle fuit sa liberté: mais s'il assume sa liberté sans laquelle il ne serait ni héros ni simplement homme, rien ni personne ne sauraient lui être nécessaires. La dépendance qu'accepte la femme vient de sa faiblesse: comment trouverait-elle une dépendance réciproque dans celui qu'elle aime dans sa force? (183)

This crucial passage reveals to us the way in which Beauvoir rationalized her relationship with Sartre, regarding the imbalance in their need for each other as a product of her own weakness as a female. It is evident from the autobiography that Sartre never depended on Simone de Beauvoir: he did not need her as she considers she needed him. Indeed, in a portrait of Sartre which she wrote for Harper's Bazaar in 1946, Beauvoir claimed that "il n'a besoin de personne."<sup>(184)</sup> The Sartre of the autobiography and the Sartre-like figures in Beauvoir's fiction are radically self-sufficient men. It is questionable, however, whether such self-sufficiency is solely a sign of strength and personal autonomy; it could well be viewed as an emotional deficiency or a cowardly unwillingness on the part of Sartre to involve himself and risk finding himself

---

(183) Italics mine.

(184) Simone de Beauvoir. "Jean-Paul Sartre: Strictly Personal", Harper's Bazaar, January 1946, p. 113, 148, 160. Re-translated and published, in extracts, in Michel Contat and Michel Rybalka: Les Ecrits de Sartre. Paris: Gallimard, 1970, p. 419.

vulnerable. (185) Whatever his psychological needs may have been, it is significant that Beauvoir never questioned what she considered his admirable (and enviable) independence; any doubts she had were directed at her self. As much as possible, she tried to ignore ("masquer") these doubts.

Early in her relationship with Sartre, Beauvoir was critical of herself for expecting Sartre to justify her life, to assume the responsibility for her life:

Quand j'avais rencontré Sartre, j'avais cru que tout était gagné; auprès de lui, je ne pouvais pas manquer de me réaliser. (FA, 66).

She tells us that her self-disgust was exacerbated by the fact that Sartre himself observed and chided her for this inclination, warning her against becoming "une femme d'intérieur". Beauvoir admits:

Je m'en voulais de le décevoir. (FA, 66).

It is probable, in fact, that her self-disgust was not exacerbated but caused by Sartre's attitude. She tells us:

seule l'opinion de Sartre pouvait m'atteindre aux moelles, (FA, 42)

and he - the man she had appointed her judge - disapproved of her behaviour. It is interesting to compare Simone with Françoise in L'Invitée, who also accuses herself of having committed "une véritable faute". Françoise's idea of "une authentique indépendance" seems more to be a constraint imposed from outside herself than a profound personal belief. She is aware that she does not want complete independence from Pierre - something which Beauvoir does not allow herself to admit in the autobiography. Françoise reflects:

---

(185) Beauvoir and Sartre often discussed Sartre's incapacity to feel or be moved by things which moved her. Beauvoir tells us: "il parlait du fleuve, et des forêts beaucoup mieux que moi, mais il ne ressentait rien. [...] Plusieurs fois, il m'expliqua qu'un écrivain ne pouvait pas avoir d'autre attitude; quiconque n'éprouve rien est incapable d'écrire; mais si la joie, l'horreur nous suffoquent sans que nous les dominions, nous ne saurons pas non plus les exprimer." (FA, 44).

Le tort qu'elle avait, c'était de reposer sur Pierre de tout son poids; il y avait là une véritable faute, elle ne devait pas faire supporter à un autre la responsabilité d'elle-même. [...] Pour devenir totalement responsable d'elle-même, il lui aurait suffi de vouloir; mais elle ne le voulait pas réellement. Ce blâme même qu'elle s'adressait, elle demanderait encore à Pierre de l'approuver; tout ce qu'elle pensait, c'était avec lui et pour lui; un acte qu'elle tirât de soi seule et qu'elle accomplît absolument sans rapport avec lui, un acte qui affirmât une authentique indépendance, elle ne pourrait même pas en imaginer. (186)

What highlighted Beauvoir's need for Sartre was that he did not need her. Would she have been ashamed if he had needed her as she needed him? It is probable that she would have considered it a flattering manifestation of his love and respect for her. When Anne, in Les Mandarins, is reflecting whether or not to go back to her lover in America, she is conscious that Robert Dubreuilh does not need her as Lewis, her lover, does:

je savais que dans tous les domaines qui comptaient pour Robert, je ne lui étais d'aucun secours; en face de ses vrais problèmes, il était toujours seul. Là-bas il y avait un homme qui avait faim de moi, j'avais ma place entre ses bras, ma place qui restait vide.(187)

She explains her position to Robert, obviously hoping to be reassured to the contrary:

- Par moments ça me semble absurde de ne pas être là où quelqu'un a besoin de moi; un vrai besoin, comme personne n'en a jamais eu de moi. Et je n'y suis pas.(188)

The reassurance was not forthcoming, and Anne tells herself wistfully:

Mais que j'étais donc fatiguée de soulever chaque matin le poids si vain d'une journée où je n'étais exigée par personne! Robert ne m'avait pas répondu qu'il avait besoin de moi. Jamais il ne me l'avait dit.(189)

The woman in L'Age de discrétion questions herself in a similar way. Unlike the passage in Le Deuxième Sexe where need for another person is regarded as dependence and a weakness, -the woman here, like Anne in Les Mandarins, regards need as a sign of love. Thinking about André, she asks herself:

(186) L'Invitée, p. 139. (Italics mine).

(187) Les Mandarins II, p. 357.

(188) *ibid.*

(189) *ibid.*, p. 358.

M'a-t-il aimée comme je l'aimais? [..] Je pense qu'il me considère comme un invariant, dont la disparition le déconcerterait, mais qui ne saurait modifier en rien son destin, la partie se jouant ailleurs. (190)

Such reflections do not occur in the autobiography. Beauvoir does admit that, in the late forties, Sartre:

me paraissait plus lointain qu'il ne l'avait jamais été, et qu'il ne devait jamais l'être. (FC, 274).

She attributed this to his work and his fame. Generally, however, Beauvoir stresses that her relationship with Sartre was a complete success and that it helped her to achieve a genuine independence. She argues that her early dependence on Sartre was only possible because she knew she could trust Sartre to guide her towards independence:

Si un homme avait eu assez d'égoïsme, et de médiocrité pour prétendre me réduire, je l'aurais jugé, blâmé, je me serais détournée de lui. Je ne pouvais avoir envie de me démettre qu'en faveur de quelqu'un qui précisément fît tout son possible pour m'en empêcher. (FA, 85).

However, we know that this, too, is not so straightforward. Had not Sartre said to her, in 1929:

"A partir de maintenant, je vous prends en main".? (MJFR, 338).

And is not the idea of "helping" someone towards independence an attempt to make that person dependent - on her guide? It appears that, at least at first, Sartre was as eager to play a traditionally male role as was Simone to play a traditionally female role, expecting her supreme male judge to justify her existence.

I consider that, to understand Simone de Beauvoir's desire to prove herself "une femme indépendante" we must turn again to her "choix originel".

---

(190) La Femme rompue, p. 65.

As a little girl, it seemed natural to Simone to have a myriad of beaming faces look upon her with approval. We recollect that the shock of having to share her mother's love with her baby sister, which meant being ousted from the maternal lap, made her conscious of her extreme vulnerability and her dependence on the love and approval of others for a feeling of security. Since it seemed, henceforth, that her presence on earth was not automatically justified, she chose to excel in order to earn the esteem of those she respected, so that she could esteem herself. We have seen how she looked to men to replace her father's judgement which she could no longer respect. And we have seen that she found Jean-Paul Sartre.

Beauvoir tells us that after many years of adolescent solitude, it was a revolution to meet not only Sartre but also Nizan, Aron and Politzer whose "univers intellectuel" was far richer than her own:

c' était un sérieux événement de découvrir que je n'étais ni l'unique, ni la première; une parmi d'autres... (MJFR, 343).

However, she had become "la première" in the life of the man she had chosen as her supreme judge. His approval justified and gave meaning to her existence. It seems that Sartre did encourage her to lead an independent sort of existence. At the same time, it is clear that his position as guide was absolutely secure, and that this was important to him. He admits to this degree of "machisme" in the 1977 interview with Catherine Chaine:

je me suis toujours senti une grande responsabilité à l'égard des femmes avec qui j'avais des rapports. [ ... ] j'aime que les femmes, au moins pendant un certain temps, doivent tout ce qui leur permet de vivre à un rapport avec moi. (191)

In a sense, the determination with which Beauvoir undertook to prove herself independent - as independent as Sartre - was a manifestation of her dependence on Sartre's approval. Her need for independence was not just for her own sake, nor was it to prove herself that she could live without Sartre as

---

(191) "Sartre et les femmes." Le Nouvel Observateur, N. 639, (7-13 février, 1977.) p. 82.

she sensed he could do without her. She knew that it was by leading an exemplary independent existence that she would retain Sartre's all-important love and respect.

In the autobiography, Beauvoir places great emphasis on the satisfaction which her independence brought her. For example, once the dreaded separation from Sartre was behind her, she writes that she felt exhilarated when she arrived - alone - in Marseille:

J'étais là, seule, les mains vides, séparée de mon passé et tout ce que j'aimais, et je regardais la grande cité inconnue où j'allais sans secours tailler au jour le jour ma vie. Jusqu'alors, j'avais dépendu étroitement d'autrui; on m'avait imposé des cadres et des buts; et puis, un grand bonheur m'avait été donnée. Ici, je n'existais pour personne; quelque part, sous un de ces toits, j'aurais à faire quatorze heures de cours chaque semaine: rien d'autre n'était prévu pour moi, pas même le lit où je dormirais; mes occupations, mes habitudes, mes plaisirs, c'était à moi de les inventer. (FA, 93-94).

Living alone in Marseille, and undertaking, on every possible occasion, long "randonnées solitaires", (FA, 98) she began to take a new pride in herself, warming to her image of a "femme seule" à la Katherine Mansfield. (FA, 106).

It was very important to her that she was earning her own living, for she has always asserted:

Gagner sa vie, en soi ce n'est pas un but; mais par là seulement on atteint une solide autonomie intérieure. (FA, 376).

From 1932-1936 Beauvoir taught in Rouen, and in 1936, she and Sartre found themselves once again living in the same city - Paris. They found rooms in a hotel and Simone stresses that the arrangement was highly satisfactory:

Sartre habitait à l'étage au-dessus. Nous avions ainsi tous les avantages d'un vie commune, et aucun de ses inconvénients. (FA, 323).

Unfortunately, Beauvoir does not expand on what she considered these "avantages" and "inconvénients" to be.

Beauvoir emphasizes the pleasure she took, in the following years, in independent travel and in her work. She continued to go on long working trips by herself and she writes of the sense of exaltation and profound feeling of harmony with nature and with her own body that she experienced at such times.

In 1945 she was invited by the Alliance française to give lectures in Tunis and Algiers. Once there, she writes:

Le démon de l'aventure m'avait reprise. (FC, 68).

People warned her of the danger of rape as a woman travelling on her own. Transportation across the Sahara was irregular and unreliable. Nevertheless, she decided to explore Tunisia and then to return to Algiers across the Sahara, and she seemed to relish the risks. She tells us that the experience was thrilling.

Après des années de vie collective, ce tête-a-tête avec moi-même me touchait si fort que je croyais y découvrir l'aurore d'une sagesse [...] . j'ai longtemps retenu dans mon coeur les palmes, les sables et leur silence. (FC, 72).

She bought a car in 1951 and took the same pleasure, she writes, in long drives by herself as she had taken, previously, in her solitary excursions on foot. Driving from Paris to Milan, alone, to meet Sartre, she wrote in her diary, on June 16, 1958:

Quel rajeunissement de replonger dans la solitude, dans la liberté, comme au temps des voyages à pied. (FC, 436).

Simone de Beauvoir also emphasizes that her writing was an important aspect of her independence:

écrire était devenu pour moi un métier exigeant. Il me garantissait mon autonomie moral; dans la solitude des risques courus, des décisions à prendre, je réalisai ma liberté, bien mieux qu'en me pliant à des routines lucratives. Je voyais dans mes livres mon véritable accomplissement. (FC, 24).



She impresses on the reader that this was an important difference between her and her heroine, Anne, in Les Mandarins:

elle n'est que timidement engagée dans sa profession. [...] elle n'a ni mes appétits, ni mes entêtements, ni surtout l'autonomie que me donne un métier qui me tient à coeur. (FC, 288).

However, despite her emphasis on the satisfaction which her independence provided her, Beauvoir does make us vaguely aware of the negative side of independence: the insecurity and the anxiety - for not only were she and Sartre treading parallel paths, rather than the same path, but as a woman, too, her unconventional choices made her path a solitary one. As a model and a guide, she could not fall back upon the comforting warmth of "feminine" solidarity.

Despite the "joie presque religieuse" which writing gave her in good moments when, she explains, she had "l'impression à la fois de me risquer et de me dépasser", (FC, 143) at other times writing could be a painful and lonely exercise. Particularly when she was engaged in writing the autobiography, the content of her writing was so much a reflection of her daily existence and her attitude at the time of writing that she was not able to forget herself in her task. She complains, in her diary, of her difficulty in interesting herself in her past enough to write about it when the present moment overwhelmed her with anxiety. There is no doubt that Beauvoir felt, at times, a despair and emptiness similar to that experienced by Anne.

At the same time, Beauvoir denies any similarity between the relationship she portrays between Anne and Dubreuilh and her own relationship with Sartre:

Ses relations avec un homme de vingt ans plus âgé qu'elle sont presque filiales et, malgré leur entente, la laissent solitaire. (FC, 288).

In Tout compte fait, she states quite emphatically:

depuis mes vingt et un ans je n'ai jamais connu la solitude. (TCF,39).

And yet, as I have shown, it seems there were times when Beauvoir acutely felt the distance between herself and Sartre. At certain periods, although she never uses the word herself, she describes what appears to be loneliness - a feeling of not being necessary to anyone. In 1945, she describes her insecurity when Sartre came back from America, telling her excitedly of his love for the woman she calls "M":

leur attachement était réciproque et ils envisageaient de passer chaque année trois ou quatre mois ensemble. Soit; les séparations ne m'effrayaient pas. Mais il évoquait avec tant de gaieté les semaines passées avec elle à New York que je m'inquiétais; [...] je me demandais soudain s'il ne tenait pas à M plus qu'à moi; je n'avais plus l'optimisme chevillé au coeur: tout pouvait m'arriver. (FC, 81).

In her diary which covers that period, she writes constantly of a "drôle d'état d'angoisse", (FC, 89) her "mauvais rêves" and her "espèce de froid au coeur". (FC, 88). She had frequent headaches and felt continually tired. In 1947, when she returned from America herself, feeling "chavirée" (FC, 141) after having had to leave Algren, she found that "M" had decided to prolong her stay in France until July. To avoid "des frictions" Sartre and Beauvoir installed themselves in a hotel on the outskirts of Paris, and Sartre made frequent visits to Paris to be with "M". Beauvoir writes of her "anxiété qui touchait à l'égarement" (FC, 143) but attributes it in the autobiography to the failure of Tous les hommes sont mortels and to the memory of her "dernières journées en Amérique". (FC, 143). She changes the subject and writes about events in Paris which she did not witness herself; she stayed in her hotel. After a lengthy discussion of the world political situation and of Sartre's rapport, at the time, with the communists, she returns briefly, to her personal crisis. After Sartre saw "M" off, she writes that they spent "des journées accablantes" together. Shortly afterwards, it was "avec soulagement" that she went away with Sartre, to Copenhagen. There, they spent an awful first day together:

Sartre se taisait, moi aussi, et je me demandais avec terreur si nous étions devenus deux étrangers. (FC, 148) (192)

Her tension continued throughout the trip and, she recalls:

Je faisais des cauchemars. Je me rappelle un oeil jaune à l'arrière de ma tête que crevait une longue aiguille à tricoter. Et des angoisses me reprirent. (FC, 149).

And yet, Beauvoir portrays this as an isolated episode in a long, happy life. During the trip, she managed to persuade herself that her anxiety was unfounded and that her security and her future were not threatened. And she writes, once again, as if the problem evaporated - a thing of the past.

Such evasion techniques are used time and time again in the autobiography, preventing us from penetrating to the core of her relationship with Sartre, and leaving us a little bewildered, but with the impression that Beauvoir was well in control of her life, even if she was not at all times serene. However, even fleeting remarks show the reader how much she adapted herself to Sartre. The effort she made to overcome what she considered her weakness highlights her isolation as a woman trying to be independent in a society which only respected qualities traditionally associated with males. For example, she writes this about going to the cinema with Sartre in the early nineteen-thirties:

Al Johnson chantait Sonny Boy avec une émotion si communicative que j'eus la surprise, quand la lumière revint, de voir des larmes dans les yeux de Sartre: il se faisait volontiers pleurer au cinéma et je regrettai la peine que j'avais prise pour m'en empêcher. (FA, 54).

If Sartre was "toujours d'un grand secours", as she says, why was it necessary for her to tell him that she thought she might have breast cancer "avec un feint détachement"? (FC, 276). Why did she so often feel obliged to suppress her emotions and her anxieties in front of him?

Beauvoir often seems to have been trapped by her conception of female independence in a patriarchal society. The solution she had advanced, in Le Deuxième Sexe, to the problem of women's inferior position in society, was social change, which would involve the assimilation of women into society on an equal footing with men. Her position was fundamentally "masculinist" (as opposed to "feminist") in the respect that although she rejected the traditionally feminine sphere, (justifiably,) she accepted almost uncritically the male world into which "independent women" were supposed to integrate themselves. This was a world in which, as she had written:

l'homme représente [..] le positif et le neutre, c'est-à-dire le mâle et l'être humain, tandis que la femme est seulement le négatif, le femelle.

It meant that she believed that women must change, rather than the "human values" which reinforced the marginalization of women. This belief had all sorts of repercussions for her personal life. For example, although she admired what she called the "sensibilité féminine", (MJFR, 160), she saw that it was a disadvantage when it came to competing with men on their own terms and so she regarded it as a personal weakness rather than a strength.

In the autobiography, Beauvoir clearly presents the "femme indépendante" as the only woman who can win "la partie" of life. However, she deliberately understates the price that she may have to pay for "victory". The picture is somewhat one-sided: Beauvoir says as little about the "désarroi" of the so-called independent woman as she does about the joys and satisfactions of dévouement or narcissism. Her picture of female experience is distorted by her moral parti pris; it does not have the psychological depth that it could. Because, in the existentialist view of Simone de Beauvoir, the dévouée and the narcissist have chosen to avoid their liberty, whereas the independent woman has chosen to assume hers, the latter triumphs in life.

The autobiography closes with Beauvoir reasserting one of her main aims and justifications in writing:

Dissiper les mystifications, dire la vérité, c'est un de ces buts que j'ai le plus obstinément poursuivis à travers mes livres.  
(TCF, 512).

Since she concluded her autobiography by emphasizing this aim, I must conclude by emphasizing that demystification, although certainly a central preoccupation in her writing, was subordinate to another driving force - her choix originel : to lead an exemplary life. This choice has partly contradicted her first aim, leading her to fabricate her own "mystifications", the major one being the image she presents of the independent woman's experience.

Because of these two aims - to "dissiper des mirages"<sup>(193)</sup> and to pose as an exemplary heroine, it seems to me that what Beauvoir wrote about women writers, in Le Deuxième Sexe, applies also to herself. She had commented:

Nous sommes encore trop préoccupées d'y voir clair pour chercher à percer par-delà cette clarté d'autres ténèbres. <sup>(194)</sup>

What it has meant is that in her autobiography, Beauvoir, like the other women writers she mentions;

s'arrête effrayée au seuil de la réalité. <sup>(195)</sup>

. . . . .

---

(193) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 553.

(194) *ibid.*

(195) *ibid.*

PART TWO.

VIOLETTE LEDUC.

VIOLETTE LEDUCCHAPTER ONE.THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL PROJECT.

Given that Violette Leduc and Simone de Beauvoir were both born females, of French parents and within a year of each other, it is hard to imagine that the circumstances into which they were born could have been more different. However, after 1945, their lives were intertwined. Simone de Beauvoir and her ideas became the main influence in Leduc's life.

Beauvoir began writing Le Deuxième Sexe soon after the two women became acquainted. We know that it made a great impact on their entire generation of women, and as the first major analysis of women's lived experience, it could not but affect Leduc's attitude towards female roles. She saw how Existentialism could be applied to human experience, both as a means of analysis and as a criterion for authentic behaviour. For personal reasons, too, the book would have been important to her. In it, Beauvoir had made several references to her, thus drawing her into a tradition of female writing. This must have made Leduc, who was only just beginning to write at the time, much more conscious than she would otherwise have been of her place in a historical tradition.

The first three volumes of Beauvoir's autobiography were in circulation before La Bâtarde appeared, in 1964. Thus, Leduc was well acquainted with Beauvoir's outlook on female conditioning and women's roles.

Through her reading of Beauvoir and Sartre and her discussions with Beauvoir, Leduc was also familiar with the existentialist emphasis on individual choice. In her autobiography, she implies that there was always an element of choice in her own existence - and this idea was expressed by Beauvoir in her

The notion of an original choice is as crucial for an understanding of Leduc's autobiography as it has proved to be for Simone de Beauvoir. It sheds light on Leduc's motivation for undertaking an autobiography in the first place and helps us understand why her portrayal of her self and her experience is so negative. A close examination of the autobiographical text reveals a pattern in the author's choices which indicates her fundamental choice of being.

There is a remarkable similarity in their attitude to women. Both use irony to depict women in dévouée and narcissistic roles. Both admire lucid and independent women. Leduc's autobiography presents Simone de Beauvoir as a model of an independent woman - just as Beauvoir herself does.

Before looking at the autobiography itself, let us turn our attention to Violette's circumstances before and during the writing of the autobiography. We shall look at the influences on her writing: literary, intellectual and personal. Finally, we will examine her motives for writing an autobiography - for these obviously affected the content.

#### I. Violette Leduc: A brief sketch of her life.

Unlike Simone de Beauvoir, Violette Leduc was neither born in Paris nor into the bourgeoisie. Born in Arras, in the north of France, she was brought up by her mother, who had to struggle to support them both. Her father, a young aristocrat, never acknowledged her as his daughter. In 1913, the two women moved, with Violette's grandmother - to Valenciennes - the town from which Violette's mother, Berthe, had fled in shame when she discovered that she was pregnant.

Fideline, Violette's grandmother, was the little girl's close companion while Berthe worked. She died of consumption in 1916.



Whereas the Beauvoir family became "de nouveaux pauvres" after the First World War, the fortunes of Violette and her mother suddenly changed for the better, because Berthe married. With her husband went a business which the two of them managed to make successful.

In 1923, Berthe gave birth to a boy named Michel, a legitimate son and acknowledged by both parents. Violette, aged sixteen, was sent as a boarder to the Collège de D...,<sup>(1)</sup> where she became involved in lesbian relationships first with Isabelle and then with Hermine. In 1925 she was denounced for exchanging love letters with Hermine and expelled. She joined her mother and her mother's new family, who were then in Paris, and went to the Lycée Racine to study for the certificat d'études secondaires. She did not pass the examination and never sat for her baccalauréat.

Leduc lived with Hermine for eight years, and then, in 1939, she married Gabriel Mercier. The marriage was an unmitigated disaster and their cohabitation did not last longer than a few months.

From 1927 to 1931, Leduc worked as a reader at the Plon publishing house. After this and until the war she worked in various jobs as a receptionist and secretary. She met Maurice Sachs in 1936 or 1937. Author of Alias<sup>(2)</sup> and about to write his autobiography, Le Sabbat, Sachs recognized Leduc's talent for writing. He arranged that she should write some articles, stories and advertising copy for the popular women's magazine Pour Elle. In 1943, with his encouragement, she began work on an autobiographical novel, L'Asphyxie. In February 1945, an acquaintance of Violette<sup>(3)</sup> arranged for Simone de Beauvoir to read the manuscript. Beauvoir was enthusiastic. This was the beginning of her role as model, guide, critic and friend to Violette Leduc.

(2) Maurice Sachs. L'Alias. Paris: Gallimard, 1935.

(3) Violette calls this acquaintance Gégé. (La Folie en tête, p. 28). This is possibly the Gégé whom we know from the memoirs of Simone de Beauvoir. (See p. 317.)

Violette Leduc was thirty-nine when L'Asphyxie was published, in 1946. After this, she devoted herself to her writing with the help of a small monthly allowance which she believed was from Gallimard. In fact, this was a debt to Simone de Beauvoir which she never even knew about. (4)

Two more autobiographical novels followed: L'Affamée (1948) - which describes her passion for Simone de Beauvoir, whom she calls "elle", and Ravages (1955) - in which she portrayed her relationships with Isabelle, Hermine and Gabriel. The beginning of this novel, depicting the love affair between two schoolgirls, was refused by Gallimard and a series of other French publishing houses, despite the recommendation of Simone de Beauvoir. This part, later called Thérèse et Isabelle, was not published in France until 1966 - namely, after the commercial success of La Bâtarde.

Beauvoir writes that the failures of Ravages depressed and upset Leduc:

l'échec de Ravages la jeta dans un grand abattement. Bientôt elle devint la proie des incohérents délirés. (TCF, 57).

Nevertheless, she continued to write. La Vieille Fille et le mort was published in 1958 and the review in Les Temps Modernes called it:

un livre cruel, désespéré, probablement l'un des plus originaux publiés ces dernières années. (5)

The reviewer also commented: "nous touchons ici au cas pathologique". (6)

---

(4) Dominique Aury, writing on Violette Leduc in La Nouvelle Revue Française, 255, (mars 1974), comments on Beauvoir's generosity towards Leduc and adds: "sa longue générosité a eu des complices, puisque dans ce Paris littéraire où tout le monde paraît-il trahit tout le monde il ne s'est pas trouvé un seul indiscret pour humilier Violette en lui révélant qu'elle devait à Simone de Beauvoir les mensualités que lui versait son éditeur." (p.115). (Leduc tells us about her "mensualité de 20,000 francs" in La Folie en tête, p. 313.)

(5) Claude Couffon. "La Vieille Fille et le mort". Les Temps Modernes, 156-157, (février-mars 1959), p. 1504.

(6) *ibid.*, p. 1501.

Indeed, her writing reflected Leduc's actual state. By the end of 1957, Simone de Beauvoir became seriously alarmed about Leduc's delusions and paranoia. A psychoanalyst who had seen Violette earlier in the year had told Beauvoir that he considered her case hopeless. Finally, Leduc herself consented to psychiatric treatment and was submitted, despite Beauvoir's formal opposition, to shock treatment. A month-long sleep cure proved equally ineffective. However, a convalescence in a friendlier clinic set in beautiful grounds did restore Leduc's capacity to lead a normal life. Beauvoir, who, Leduc tells us, paid "des sommes fantastiques" (CA, 110)<sup>(7)</sup> for her hospitalization, comments:

Elle ne renonça jamais tout à fait à ses interprétations. Le monde resta peuplé de symboles et de signes émis par d'invisibles persécuteurs. Mais elle ne se laissa plus abattre: elle recommença à travailler. (TCF, 59).

Trésors à prendre, published in 1960, was a brilliant description of a trip she undertook across France in the attempt to restore her health. It was greeted with virtual silence. Finally, Violette Leduc, encouraged by Simone de Beauvoir, turned to autobiography proper. The result, La Bâtarde, took her just over a year. It was the story of her life up till 1944. The book appeared with an enthusiastic preface by Beauvoir.

La Bâtarde was an immediate success.<sup>(8)</sup> It was considered by many to be a strong contender for the Prix Goncourt. One reviewer describes its impact:

le succès enfin, est venu, d'un seul coup, et total. Les intellectuels, les gens du monde, les clientes des petits salons de coiffure, les concierges, tout le monde lisait La Bâtarde.<sup>(9)</sup>

---

(7) Henceforth I shall abbreviate La Bâtarde as B, La Folie en tête as FT and La Chasse à l'amour as CA.

(8) Three editions were printed within three weeks of its publication.

(9) Dominique Aury. "Violette Leduc." La Nouvelle Revue Française, 255, (mars 1974), p. 116.

English and German translations of the book appeared within less than a year. The English translation, by Derek Coltman, kept the French title, and was published in New York, in 1965, by Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Piper published the German translation, Die Bastardin, in 1965.

For Leduc, this success meant sudden wealth and fame, although her reputation had become somewhat equivocal. The popularity of La Bâtarde was greatly increased by the hint of scandal about the book.

Unfortunately, the three volumes of Leduc's autobiography only cover the period up to 1964, ending when she was on the threshold of fame. Although she knew she had cancer, death took her unawares when she was sixty-five. Up to the present moment, there are only a few interviews with Leduc, and Simone de Beauvoir's brief résumé in Tout compte fait to reveal to us how this astonishing woman spent her last eight years.

La Folie en tête (1970) which covers the years 1944-1955, was, strangely, less successful than La Bâtarde. Two short novels, La Femme au petit renard (1965) and Le Taxi (1971) received little attention. The final volume of the autobiography, La Chasse à l'amour, spans the years between the failure of Ravages and the publication of La Bâtarde. It was edited by Simone de Beauvoir<sup>(10)</sup> and published after Leduc's death.

Beauvoir tells us that Leduc had intended to continue her memoirs, and it would certainly have been fascinating to learn from the author herself how she had reacted to her sudden change in fortune. Beauvoir comments:

Sa réussite transforme l'existence de Violette Leduc. Jusqu'alors, elle avait été vouée à la solitude et à la pauvreté: elle se retrouva riche et entourée d'amis, les uns sincères, les autres plus ou moins intéressés. (TCF, 59).

---

(10) Beauvoir explains the extent of her editing in the preface to La Chasse à l'amour: "Comme [V.L.] le dit dans la dernière page de ce livre, elle acceptait presque toujours les coupures que je lui suggérais. Je me suis autorisée de cet accord pour supprimer quelques passages qui m'ont paru alourdir inutilement son texte: c'est à quoi s'est bornée mon intervention."

After the novelty of being admitted into fashionable society circles wore off a little, Leduc spent more and more time in Faucon, a village in Haute Provence, near Mont Ventoux. Here she bought the large old house which she had been renting for several years and where she regularly spent the summer months. Beauvoir tells us that she lived there permanently from 1969, and it seems that, close to the woods and to the smell of the earth, she found a new tranquillity. It was at Faucon that Leduc finished her autobiography, and, as Beauvoir writes:

on ne saurait détacher ses livres de la femme de chair et d'os qui en est l'auteur. Elle fait de sa vie la matière de son oeuvre qui a donné un sens à sa vie. (TCF, 63).

It was at Faucon, too, that Leduc died. She was buried in the village cemetery.

II. Writing about personal experience: Leduc's models.

Violette Leduc did not see herself as an intellectual and she always felt ill at ease, due to her lack of education and to what she considered her lack of intelligence,<sup>(11)</sup> in the intellectual circles with which she came into contact later in life. Whereas Beauvoir regarded herself primarily as an intellectual and, secondarily, as a woman, Leduc only ever felt a part of one group: she felt, in her more confident moments, that she had a contribution to make to women's writing.

---

(11) "Intelligente je ne le suis pas, je ne le deviendrai pas." (B, 462).

Her identification with women writers manifested itself as early as 1929. She was twenty-two and was working at the Plon publishing house when Rosamond Lehmann's novel Dusty Answer was published by Plon in translation.<sup>(12)</sup> Above all, Leduc was impressed that Rosamond Lehmann, a young woman of twenty-six had dared broach a subject about which women had traditionally remained silent:

Deux adolescentes s'aimaient, une femme osait l'écrire. (B, 159). Poussière, writes Leduc, was discussed "dans les couloirs, dans les bureaux, au rez-de-chaussée, au premier étage". (B, 159). It was a bestseller on publication in France, just as it had been in England.

The impact the book made on Leduc was certainly partly due to her own lesbian experience. As well - as she indicates - the subject of lesbianism was still regarded as shocking at the time. The subtlety with which Lehmann dealt with the sexual element in her novel can best be gauged by the fate of Radclyffe Hall's Well of Loneliness, published in England the year after Dusty Answer. Because of its explicit defense of lesbian experience, it was banned in that country on the grounds of obscenity, and its publisher was sued.<sup>(13)</sup> It fared better in France, where it was readily available.

Colette, of course, had already portrayed sexual attraction between women in the Claudine series, particularly in Claudine à l'école, published in 1900.<sup>(14)</sup> She too, had dealt with the subject with the utmost delicacy, hinting at attraction rather than acknowledging actual lesbian eroticism. Leduc told Madeleine Chapsal, in an interview in 1964:

---

(12) We recall that Simone de Beauvoir and her friend Zaza Mabile, were highly enthusiastic about this book. See Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée, p. 356. La Force de l'âge p.64, Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 96 and p. 118-119. Dusty Answer had been published in England by Chatto and Windus in 1927.

(13) The reason for its condemnation was its open defense of lesbianism, for Virginia Woolf's Orlando and Elizabeth Bowen's The Hotel were published in the same year and were not censored.

(14) The Claudine series were five novels, spanning seven years: Claudine à l'école, (1900), Claudine à Paris (1901), Claudine en ménage (1902), Claudine s'en va (1903) and La Retraite sentimentale (1907).

j'ai beaucoup aimé Colette. [...] Mais, en la lisant j'avais le sentiment qu'elle n'avait pas osé, qu'elle s'était retenue. Elle me donnait une sorte de faim, j'en voulais davantage. (15)

In the late thirties, Leduc had personal contact with some women writers, and this made a strong impression on her. She was introduced, through a mutual acquaintance, to both Clara Malraux and Else Triolet. (16) More importantly, in the autumn of 1943, the year in which she started to write L'Asphyxie, Leduc came across a new name: Simone de Beauvoir. It was on the cover of what appeared to Leduc a formidably thick book, just published by Gallimard: L'Invitée. This first publication by a French woman the same age as herself was an inspiration to Leduc, who was by now aspiring to become a writer herself. She describes her reaction:

C'était plus qu'une émotion. Je lisais, je relisais le nom, le titre: une femme écrivait à la place de millions de femmes comme si toutes les femmes étaient capables d'écrire. (FT, 31).

Violette Leduc's awareness of female experience and her identification with other women writers evolved with Beauvoir - whose influence in this regard was major. By 1964, when Leduc wrote La Bâtarde, she was conscious of a female writing tradition, and the contribution she could make by writing about female experience, and particularly, she felt, about female sexuality. She told Madeleine Chapsal:

---

(15) Madeleine Chapsal. "Violette Leduc, la bâtarde". L'Express, 696, (19-25 octobre 1964), p. 70-71.

(16) Clara Malraux had translated several books from German, and was beginning to write herself. Her first publication, Le Livre de comptes, about her relationship with André Malraux, appeared in La Nouvelle Revue Française in July, 1939. (Other semi-autobiographical works were to appear in the forties). At this time, Elsa Triolet was writing her first piece: Bonsoir Thérèse.

C'est cela: mon but: approcher un peu la sensation dans l'érotisme, la décrire. Je ne suis pas allée très loin, je ne suis pas réellement arrivée à rendre comme il le faut l'impression sensuelle. ...Mais je me dis: J'essaye de déblayer, d'autres y arriveront mieux que moi. Des femmes plus jeunes me liront et diront: "Cette Violette Leduc, elle n'a pas vraiment osé: moi, je vais oser..."(17)

Apart from the influence of other women writers, Violette Leduc, like Beauvoir, writes that she had been enraptured when she had read Gide as an adolescent:

La lecture des Nourritures Terrestres, une ivresse. (FT, 296).

Both Adrienne Monnier, whose bookshop and lending library Leduc frequented in the early thirties<sup>(18)</sup>, and Maurice Sachs, whom she met in the late thirties, were particularly enthusiastic about Gide and would have recommended him to her. Leduc recalls:

Je tombai, sans exagération, dans un abîme de surprise la première fois que j'entendis Adrienne Monnier: "Gide hier soir, ici, avec quelque chose amis, nous a lu.." (B, 231)

In his autobiography, Le Sabbat, Maurice Sachs writes of the impact Gide's work had made on him. With such fervent exclamations as "Familles je vous hais!" and "Ose devenir qui tu es",<sup>(19)</sup> Gide, Sachs explains, was essential to the youth of his (and Leduc's) generation, because this author was:

quelqu'un qui vous fait revenir sur vous-même.<sup>(20)</sup>

(17) Madeleine Chapsal. "Violette Leduc, La bâtarde", p. 71.

(18) This was the Maison des amis des livres, on the rue de l'Odéon, which Monnier opened in 1915 and had to close during the Second World War. Simone de Beauvoir also refers to Adrienne Monnier and her first-rate collection of modern literature. (See: Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée, 186, 220, 264 and La Force de l'âge, 51, 56). Leduc also mentions Sylvia Beach and her English language bookshop, Shakespeare and Company. (La Bâtarde, 233).

(19) Sachs is quoting from Les Nourritures terrestres in Le Sabbat, Paris: Corrêa, 1946, p. 244 and p. 256.

(20) Le Sabbat, p. 260.



Sachs, like Monnier, had known Gide personally. The younger man was particularly impressed with Gide's attempt to write about himself with complete sincerity - and this aspect of Gide's work would have interested Violette Leduc equally.

Another major writer whom Leduc first read in the early thirties and whose work was to have an important impact on her own writing, was Marcel Proust. Indeed, the last volume of his great work, Le Temps retrouvé, had only appeared in 1927, several years after his death. Leduc turned constantly to Proust's writing, over the years, for inspiration:

Du Côté de chez Swann. Les deux volumes - la portée de ma main m'ont suivie pendant plus de trente années. La poussière ne veut pas d'eux. (B, 123).

Nearly always written in the first person, Proust's work gave new importance to the consciousness of the writer - what might best be called "la vie intérieure". His writing was both observation and introspection. As one manual puts it:

la grande découverte de Proust, c'est que non seulement le monde s'ordonne autour de nous, mais qu'il est en nous, qu'il est nous-même. (21)

This sums up what Leduc herself must have found so exciting about Proust's writing. As well, his influence is also apparent, at times, in Leduc's style. Her writing, like his, is richly evocative, laden with metaphors, sensual.

Leduc's meeting with Maurice Sachs in 1936 or 1937 was an important landmark in her life. Like Gide, Sachs believed in the importance of sincerity, - and his writing is mainly autobiographical. Like Gide and Proust, he was also a homosexual, and throughout her life homosexuals held a strange fascination for Leduc.

---

(21) From A. Lagarde and L. Michard. XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle. Les Grands Auteurs français Paris: Bordas, 1969, p. 222.

Sachs had written a first draft of his autobiography in 1939, and during the war he gave Violette the completed manuscript to read. She told him: "Je l'ai lu sans reprendre souffle." (B, 396). Le Sabbat was not published until after Liberation. It was the book which made Sachs "un écrivain reconnu" (FT, 44) - after his death. (22)

In Le Sabbat, Sachs wrote that the Gide of the Journal and Si le Grain ne meurt was not, in fact, as honest towards himself as he claimed to be. He:

se montre [...] trop parfait toujours, sans se dévoiler tout à fait, comme un Rousseau. (23)

Sachs maintained that he was going to portray himself without any "infâme complaisance" (24), describing himself as a "personnage parfois répugnant, souvent attachant". (25) He claimed:

je me considère comme un mauvais exemple dont on peut tirer de bons conseils. (26)

When Beauvoir became acquainted with Leduc, in 1945, she told her protégée that Le Sabbat had interested her but failed to move her, precisely because, in her opinion, "l'authenticité de Maurice Sachs était trop cachée". (FT, 49). Beauvoir, too, considered it the primary responsibility of the writer to "se regarder en face". (FC, 52). Thus, the standard criticism which Leduc heard from writers she respected was that others did not go far enough in their attempt to write sincerely about their experiences. This certainly influenced her in her own writing.

---

(22) Sachs was killed in Germany in 1943. It seems that he had become an agent of the Gestapo.

(23) Le Sabbat, p. 258.

(24) *ibid.*, p. 13.

(25) *ibid.*, p. 96.

(26) *ibid.*, p. 13.

Maurice Sachs was an avid reader and imparted his enthusiasm for certain writers to Leduc. She writes that she read "avec plus d'ardeur" whilst living for some months in the same house as Sachs in L'Orne, Normandy, during the war. (B, 364). As a reader with Gallimard, Sachs was also quick to recognize that Leduc had talent as a writer. He was the first person who encouraged her to write seriously, suggesting to her in his affable, affected manner:

Pourquoi n'écrivez-vous pas, ma chère? Quand on écrit les lettres que vous m'écrivez, ma chère.. (B,305).

Sachs also introduced Leduc to another passion of his - psychoanalysis. He talked to her about his childhood and his relationship with his mother. (B, 304). Later, in Tableau des mœurs de ce temps, he wrote that his mother had wanted him to be a girl and that he suffered from feeling insufficiently loved.<sup>(27)</sup> In a review of this book in Les Temps Modernes, Yvon Belaval referred to Sachs' "névrose d'abandon"<sup>(28)</sup> and tells us that he was psychoanalysed by René Allendy, who had founded the Société Française de Psychanalyse. Leduc writes:

Maurice Sachs [....] me parlait du psychiatre Allendy, presque un voisin, un médecin et un ami secourables quand le coeur et la tête sont patraques. (B, 307) (29)

With her obsession about her own childhood and sexuality, Sachs found a captive listener in Leduc. He also found himself listening to her recount her "malheurs d'enfance" (B, 399) rather more than he would have liked. They decided that her relationship with her mother had - like his - played a major role in her life.

(27) Maurice Sachs. Tableau des mœurs de ce temps. Paris: Gallimard, 1954. It was obviously available, in a limited edition, in 1951.

(28) Yvon Belaval. "Le monologue hambourgeois". Les Temps Modernes, 65, (mars 1951), p. 1697.

(29) Anais Nin was also psychoanalysed by Allendy, and writes about the experience in some detail in her Journal, v.I. N.Y.: Gunther Stuhlman, 1966.

Sachs me demande des nouvelles de mon sommeil, il me raconte ses visites chez les psychiatres, chez les psychanalystes, le mot névrose, le mot subconscient reviennent constamment dans sa bouche. Le subconscient, Violette, le subconscient absorbe un individu. Les névroses, Violette, les névroses le tuent. Maurice Sachs m'effraie. Comment s'en sortir? Nous décidons que l'enfant en moi devra se libérer de la mère. (B, 363).

The danger of Sachs' interest in psychoanalysis was that it endorsed Leduc's labyrinthine self-absorption without indicating a means of escaping from certain patterns of behaviour. Apart from this, Sachs was obviously too absorbed with himself to help Leduc. His tendency was to tell her, impatiently:

Vous êtes bourrelée de névroses et il ne faut pas. (B, 317).

However, Sachs did encourage her to write, and psychoanalysis did grant particular validity to the relatively neglected areas of experience which interested Leduc. She did not have much faith in psychoanalysis as a method of treatment: she went to see both Dr. Jacques Lacan and Dr. Diatkine in the nineteen-fifties, with great reservations.<sup>(30)</sup> However, her knowledge of psychoanalysis certainly influenced her writing.

Under the influence of Sachs, then, Violette Leduc learnt something about psychoanalysis, and she began to write. A more important influence still was that of Simone de Beauvoir and Existentialism.

Les Temps Modernes, with its interest in human conditions and social conditioning and pressures, encouraged accounts of personal experience - particularly by individuals from minority or oppressed groups, who rarely had the chance to be heard. Thus, in 1947 and 1948, the review printed a prostitute's account of her life;<sup>(31)</sup> in May, 1949, Monique Lange described

(30) See La Chasse à l'amour, p. 85 - 88.

(31) "Vie d'une Prostituée". Les Temps Modernes, 4, (janvier 1946) 27, (décembre 1947) and 28, (janvier 1948).

her "Jeunesse Coloniale"; (32) in March 1960 there was a description by Mahmoud X of his childhood in Algeria. (33) In the same year appeared an excerpt from the autobiography of Maria Occhipinti, a Sicilian peasant-born woman. (34)

Until Violette Leduc met Simone de Beauvoir, she felt that she was "une sentinelle aux portes de la littérature". (FT, 33). Les Temps Modernes did much to make her feel a part of a literary current - even though she always did remain an isolated figure, for she was not an intellectual, nor was she interested in political or sociological analysis. Through the review she kept in contact with the evolution of Existentialism as well as with the contemporary literary works which the editorial committee found particularly interesting.

It was through Les Temps Modernes that Leduc first became acquainted with the writing of Jean Genet, one more homosexual writer, whose daring sincerity she ardently admired. An excerpt from his Pompes funèbres appeared in the journal in December 1945. The following year his Miracle de la rose was published (35) and Leduc writes:

Je tombe dans la lecture de Miracle de la rose comme on tombe dans l'amour. (FT, 111).

---

(32) Monique Lange. "Jeunesse Coloniale". Les Temps Modernes, 43, (mai 1949).

(33) Mahmoud X. "Une Enfance Algérienne". Les Temps Modernes, 167-168, (février-mars 1960).

(34) Maria Occhipinti. "Une Femme de Ragusa." Les Temps Modernes, 172, (juillet 1960). The autobiography, published in Florence in 1960 by Landi, was prefaced by Carlo Levi and the historian Paolo Alatri, and won the renowned Viareggio prize.

(35) Miracle de la rose was published in a limited edition, by L'Arbalète in Lyon. It was published by Gallimard in 1951.

Leduc identified with this social misfit, and Sartre's great interest in Genet must have been encouraging to her:

Il me parle de lui dans ses livres. Je le vois si triste et si fragile. [...] Douleurs et chagrins de Genet sont mes cantiques. (FT, 113).

Nineteen years later, when she was fifty-seven, Leduc re-read the novel before beginning her autobiography:

Fièvre, palpitations, frissons comme au temps de ma première lecture. (FT, 113).

Genet's writing also encouraged Leduc to be more forthright herself, to not be afraid to use "obscenities" in her writing - if she felt this was appropriate:

Pourquoi des obscénités? disais-je dans le temps. Je dis maintenant: pourquoi farder le mot bite puisque le mot se perd dans la myrrhe et l'encens de Genet. (FT, 114).

She also declares herself a "dévote exaltée de l'homosexualité dans les livres de Genet." (FT, 127)

In 1949, Jean Genet's Journal du Voleur was published, dedicated to Sartre and "le Castor". We know that Beauvoir considered this "un de ses plus beaux livres" (FC, 212) and she would have discussed it with Leduc - especially as it inspired Sartre to write a series of articles on Genet which appeared in Les Temps Modernes in the second half of 1950, and which were finally published, somewhat modified and expanded, as a book: Saint Genet, comédien et martyr.<sup>(36)</sup> Leduc tells us that she read this book in the late fifties. ("Je sautais ce que je ne comprenais pas". CA, 243).

---

(36) Paris: Gallimard, 1952.

Les Temps Modernes published an excerpt from Nathalie Sarrante's first novel, Portrait d'un inconnu, in January, 1946. A passage from Colette Audry's childhood souvenirs was printed in the April issue that year.<sup>(37)</sup> The revue also took a keen interest in the autobiographical writing of Maurice Sachs. A piece from La Chasse à courre, the sequel to Le Sabbat, was published in March 1948, and a selection of various letters which he wrote from Hamburg appeared later in the year.<sup>(38)</sup> Colette Audry reviewed La Chasse à courre in May, 1949, praising the book and condemning the man. In March 1951, Yvon Belaval, reviewing Tableau des moeurs de ce temps, claimed that his interest had never faltered; Jean-Louis Curtis, in his review of La Décade de l'illusion in June of that year, was less generous with the much earlier book.<sup>(39)</sup> Leduc also read the extracts from Le Traître, by André Gorz, which appeared in the review between October 1957 and March 1958. It is certain that the influence of Les Temps Modernes pushed Violette Leduc in the direction of autobiography, reinforcing the impetus to self-analysis given by Sachs whose work, we have noted, was significant for the review.

As well as placing emphasis on autobiographical writing generally, Les Temps Modernes showed an interest which was unusual for the time in accounts of various aspects of female experience. As well as the passages from women's autobiographies and fiction, long extracts from Le Deuxième Sexe appeared in the review in 1948 and 1949. Just as Sartre encouraged Beauvoir to write about what it meant to be brought up a woman, Beauvoir encouraged Leduc to write with utmost frankness about her experience.

---

(37) Colette Audry. Aux Yeux du souvenir. Paris: Gallimard, 1947.

(38) "Lettres du Hambourg". Les Temps Modernes, 34, (juillet 1948).

(39) La Décade de l'illusion was completed in 1932 - ten years before Le Sabbat, and Curtis claims that it does not compare with the latter.

Indeed, from its very beginning, Les Temps Modernes, with Beauvoir as mediator, supported and promoted Violette Leduc. Extracts from L'Asphyxie appeared in the second issue, in November 1945. Short stories called "Le Train noir" and "Les Mains sales"<sup>(40)</sup> were published in the March and December issues of 1946. Passages from L'Affamée were printed in October and November of 1947. Other stories, "Au Village" and "Désirée Hellé" appeared in March 1951 and June 1952. A decade later, the review published an excellent section from what was to be La Bâtarde, entitled "Le Tailleur anguille".<sup>(41)</sup> And in 1963 two numbers printed other extracts from La Bâtarde.<sup>(42)</sup>

Simone de Beauvoir and Les Temps Modernes were interested in autobiographical writing and accounts of the different facets of human experience. They were aware that female experience was a largely unexplored area. However, Leduc interested them for another reason as well: they admired her remarkable unwillingness to compromise. In La Forcé des choses, Beauvoir explained the failure of Ravages by the fact that it not only shocked: "il déplut". (FC, 345). This, wrote Beauvoir, was because Leduc

jette au public son expérience sans lui offrir aucune complicité.  
(FC, 345).

In the preface to La Bâtarde, Beauvoir made the same point:

Violette Leduc ne veut pas plaire; elle ne plaît pas et même elle effraie.<sup>(43)</sup>

In Tout compte fait, Beauvoir defended her own writing as she had always defended Leduc's:

j'ai le souci de regarder en face la réalité et d'en parler sans fard: qui osera dire qu'elle est riante? (TCF, 512).

---

(40) Leduc writes that the title "Les Mains sales" was Genet's suggestion. Sartre's play by the same name was not published until 1948.

(41) "Le Tailleur anguille". Les Temps Modernes, 186, (novembre, 1961).

(42) These were the August and September issues of 1963.

(43) Simone de Beauvoir. Preface to La Bâtarde, p.7.



Indeed, as she wrote in the preface to La Bâtarde, Beauvoir had just discovered how painful it was to be rejected by the public for stating what it was unwilling to hear. La Force des choses, which had just appeared, had caused an outcry:

J'ai déplu [...] : j'avais parlé sans la farder de la vieillesse. Je ne savais pas alors combien ce sujet était tabou et ma sincérité indécente. (TCF, 133).

It is clear that Beauvoir and Les Temps Modernes encouraged Leduc to write without complicity and with as great a sincerity as possible. More than this, they provided her sole, loyal support group in the difficult years between 1946 and 1964 - years in which Leduc faced constant rejection by the public. It was Beauvoir who suggested to Leduc that she should write her autobiography - just as Sartre had encouraged her in this direction. Without knowing it, Leduc also owed her economic independence to Beauvoir. The intellectual stimulus and influence of Beauvoir and Les Temps Modernes was extremely important to Leduc. Finally, Beauvoir's personal support was absolutely crucial to her.

Beauvoir herself is modest about the supportive role she assumed in her relationship with Leduc, although we gain some idea of the dimensions this took from Tout compte fait. It is through Leduc's writing that we realize the supreme importance of Simone de Beauvoir to Leduc's life and writing. L'Affamée, Trésors à prendre, and the last two volumes of the autobiography leave us with a clear impression of this.

Leduc tells us that they met regularly, once a fortnight:

Je n'étais pas seule; elle me donnait une longue soirée, cinq à six heures de présence deux fois par mois. J'étais privilégiée.

(FT, 195).

Beauvoir would always ask her: "Avez-vous travaillé?"<sup>(44)</sup> and she would read Leduc's work or listen to her problems. Leduc liked to believe that she was writing for Simone de Beauvoir; it was only then that she was able to take herself seriously.

Je raconte ma vie, écrire est devenu ma vie. Croyez-moi, je ne me prends pas au sérieux quand je noircis du papier. Faut-il continuer de la raconter? Ne faut-il pas? Si je m'arrête, je supprime Simone de Beauvoir. C'est elle qui m'a aidée à écrire mes livres, j'ai continué d'écrire pour elle. (FT, 55).

When first L'Asphyxie, then L'Affamée, then Ravages were condemned, or, worse still, ignored, Simone de Beauvoir convinced Leduc that it was essential to continue writing:

Elle est patiente, Simone de Beauvoir... Elle écoute mes plaintes, mes sanglots, mes jérémiades [...]. Je lui dis: "Je veux laver des verres dans un café, je veux devenir votre femme de ménage." Elle n'en croit pas un mot, cependant elle me répond avec grand douceur: "Non Violette ... non. Ne perdez pas confiance.... Continuez d'écrire..." [...]. Il faut continuer d'écrire puisqu'elle insiste. (FT, 264).

Indeed, Leduc appears to have been quite lucid about what Beauvoir represented to her and to her writing:

je ne l'aime pas comme un être toujours proche de moi. Jamais je n'ai eu ni n'aurai une seconde de familiarité avec elle. Si je ne devais plus la voir tous les quinze jours, la nuit m'engloutirait. Elle est ma raison d'être sans que je sois dans sa vie. (FT, 110).

Violette Leduc wrote because of Simone de Beauvoir, she wrote for Simone de Beauvoir, she wrote about Simone de Beauvoir. It is doubtful whether Violette Leduc would ever have written her autobiography without Simone de Beauvoir.

---

(44) Leduc writes that this was always Beauvoir's first question. See La Folie en tête, p. 55, 70, 319, 407.

### III. The autobiography: Leduc's personal motivation.

Leduc, as we have seen, did not turn to autobiography out of a desire to be loved by her readers. Nor did she wish to justify her actions or provide a model for other women. On the contrary, her autobiography reveals a quite remarkable indifference to these aims - aims which are, after all, common amongst writers portraying their own lives.

Like Beauvoir, Leduc seems to have had a long-standing autobiographical impulse. In her case, the driving forces behind her autobiographical writing were her narcissism, her desire to be the centre of attention, her self-pity and her wish to shock.

Leduc agreed, in an interview in 1966, that when one writes "on cherche la sympathie."<sup>(45)</sup> However, she does not attempt to cut a likeable figure. She hopes at best, to be appreciated for her honesty; apart from that, she wants to elicit pity. She freely admits that "se plaindre, c'est vouloir attirer", (FT, 110) and that, in relationships with others:

je voulais séduire avec mes misères. (B, 239).

Genet prided himself on "la singularité" of his "misères";<sup>(46)</sup> it was a similar conviction which made Leduc endlessly pour out her sufferings - to Maurice Sachs, to Simone de Beauvoir, to a psychiatrist - and to her reader.

In 1943 she lived for a time in the same house as Sachs in a village in Normandy. Despite his interest in psychoanalysis, Sachs was not able to bear Leduc's continual reminiscing about painful childhood experiences. Eventually he told her:

---

(45) Interview with Pierre Deméron for France-Culture (radio). 1966.

(46) Journal du voleur. Paris: Gallimard, 1949, p. 92.

Vos malheurs d'enfance commencent de m'emmerder. Cet après-midi vous prendrez votre cabas, un porte-plume, un cahier, vous vous assoirez sous un pommier, vous écrirez ce que vous me racontez. (B, 399).

That very day, near the end of summer, Violette obediently started writing what she calls her "souvenirs d'enfance". (B, 437). She described the way in which her mother had rejected her, beginning: "Ma mère ne m'a jamais donné la main".<sup>(47)</sup> Months later, with an ironic flourish, she concluded: "C'était une mère irréprochable".<sup>(48)</sup>

Simone de Beauvoir, too, was subjected to long outpourings. It seems that their evenings together frequently consisted of "trois heures de jérémiades" from Violette. (CA, 46). Like Sachs, Beauvoir persuaded Violette to write down her memories, to unburden herself on paper:

Hier, elle me l'a expliqué, je devrais essayer de me souvenir d'Hermine et de Gabriel, de raconter cette histoire comme je la lui raconte. (FT, 264).

Sachs easily lost patience with what he called "ce visage d'outre-tombe" which Leduc assumed. (B, 404). Her mother called her "un saule pleurer". (CA, 35). Leduc calls herself "une pleureuse professionnelle", (FT, 137) and describes herself, lucidly, later in life as:

une vieille qui veut être la championne de la désolation. (CA, 79).

As a loyal reader of Existentialists, she is conscious that she had chosen her misery. When, during the height of her persecution fantasies, Beauvoir tried to convince her that her persecutors were the product of her imagination, Leduc writes:

---

(47) L'Asphyxie. Paris: Gallimard, Espoir, 1946, p.7.

(48) ibid., p. 188.

Taisez-vous, Simone de Beauvoir. [...] Laissez-moi avec mon mal. Vous ne pouvez pas m'en séparer. Vous comprenez tout. Cela, vous ne le comprenez pas, vous ne le comprendrez pas. C'est mon mal, c'est tout ce que j'ai. (CA, 27).

Leduc's self-pity was an aspect of her narcissism. She needed to exhibit herself as a pathetic figure. Writing an autobiography enabled her to do this. She was able to make the same demands on her reader as she made on Sachs, Beauvoir and others. The role of the reader is to bear witness to her sufferings. As Beauvoir put it:

Le lecteur [...] écoute son monologue; il n'y répond pas, mais il le justifie.(49)

Leduc then felt justified to absorb herself in what she describes as:

Mes gestes, mes tics, mes mouvements, mes détresses, mes élans, mes crises, mes émerveillements, mes trésors, mes déchets, mes chutes, mes bonds, mes déséquilibres, mes redressements, mes extases, mes agonies, mes affaissements, mes guérisons, mes abjections, mes erreurs, mes humiliations, mes écroulements, mes ascensions. (FT, 51).

A remark made by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and quoted by Sachs in Le Sabbat, applies particularly well to Violette Leduc:

Je sais bien que le lecteur n'a pas grand besoin de savoir tout cela, mais j'ai besoin, moi, de lui dire.(50)

Violette Leduc wrote more easily when she was openly portraying her own experience. It is obvious that she felt constricted by the medium of fiction. In her first three novels, she writes that she had "mêlé la vérité au roman". (B, 40) However, fictionalizing her past appeared to her to be a betrayal of her experience and it placed her, as a writer, in a kind of straitjacket. She wanted most to publicize her experience - as she had lived it.

(49) Préface, p. 12.

(50) Quoted in Le Sabbat, p. 81.

In L'Asphyxie, Leduc could not bring herself to call her beloved grandmother by anything other than her true name, Fideline. In L'Affamée, it was impossible for her to disguise the fact that she was writing about Simone de Beauvoir. And when she referred, briefly, to Maurice Sachs, she wrote his initials: M.S.<sup>(51)</sup> In Ravages, she was unwilling to call her school-friend, Isabelle, by any other name:

Je travestirais mes dix-sept ans si je changeais le prénom. (FT, 296).

Never, in the autobiography, does Leduc comment on any event which does not directly concern herself. Her preoccupation with herself is total. Thus, despite the commitment of Les Temps Modernes to the cause of the Algerian Front de Libération National, there is no mention of the Algerian War - even though the autobiography covers the period in which this was a major issue in French society. However, the Second World War, which modified Leduc's existence and from which she profited through her black market activities is mentioned - in as far as it affected her.

Leduc is narcissistic, but she is not complacent. She writes to be heard, it is true, but she is sufficiently oblivious to the subjectivity of the reader to be quite undeterred by the reader's judgement. As Beauvoir wrote in her preface to La Bâtarde:

elle se raconte avec une sincérité intrépide; comme s'il n'y avait personne pour l'écouter.<sup>(52)</sup>

(51) L'Affamée, Paris: Gallimard, 1948, p. 63.

(52) Préface, p. 7-8. (Italics mine).

No autobiographer, before or since Leduc, seems to have surpassed the unmitigated negativity of her own self-portrait. She herself did not suffer from the Gidean dilemma: "être moral, être sincère".<sup>(53)</sup> Questions of morality or discretion appear to have inhibited Leduc minimally in life, as in her writing. In contrast to Sachs, who professed to be ashamed of his past self and hoped that his "confession publique" would lead to absolution,<sup>(54)</sup> Leduc, like Jean Genet, was uninhibited by any sense of shame. Both lacked Sachs' religiosity, and both saw themselves primarily as victims.<sup>(55)</sup>

For Leduc, the sole moral criterion for her autobiography was "l'honnêteté." (FT, 52). As Beauvoir commented about her colleague:

Elle ne s'excuse ni s'accuse: ainsi était-elle; elle comprend pourquoi et nous le fait comprendre. (56)

Occasionally, Leduc reminds us of her firm resolve:

Je dis tout, tant pis si je me ridiculise. (FT, 119).

And, on another occasion:

Je n'aurai pas honte de ce que j'écrirai. (FT, 207).

At such times, it is not herself she is trying to convince. It is more that she is reminding the reader of the courage it takes to keep questions such as pride and shame subordinate to the higher aims of sincerity. She does want acknowledgement of her courage.

(53) André Gide. Journal. 1889-1939. Paris: Gallimard, 1948. (11 janvier, 1892).

(54) Le Sabbat, p. 13.

(55) Genet relates that years later, when he came across a photograph of himself at sixteen or seventeen, his emotion "s'exprima presque à haute voix": "Pauvre petit gars, tu as souffert". (Journal du voleur. Paris: Gallimard, 1949, p. 90).

(56) Préface, p. 17.

We recall that Beauvoir had made a similar claim about herself in the preface to La Force des choses: "je ne porte aucun jugement sur moi." (p.9). Whereas it is true of Leduc, I have shown that Beauvoir does judge herself.

Where Leduc most prided herself on her sincerity was in the area of sexuality. Although writing about male homosexuality had become quite acceptable, Leduc was considered shocking for writing so openly about lesbianism. Despite the fact that Gide, Sachs and Genet were considered respectable enough writers, Leduc's Thérèse et Isabelle was censored, in the mid-fifties, just as Radclyffe Hall's The Well of Loneliness had been in England, some twenty-five years earlier.

Simone de Beauvoir explains the reaction of the Gallimard editors to the beginning of Ravages:

Ils jugèrent impubliables certaines scènes qui ne dépassaient pas en audace bien d'autres qui sont imprimées: mais l'objet érotique, c'était l'homme et non la femme, et ils se sentirent outragés. (FC, 345).

Nevertheless, such a change had taken place between 1955 and 1964 that Violette Leduc was able to include much of the material from Thérèse et Isabelle in La Bâtarde.

When she wrote the beginning of Ravages, which depicted her own lesbian relationship with Isabelle, and when she wrote about eroticism in the autobiography, Leduc's concern was to depict experience as close as possible to the lived reality. When writing about Thérèse and Isabelle, she writes that she masturbated in order to be able to describe the sensation more accurately:

je m'aime. Mon sexe? Pour ne pas trahir Thérèse et Isabelle. Exploitation répugnante. Tu vendrais ton sexe à ton porte-plume? Je vendrais tout pour une plus grande exactitude. [...]  
un mot juste, un seul et je me foutraï de l'opprobre et du péché.  
(FT, 298).

Once again, she emphasizes the struggle with herself which her daring entailed, and her reliance on Simone de Beauvoir's judgement:



Ils diront: C'est de l'ordure. Qui? Ils ne te lisent pas.  
 Je te plains, esclave du qu'en dira-t-on. On glisse si vite  
 dans le dégueulasse... [...] Simone de Beauvoir lira ça?  
 J'oserai lui faire lire ça? La prendrais-tu pour une oie  
 blanche? Ecris, souviens-toi, c'est ce qu'elle veut. [...]  
 Tu l'oublies: Simone de Beauvoir vieille sur toi. (FT, 297-298).

What she does not mention is the delight she took in shocking. Throughout the autobiography, it is obvious that she took pleasure in drawing attention to herself by behaving in a way which those around her considered outrageous. Leduc's primary motivation was always narcissistic.

Despite her obsession with herself, Leduc does reveal a great deal about the condition of women in society. As Beauvoir wrote in her preface to La Bâtarde:  
 quiconque nous parle du fond de sa solitude nous parle de nous. (57)

As with Simone de Beauvoir, it is precisely because of the contribution which Leduc makes to our understanding of women's lives that we need to examine her own life in its specificity. In so doing, we gain insight into her assumptions about women.

CHAPTER TWO"LA JEUNE FILLE DERANGEE" (1)

The circumstances of Violette Leduc's childhood shed light on her negative self-image and on the sado-masochistic tendencies which are evident in the autobiography.

Violette was an unwelcome presence in her mother's life. For reasons directly related to her experience as a woman in society, Violette's mother felt both guilt and resentment - emotions which she associated with her daughter. Indeed, Berthe transmitted the guilt for what she saw as her sin to her illegitimate daughter, whom she regarded as her punishment.

From her grandmother, Violette received both love and physical warmth. However, her death, when Violette was nine, was one more tragedy to befall the child.

As an illegitimate child, Violette was a social embarrassment to her mother. Because of her continual illnesses, the little girl incurred medical costs which her mother could ill afford. Berthe's endurance was further tested by the fact that Violette had an ungainly appearance. Berthe herself was an unusually attractive

---

(1) Jacqueline Piatier uses the term "jeune fille dérangée" in her review of La Bâtarde in Le Monde, 6139, (10 octobre 1964).

woman and very conscious of appearances, so that this was yet another severe blow to her pride.

Conscious, from an early age, that her mother rejected her, Violette also learnt what it meant to be a "bâtarde" and to be a female. She came to feel that she was cursed, - doomed to be an outcast, loved by nobody.

#### I. The resentful mother

We recollect that Simone, as a baby, was doted on by a mother who was young and gay and "fière d'avoir réussi un premier enfant". (TCF, 14). This was far from being the case for Violette Leduc, whose mother had suffered social disgrace because of her.

Violette's mother, Berthe, had had an extremely unhappy childhood and adolescence. She had been deprived of love, security and education. As a budding woman, life had been dull: "Pas de bals, pas de sorties, pas d'amies" (B, 21). Then she found a place as a maid in an aristocratic protestant family in Valenciennes. There, for the first time in her life, she was more or less happy. She became the confidant and "demoiselle de compagnie" to the lady of the house, (B, 23), and she enjoyed the gaiety of the four offspring, who were by then young adults.

La gaieté, les réceptions, l'entrain d'une famille protestante l'émerveillent. (B, 23).

During the summer of 1906, twenty year old Berthe stayed on in her maid's room, having nowhere else to go, while the family went to breathe fresher air in Switzerland. André, the youngest of the family's three sons, the one who enchanted Berthe, came home early. When Berthe later told her daughter the story of her conception, she remarked cynically:

c'est ainsi qu'il m'a fait payer mon abri.(B,24).

When it became clear that she was pregnant, André's insistence that Berthe should leave the town reinforced Berthe's feeling of guilt:

Il a dit quand c'est arrivé: "Jure que tu quitteras la ville, petite, jure que tu partiras." Elle jure, elle se jetterait à ses pieds, elle croit qu'elle a fauté.(B, 24).

André's mother, who could not understand why Berthe suddenly wished to leave, without any explanation, offered to double her wages if she would stay. However, Berthe, accepting her fate as punishment for her sin, kept her ignominious secret concealed and left for Arras with her "économies de vierge sage". (B, 25). Once there, no longer having the respectability of a "taille fine", (B, 25), the unmarried mother had great difficulty finding accomodation. Violette was born, in rat-infested quarters, early in the morning of the 7th of April, 1907. Her birth, a forceps delivery, was almost responsible for Berthe's death. Violette sums up the nature of their bond, both then and later:

Ton sang ma mère, le ruisseau de sang dans l'escalier  
quand je suis sortie de toi, les flots de sang du  
moribond. [...]  
j'étais ta prisonnière comme tu étais la mienne.(B, 25).  
(2)

---

(2) Italics mine.

Berthe's mother, Fidéline, and one of the cooks from the household in Valenciennes, Clarisse, had both given up their jobs and gone to help Berthe with the baby. Picturing their plight, Violette comments:

J'ai supposé que toutes les trois vous vous demandiez si un oreiller sur ma trogne couleur de tomate n'était pas préférable à l'avenir que je vous imposais.  
(B, 25-26).<sup>(3)</sup>

Indeed, the pregnancy was an utter catastrophe for Berthe. At twenty, as a virgin and a beautiful woman, she had marriage prospects as good as any in her milieu. Now she had to work to support three: herself, a child whose constant illnesses drained her finances completely, and her mother, who stayed to look after the child while she worked. Moreover, her position of unmarried mother made Berthe's chances of marriage very slight indeed, and this was her sole means of attaining financial security and social respectability. Although Berthe knew exactly who the father was, Violette was officially recorded as being "née de père inconnu!" (B, 28).

French law, before 1912, was unconcerned with the problem of paternal responsibility<sup>(4)</sup>, and those fathers who wished to forget

---

(3) Adrienne Rich points out in Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution, (N.Y.: Norton, 1976), that maternal infanticide was "the most common crime in Western Europe from the Middle Ages down to the Eighteenth Century". (p. 259).

(4) For a century, until 1912, Article 340 of the Civil Code forbade judicial investigation into natural paternity. Even after the 1912 law reform, Berthe would have had to prove the use of force or violence to be able to lodge paternity claims, and this was made almost impossible.

the whole unfortunate incident and deprive the mother and child of any financial support were protected by the law. As Odile Dhavernas points out, in her book Droits des femmes, pouvoir des hommes, social attitudes were such that working class women, the most frequent victims of the law, were considered brazen to allow themselves to be seduced by their wealthy superiors. She writes:

Il n'est pas douteux que les obstacles mis à la recherche judiciaire de paternité ont pour objet essentiel de protéger les messieurs de la bonne société contre les conséquences fâcheuses des amours ancillaires. C'est ce qu'exprime sans fard le tribun Lahary en stigmatisant "ces intrigantes qui, nées dans les conditions les plus abjectes, avaient l'inconvenable hardiesse de s'introduire dans les familles les plus distinguées et les plus opulentes."<sup>(5)</sup>

Berthe herself, who presumed punishment to be relative to misconduct, reflected the prejudices against women.

By 1913, Fidéline had eventually persuaded her daughter to go back to Valenciennes to ask André for money. Grandmother, mother and daughter moved back to this town. André, writes Violette, "ne pouvait plus être grondé. Il était condamné." (B, 28). He had died that same year of tuberculosis. His father begrudgingly gave Berthe twenty thousand francs to silence her - a sum which Violette was to inherit at her majority. In the meantime, they merely received the interest: "cent cinquante francs par trimestre" (B, 28). Berthe had to work long hours as a shop assistant, and money was scarce.

---

(5) Odile Dhavernas, Droit des femmes, pouvoir des hommes, Paris: Seuil, 1978, p. 26. (The tribune Lahary made the comment in 1908).

Violette was made aware, at an early age, that her existence caused her mother endless distress. She writes bitterly:

Foetus, je voudrais ne pas l'avoir été. (B, 25).

And, addressing her mother, she reflects:

Je suis née porteuse de ton malheur comme on naît porteuse d'offrandes. (B, 20).

Throughout her life, Violette always felt "de trop". (B, 132).

Even as a very young girl, she was filled with guilt for being the apparent cause of her mother's anguish. Commenting on Leduc's self-portrait, Beauvoir writes:

Coupable, coupable, coupable: la voix de sa mère retentit encore en elle; un juge mystérieux la traque. (6)

## II. "L'ange Fidéline"

Berthe's mother, the woman Violette calls "l'ange Fidéline", (B, 28), was forty-four when she gave up her job as cook and went to help her daughter with the baby. Violette remembers her as a source of great physical warmth - something which she never knew from her mother. Fidéline was her "fiancée", (B, 32), her "soeur", (B, 34), her "sauveur" and her "compagne"<sup>(7)</sup>. Whereas Violette was intimidated by her mother's "regard bleu acier" (FT, 56), Fidéline's blue eyes were "un lac de douceur"<sup>(8)</sup>.

---

(6) Preface to La Bâtarde, p. 15.

(7) L'Asphyxie, p. 133.

(8) ibid., p. 13.

In the novel, L'Asphyxie, as well as in La Bâtarde, Fidéline's "douceur céleste" (FT, 56) is contrasted with her mother's coldness. Like two sisters, Berthe would send them to the cinema on Sundays. Surrounded by the excited voices of the audience, Violette, scared and attracted by other children, would press herself against her grandmother for protection. Outside, she recalls, "Fidéline prend ma main". (B, 34). At night, they slept in the same bed:

Quelle corbeille de fiançailles quand je me nichais dans ton cou. Ta main la nuit /.../. Mes pieds dans ta chemise de nuit /.../. J'écoutais ta respiration, mon oreille chérissait ton sein irréel. (B, 32).

Fidéline was a devout Catholic and often took Violette to Church with her. However, for the little girl, who knew nothing about Jesus, this merely meant long hours of boredom. In contrast to Simone de Beauvoir, religion was not a source of psychological security. She was not told that there was a guardian angel always watching over her, or that God was always looking after her. It was to "l'ange Fidéline" to whom Violette ran when she needed reassurance:

je me cachais dans la jupe de ma grand-mère, je respirais l'odeur surannée de l'étoffe, je m'enfouissais. (B, 32).

However, there came a time when Fidéline's voluminous black skirt was no longer at her side to shelter Violette. During the First World War, when Violette was seven, her grandmother became ill with consumption.

Je me jette chaque soir dans le lit d'acajou du rez-de-chaussée, ma mère m'en arrache, je pleure avec la fougue d'une amante. Fidéline, ma grand-mère, tu seras toujours ma fiancée dans ton lit de poitrinaire. (B, 35).

Fidéline died in 1916, when Violette was nine. She writes that it was not until five years later that she realized that her grandmother



was dead, that she had loved her and would never see her again. All that time, she had been learning what it was like to be alone to face an embittered mother and the world.

III. An outcast

From a very early age, Violette was made aware that she was a burden to her mother and rejected by other children. She came to believe that this was somehow connected with her body.

As a child, Violette was very often ill, costing precious money and needing special care. Violette continually stresses the guilt and shame she felt:

Tout notre argent s'en allait en visites de médecin, en notes de pharmacien. [..] Me voici responsable d'avoir été un souffle emportant leurs économies. [..] je fautais par fragilité. (B, 26).

Her mother would then utter her eternal refrain - what Violette calls her "slogans de tragédienne" (CA, 316). Berthe would look upon her fate as a punishment sent from God:

"On ne s'en sortira pas. Qu'est-ce que nous avons fait?" (B, 34).

or:

"Qu'est-ce que j'ai fait au bon Dieu?" (CA, 314).

Berthe would care for her daughter "avec dévouement", (B, 131), but with "un douloureux reproche dans ses yeux". (B, 47). With every sickness, Violette's consciousness of herself as a heavy imposition was reinforced:

J'étais malade, je me croyais coupable. (B, 47).

Berthe was afraid that tuberculosis might be hereditary and consequently, because of André, she was always anxious when Violette became ill. The daughter remembers:

Ses yeux durcis par l'épouvante me terrorisent. (B, 29).

On one occasion, Leduc writes:

Ma tête penche, c'est cela mon premier souvenir. (B, 27).

On another occasion, she claims that her first memory was when she broke her arm:

C'est mon premier souvenir, d'une douleur dans ma chair. (B, 33).

Whatever her very first memory may have been, it is evident that Leduc's early memories are associated with her body - and with her consciousness that her body was a burden, both to herself and others.

The impression derived from her mother, that her body made her unlovable, was strengthened by other children. She writes that her grandmother coddled her to such an extent that she was totally unprepared for the roughness of other children her age. Consequently, they rejected her brutally:

j'aurais voulu deux des mains en cire tiède, lorsque je me hasardais à jouer avec un petit garçon ou une petite fille. [..] J'étais seule, j'avais le monde contre moi dès que petits garçons et petites filles impatientés par ma fragilité s'éloignaient. Je sanglotais s'ils riaient et leurs rires redoublaient. (B, 36).

The boys mocked her appearance:

J'avais un visage ingrat et des jambes si maigres que des garçons m'appelaient "Mollet de coq". (B, 41).

Above all, however, Violette's feeling of rejection was the outcome of her mother's behaviour. What we can take, from the

autobiography, to be Violette's crise originelle occurred when her mother abandoned her - as she felt - to a boarding school. Some fifty years later, Leduc is still hurt when she recalls the incident:

ma mère décida que j'irais en pension. J'avais cinq ans. Pourquoi, dis, pourquoi? Je t'embarrassais donc tant que cela! Je ne me souviens pas, ô privilège, de ma mère me laissant dans l'établissement. Je me souviens de mon chagrin, de mes trépignements sur le carrelage après son départ. Cris, pleurs, gémissements, ces jours-là seront toujours un cataplasme trop lourd et trop refroidi. La directrice craignait des convulsions, elle envoya un télégramme, ma mère me reprit. (B, 27).<sup>(9)</sup>

Violette's tragedy was to depend, for a sense of identity and for approval and encouragement, on a young woman who associated her with social disgrace and frustrated hopes. The more Berthe resented the sacrifices which her fragile, awkward-looking, illegitimate child imposed on her, the more the child felt insecure and made demands on her attention. It was an unfortunate vicious circle.

Violette soon manifested the acute separation anxiety which was to plague her throughout her life. Fear would strike her as soon as she woke up:

Mes terreurs, au réveil, étaient profondes jusqu'à la douleur et l'anéantissement. (B, 29).

Because her mother was not able to give her a sense of security, Violette would cling obsessively to her physical presence. When her mother left her by herself one afternoon, Violette felt an acute loss:

---

(9) (*Italics mine.*) Violette writes of her "souffrance à cinq ans" on p. 20 and alludes to the crisis again on p. 346 of La Bâtarde.

je commence à l'attendre dès qu'elle a refermé la porte. (B, 47).

Whereas her communication with Fidéline had been primarily physical, Violette sensed that her mother could not cherish her as a physical being. She writes:

Je t'ai vue nue, je t'ai vue te donner des soins intimes. Aucune mère n'aura été plus abstraite que toi. Ta peau, tes jambes, ton dos quand je le lave, le baiser du matin que je te demande n'ont pas de réalité. Où te rencontrer? (B, 25).

It is significant that she had to ask her mother for kisses - "baisers [...] ça ne l'intéresse pas", she writes. (FT, 162).

In L'Asphyxie, which Leduc refers to as her "souvenirs d'enfance" (B, 437) although she claims to have blended reality with fiction, she emphasizes her mother's physical rejection of her even more than in La Bâtarde. In this novel, she writes that her mother would tell her to go and play, without so much as looking at her:- "un ordre donné sans un coup d'oeil vers moi".<sup>(10)</sup> She stresses that her mother would avoid any physical contact with her:

Ma mère ne m'a jamais donné la main. [...] Elle m'aidait à monter, à descendre les trottoirs en pinçant mon vêtement à l'endroit où l'emmanchure est facilement saisissable. (11)

Even if such memories are fictitious, invented to highlight her mother's heartlessness, it is the obsession which is significant.

In the autobiography, Leduc makes a passing reference to the

---

(10) L'Asphyxie, p. 49.

(11) ibid, p. 7.

tears she shed when she lost her umbrella at the age of seven.

(FT, 292). In L'Asphyxie, this incident is portrayed in detail. She writes that the actual "orchestre de cymbales et de gongs" which broke out when she told her mother was "la délivrance"<sup>(12)</sup> in comparison with the "regard dur et bleu"<sup>(13)</sup> which she had been so frightened to go home and confront. Her mother:

jeta au milieu de la pièce un brasier de mots:  
- Dire que je me crève pour ça. Elle nous mettra  
sur la paille. Un parapluie tout neuf. Le plus  
beau de la ville ...<sup>(14)</sup>

Once again, the mother floods the girl with guilt by playing the role of the noble, selfless mother and casting her daughter in the role of the child who destroys all things beautiful - both the umbrella and her mother.

Ce n'est pas digne de ce qu'on fait pour elle. Il y  
en aurait qui te fouteraient ça à l'Assistance. Ça n'a  
rien dans le coeur, ça n'a rien dans le ventre. Maboule!  
Espèce de maboule. <sup>(15)</sup>

It was when the little girl, whom her mother called a "sale bête",<sup>(16)</sup> attempted - in total submission - to seek some kind of reconciliation through physical contact, that her mother's repulsion was most evident:

Je tombais à ses pieds, ma joue sur la pointe de ses  
souliers vernis.  
- Ne me touche pas, espèce de toquée. [..]  
Ma joue se consola sur le carreau.<sup>(17)</sup>

---

(12) L'Asphyxie, p. 127.

(13) *ibid*, pp. 12, 13, 16.

(14) *ibid*, pp. 127-129.

(15) *ibid*, p. 127. (In La Chasse à l'amour, Leduc refers to "l'époque où ma mère m'appelait maboule, espèce de maboule" (CA, 197). It was when she was seven.

(16) *ibid*, p. 127.

(17) *ibid*. As an adult, when her mother was once ill, Violette reminded herself of this incident and refused to visit her. "Chaque nuit j'ai eu, pendant sa maladie, un carreau de son carrelage sur ma joue". (CA, 307).

It is apparent that the resentment which we sense in Leduc's portrayal of her mother is resentment which she did not acquire until her adolescence. The little girl did not judge her mother. On the contrary, she writes:

je l'aimais à en mourir. [..] J'ai aimé de passion avant l'âge. (CA, 197).

Like little Simone, Violette was utterly vulnerable in the face of her mother's judgement. However, in contrast to Simone, her mother's approval was the exception rather than the norm.

By being "une petite fille modèle", Simone was imitating and identifying with her mother's behaviour. Violette never seems to have identified with her mother in this way. Instead, she saw her mother as the incarnation of goodness and herself as the destroyer of all good things. Whereas her mother was "jolie à croquer", (FT, 172), Violette was teased about her appearance. Berthe, who was always working, called her "paresseuse" (B, 44). She who prided herself on her "courage", "énergie" and "magnanimité", decided that Violette took after her father, and Violette writes:

Elle souffrait au passé et au présent lorsqu'elle disait que moi non plus je n'avais pas de coeur. (B, 40).

When Violette was seven, Fideline was already too ill to protect her. As for the rest of the world, it reinforced the judgement of Violette's mother. Other children laughed at her or called her names. One family called her something she had not heard before:

Une famille, qui voulait tenir le haut du pavé, qui ne me répondait pas quand je lui disais bonjour, m'appela bâtarde. (B, 45).

At ten, Violette did not yet know what this meant. She merely knew that she had once again unwittingly been the cause of something which had made her mother very upset.

After the First World War, Berthe decided to go and look for work in Paris with her friend Clarisse. Violette was put in boarding school in Valenciennes. Naturally, after not having set foot in a school for six years, Violette stood out as a failure:

J'étais la dernière de la classe et deux fois plus grande que mes compagnes. (B, 46).

In no time, Violette came down with pleurisy. Once again, her mother's plans were cruelly dashed:

Ma mère annula son départ; le trimestre payé d'avance ne lui serait pas remboursé, le médecin devrait venir souvent, il faudrait des médicaments. (B, 47).

Yet again, Violette was acutely conscious of inconveniencing and disappointing her mother. On this occasion, she did try to imitate her mother's "dévouement" by trying not to cough and wake her:

Oh! ma période d'amour, mon abnégation, mes sacrifices pour ne pas l'éveiller la nuit! (B, 47).

Her passion for her mother was not reciprocated, however. The doctor recommended that Violette should spend some time in the country, and she was sent to stay with Berthe's sister, Laure, on a farm twenty kilometres from Valenciennes. It is not clear whether she stayed in the country several weeks or several months. In any event, she writes:

Ma mère m'obsédait, je voulais une lettre d'elle. Elle n'écrivait pas. (B, 52).

It was at the village school that Violette learnt what it meant not to have a father. She discovered that:

Pour ma mère et pour moi, c'était autrement que chez les autres. Lorsqu'un père prenait son enfant sur ses genoux, lorsqu'il le faisait sauter en chantant "à dada, à dada", je rougissais, envahie de honte et de pudeur. Nous, nous vivions entre jupons. (B, 51).

The boys at the school formed a gang and terrorized her:

Je sortais de l'école, ils me laissaient prendre de la distance, les cailloux pleuvaient sur ma tête. (B, 52)<sup>(18)</sup>

Laure spoke to Violette's teacher and, after that, the boys avoided her. It was one more occasion on which Violette was picked out as an object of ridicule, as the butt of the aggression of others. It seemed bound to happen wherever she went.

Later in life, a friend told Violette:

Les bâtards sont maudits. (B, 51).

And indeed, at the age of twelve or thirteen, Violette obviously already felt that she was cursed, - doomed not to be loved. She had come to associate this with the fragility of her body and her ungainly physical appearance.

#### IV. The accursed sex

Long before Violette was told that "les bâtards sont maudits", she was indoctrinated with the idea that she belonged to an ill-fated sex. The claustrophobic constellation of grandmother, mother and daughter gave reinforcement to the bitterness of the two adult women.

---

(18) Leduc refers to this trauma again in La Bâtarde, p. 222 and p.231.



Before she took to her sick-bed, Fidéline would sometimes tell the little girl about her past, presenting Violette with a picture of brutal, self-interested males and helpless, subordinate females. In L'Asphyxie, Leduc writes that Fidéline's mother slept with Fidéline's father "par charité",<sup>(19)</sup> and the baby was illegitimate. Fidéline's fortune was no better:

Un ange à dix-huit ans se marie: ma grand-mère Fidéline. Huit jours après, l'ange peu dégourdi voit dans une glace la bouche de son beau gaillard de mari sur la bouche d'une prostituée du village. (B, 21-22).

Two years later came "la délivrance"(B, 22). Her husband, a livestock merchant, received a mortal kick from a horse. Berthe, her second daughter, was born after her father's death - "elle ne l'a pas connu".(B,22). Twenty years later, her life, too, was destroyed by a man.

During the war, after Fidéline's death, Berthe, in her extreme loneliness, subjected Violette to frequent diatribes on "les laideurs de la vie". (B, 39).

Elle m'offrait [ ... ] un terrible cadeau: celui de la méfiance et de la suspicion. Tous les hommes étaient des salauds, tous les hommes étaient des sans-coeur. [ ... ] Abuser de vous, voilà leur but. Je devais le comprendre et ne pas l'oublier. Des cochons. Tous des cochons. (B, 39).

It may have relieved Berthe to spill out her woes. For Violette, "son réceptacle à douleur, à fureur, à rancoeur,(B, 40), these tête-à-têtes were less salutary.

Ma mère m'expliquait tout. J'étais prévenue, je ne devrai pas fauter. Les hommes suivent les femmes, il ne faut pas s'arrêter. J'écoutais et si je jouais avec

---

(19) L'Asphyxie, p. 116.

miettes sur la table ma mère me signifiait du regard que je manquais d'attention. Je croisais les bras, l'univers était un chemin sur lequel il fallait avancer sans s'arrêter jamais; si l'ombre d'un homme surgissait, il fallait l'abolir en marchant toujours seule, toujours plus vite [ ... ]. Ma mère l'expliquait avec une imprécise précision. Suivre un homme, l'écouter, lui céder ... Qu'est-ce que ça voulait dire, céder? Ne pas revoir le sang, grossir jusqu'à ce qu'un enfant sorte de vous, tombe dans le ruisseau avec vous. (B, 40).

As she listened to her mother, Violette had the impression that she herself was to blame for her mother's tribulations:

ma mère [ ... ] me fixait avec tant d'intensité pendant sa déclaration que je me demandais si j'étais un homme ou non. (B, 39).

And in L'Asphyxie, too, the mother seemed to manage to project her own guilt onto Violette:

Ecoute-moi. Essaie de comprendre. Si ça t'arrivait, une chose pareille, je te renierais. Moi, je ne savais rien. Le péché! C'est vague le péché! [ ... ] Tu es prévenue, il ne faut pas que ça t'arrive et si cela t'arrivait, je n'aurais aucune pitié. Je te laisserai dans le ruisseau. (20)

Because of these "leçons de réalité", (B, 39), Violette was more than ever convinced of her guilt vis à vis her mother. She writes:

Tout ce qui n'as pas tourné rond dans son existence est de ma faute. Je suis la preuve par neuf de sa malchance. Elle devrait me renier. Je suis sa misère et son humiliation. (CA, 307).

We have seen that this was no paranoid impression of Violette's. Indeed, it was a quite rational appraisal of reality. Since Berthe associated her daughter with guilt, blame and punishment, as well as continually inferring that the female condition was a punishment,

---

(20) L'Asphyxie, pp. 52-53.

Violette was induced to regard her female body as retribution for the suffering caused by her existence. Once again, she felt both guilty and a victim of fate. She was to retain this ambivalence throughout her life.

Commenting on L'Asphyxie in Le Deuxième Sexe, Simone de Beauvoir claimed that Violette related to her mother in a way which was "quasi pathologique"<sup>(21)</sup>. Indeed, it is striking that the psychodynamic patterns in Violette's relationship with her mother accord, to a great extent, with the conditions found to be prevalent in the childhood of people contentiously labelled schizophrenics. Family therapists, who consider schizophrenia in the individual the consequence of distorted communication in the family constellation, note three distinguishing factors commonly found in the family pattern of such people:

- There must be a child whose mother becomes anxious and withdraws if the child responds to her as a loving mother.
- There must be a mother who cannot accept her own feelings of anxiety and hostility toward her child and who denies them by overtly expressing love to persuade the child to respond to her as a loving mother.
- There must be an absence of anyone (father, sibling) in the family who can intervene between the mother and the child.<sup>(22)</sup>

---

(21) Le Deuxième Sexe, II, p. 43.

(22) Gregory Bateson. Steps to an Ecology of Mind. N.Y.: Ballantine, 1975, pp.202-203.

There is an interesting critique of Bateson's view in Mark Poster's book: Critical Theory of the Family. London: Pluto Press Ltd., 1978, p. 115 ff.

However controversial this analysis of schizophrenia may be, it is clear that the relationship with the figure who loomed largest in her life in her formative years had immense repercussions for Violette's destiny. Indeed, we can trace what will emerge as Violette's choix originel to the interaction between mother and daughter.

CHAPTER THREE

BECOMING A WOMAN

I. The choice of self

The previous chapter dealt with Leduc's discovery of her subjectivity; this chapter is concerned with the way in which she chose to assume her subjectivity.

In Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté, Simone de Beauvoir had described the way in which a child "découvre sa subjectivité."<sup>(1)</sup> She argued that the fundamental cause of "la crise de l'adolescence" is that "l'individu doit enfin assumer sa subjectivité":<sup>(2)</sup>

lorsqu'il arrive à l'âge de l'adolescence, tout son univers se met à vaciller parce qu'il aperçoit les contradictions qui opposent les uns aux autres les adultes, et aussi leurs hésitations, leurs faiblesses. Les hommes cessent de lui apparaître comme des dieux, et en même temps l'adolescent découvre le caractère humain des réalités qui l'entourent: le langage, les coutumes, la morale, les valeurs ont leur source dans ces créatures incertaines; le moment est venu où il va être appelé à participer lui aussi à leur opération; ses actes pèsent sur terre autant que ceux des autres hommes, il va lui falloir choisir et décider.<sup>(3)</sup>

---

(1) Simone de Beauvoir. Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté. Paris: Gallimard, 1947. (coll. "Idées", 1962, p. 138.)

(2) *ibid.*, p. 57.

(3) *ibid.* This description of the individual experiencing his or her terrifying liberty is very similar to Sartre's description in Baudelaire, which was published in the same year, (1947). See Gallimard, coll. "Idées", (1963), p. 63 ff.

Until Violette reached the age of twelve, she led a very closeted life. The only adults who played any significant role in her life were Fideline and her mother. And because of her early death, the role played by Fideline in Violette's life was of less importance. We have seen that her mother's "regard dur et bleu" made Violette feel guilty for existing. She developed an attitude of self-contempt.

To Violette, her mother appeared strong and infallible. Her negative reaction to Violette was reinforced by the rest of the world, so that the little girl never questioned her mother's judgement. Moreover, her mother's coldness made Violette's love for her quite obsessive. Since she saw that her feelings were not reciprocated, they were transformed from what might have been a healthy love to a frustrating and impossible passion. Violette liked to imagine that she was Berthe's husband:

Berthe ma mère, j'étais ton mari avant ton mariage. (B, 40).  
She liked to pretend to herself that their little twosome resembled the other couples she knew:

Je croyais nourrir ma mère. [ ... ] Travailler dans une usine pour elle, lui apporter l'argent de la semaine. (B, 44).

It is significant, as I noted earlier, that she did not identify with her mother. She did not feel worthy enough of emulating or rivaling her mother. The mother appeared to both of them as the embodiment of goodness, beauty and self-sacrifice and the daughter seemed merely to be destined to be the "porteuse" of her mother's "malheur". (B, 20).

In both the autobiography and L'Asphyxie, Leduc places great emphasis on her mother's narcissism. The "grande coquette",<sup>(4)</sup> "jamais fatiguée d'elle-même"<sup>(5)</sup> was preoccupied with her appearance.

Ma mère coquette [ ... ] avançait, reculait devant la grande glace avec la patience d'un mannequin de maison de couture. (B, 23).

Whereas for Simone de Beauvoir, imbued with the egocentricity we associate with children, the adults around her seemed to exist to play "le rôle d'un aimable miroir" to herself, (JFR, 16), Violette Leduc played this role for her mother. The two of them, mother and daughter, were always standing in front of a mirror, both pairs of eyes admiring the same person:

Elle a toujours près d'elle une enfant de sept ans qui la veut élégante devant un miroir. (FT, 164).

During her childhood, Violette's attention was centred on her mother's beautiful body. It was a turning point in her adolescence when she suddenly became aware of her mother's critical gaze on her. She perceived that her mother's rejection of her was associated with her physical appearance. The crisis occurred when she was thirteen.

We recollect that when Violette was twelve or thirteen, she was put in boarding school in Valenciennes. Some time afterwards, she became ill with pleurisy and was sent to her Aunt Laure's farm to convalesce. A strong, coarse and corpulent farmer's wife, Laure had nothing in common with her younger sister, Berthe. For the first time since Fideline's death, Violette became close to someone whose

---

(4) L'Asphyxie, p. 74.

(5) *ibid.*, p. 126.

attitude towards her was radically different from her mother's.

Unconcerned with such details as physical appearance, Laure was proud of her niece, and enjoyed displaying her to the people in the village. Violette writes:

"C'est ma nièce, racontait-elle partout, n'est-ce pas qu'elle me ressemble?" J'étais contente chaque fois qu'elle disait cela. [ ... ] Soir et matin, elle nattait mes longs cheveux, elle faisait admirer mes deux nattes. L'oeuvre de sa soeur était son oeuvre. (B, 53).

In the country, Violette's appearance was accepted like everyone else's. She was simply "une paysanne parmi les paysans". (B, 54). She would have been very happy, if only her mother had written.

Eventually, Berthe returned to the farm from Paris. It was the first time that Violette says she linked her appearance to the rejection she sensed. She describes the following incident in both the autobiography and L'Asphyxie:

Je courus dans la cour, je l'embrassai [ ... ]. Ma mère se devoue, elle embrasse rarement. Elle m'examinait, elle me révisait. Laure lui dit combien j'avais changé. J'avais trop bonne mine. Je le lisais dans ses yeux. Mes deux tresses à la mode du village, elle les méprisait. [ ... ] le soir près du poêle, elle murmura: "Comme tu es devenue campagnarde". [ ... ] Elle me blessa avec un couteau. [ ... ] Je croyais [ ... ] que je n'étais plus son enfant parce que je manquais de séduction. (B, 54).

Berthe, "une citadine", "détestait le village, la campagne, la vie de la ferme". (B, 54). Once again, her vision of the world took over. Violette no longer looked at Laure, the countryside or herself with the same eyes. She was no longer "une paysanne parmi les paysans". (B, 54). The difference was that Violette was now aware of something



she had previously known without being fully conscious of it: her mother rejected her. For the first time, Violette consciously associated this rejection with her lack of "séduction".

Shortly after this episode came another major crisis. Berthe married. For the second time within a short period, Violette felt profoundly rejected. She was then fourteen. It was decided that she would return to the boarding school at Valenciennes. Just as Baudelaire felt betrayed when his mother remarried and put him in boarding school at the age of seven, (and Violette had read Sartre's account of this), Violette declares emphatically:

Ma mère s'est mariée, ma mère m'a trompée. (B, 76).<sup>(6)</sup>

Before her mother's marriage, Violette had liked to think of herself as Berthe's husband. Thus, Berthe's marriage not only seemed to confirm the rejection which the incident in the country had already impressed on the adolescent, but the "blessure", this time, was her mother's preference for another:- "toi arrachée de moi". (B, 57).

---

(6) "Fragment d'un portrait de Baudelaire" appeared in Les Temps Modernes, 8, (mai 1946), p. 1345-1377. Gallimard published Baudelaire in 1947. Sartre writes:-

"Il y avait, dans son existence, un événement qu'il n'avait pu supporter: le second mariage de sa mère." (coll. "Idées", 1963, p.19). We also recall Sartre's description of his own mother's remarriage when he was twelve. He thereby lost his "soeur aînée", (Les Mots, p. 21) and experienced, he explains, "une rupture intérieure avec ma mère". (Sartre, filmscript, p. 17).

Les Mots appeared in Les Temps Modernes, in October and November of 1963, just after Leduc had completed La Bâtarde. However, Simone de Beauvoir, in her conversations with Violette, would no doubt have compared the impact on Violette of her mother's marriage with that felt by Sartre.

Now Berthe was going to share with this man a physical intimacy which Violette had only known with her mother on cold nights during the war:

Jalouse? Non. Nostalgique jusqu'au vertige [ ... ]; exilée de notre édredon qui nous réchauffait pendant les bombardements. (B, 57).

As Berthe made clear to her daughter: "elle traînait un boulet" - Violette. (CA, 306). It meant that her husband was "bravant l'opinion de toute une ville" by marrying her. (B, 61). Violette was also painfully aware of her mother's attitude:

Ma mère apportait une charge, son "fardeau", comme elle dit, quand elle se maria. Elle travailla le lendemain de son mariage pour payer tout de suite le pain de son "fardeau". (B, 61).<sup>(7)</sup>

When her stepfather first set eyes on her, "ses yeux étaient froids". (B, 56). Violette was the living reminder of an incident in his wife's past that he was anxious to forget. Worse, Violette did not take after her mother; it was "le séducteur" whom she physically resembled. (B, 56). Once again, Violette was conscious that her very physical appearance made her unlovable.

---

(7) Berthe's financial dependence, in 1921, was similar to that of Sartre's mother, Anne-Marie, who married M. Mancy in 1917. Simone de Beauvoir writes in Tout compte fait:

"Soumise, dévouée, pleine de reconnaissance parce qu'il l'avait prise en charge ainsi que son enfant, Mme Mancy lui donnait toujours raison." (p. 105).

However, Mme Mancy, as a widow, was not in the same degraded social position as Mme Leduc, an unmarried mother.

Voulait-il éprouver au premier contact, en fixant mes yeux, le séducteur de ma mère à qui je ressemblais? [...] Je comprenais confusément qu'il aurait voulu m'effacer. J'étais le poids d'un grand amour, j'étais une mouche sur un linge blanc. (B, 56).

The coldness of the girls at school reinforced the verdict that Violette read in the eyes of her mother and her stepfather:

Je commençais de voir dans les yeux que j'étais laide, que cela les amusait, qu'elles se poussaient du coude. (B, 58).

At this stage of Leduc's existence, there is, in the autobiographical text, a distinct suggestion that she was making a fundamental choice of being. Leduc associates her new sense of identity with her mother's marriage, and Simone de Beauvoir, in the preface to La Bâtarde, traces what she considers Violette's choix originel to this "drame de ses quatorze ans":<sup>(8)</sup>

La mère s'est mariée: la petite fille a été brisée par cette trahison. [...] Elle s'est blottie en elle-même. Par angoisse, par déception, par rancœur, elle a choisi le narcissisme, l'égoïsme, la solitude.<sup>(9)</sup>

In fact, however, the marriage of her mother was not an isolated crisis. Even though Violette considered it a "trahison" of her previous intimacy with her mother, she had already become aware that her mother recoiled from physical closeness with her, that her mother was unable to love her. Her relationship with her mother before the latter's marriage was very different from Sartre's description of

(8) Préface, p. 9.

(9) ibid., p. 8.

Baudelaire's union with his mother - which was reminiscent of Sartre's own bond with his mother. Baudelaire, like Sartre, "se perdait dans la douce tiédeur de leur amour réciproque".<sup>(10)</sup> For them both, the mother-figure was "à la fois une idole et un camarade".<sup>(11)</sup> Violette, on the other hand, had long since sensed that her love for her mother was not reciprocated. She had felt this when she was five years old and abandoned at boarding school, and had become properly conscious of this in the country, when her mother first set eyes on her after a long absence. Her mother had been an idol; however, the lack of reciprocity in their relationship ensured that she was never a "camarade" to Violette. Thus, the marriage was merely a concrete confirmation of something with which Violette was already having to come to terms. The crisis in the country and the marriage of her mother occurred within such a short space of time that it is not possible to determine the impact of the separate incidents exactly. However, to place as much emphasis as Beauvoir does on Berthe's marriage is misleading. Indeed, one may well wonder whether Leduc's choix originel would have been affected in any way if her mother had not married. Certain patterns of interaction with her mother were already so instilled in her that it seems unlikely.

Since Violette had come to associate other people's rejection of her with her physical appearance, she chose, at this stage, to make herself unlovable. She assumed both her "ugliness" and her misery:

---

(10) Sartre. Baudelaire. Paris: Gallimard, coll. "Idées", 1963, p. 18.

(11) *ibid.*, p. 19.

J'étais laide, je serais un monstre de laideur. (B, 275).

and

je serai le forgeron de ma douleur. (B, 112).

She made her ugliness and her unhappiness her weapon against others.

Having realized, as she says, that:

je manquais de séduction (B, 54),

she attempted to gain attention through other means:

je voulais séduire avec mes misères. (B, 239).

This, of course, is what she was also doing later, by writing the autobiography. Not only did she want to attract the attention and pity of her reader, but she also admits feeling most comfortable, herself, with the self-contempt she had acquired as a child. She exclaims:

Qu'il est doux de se rendre antipathique à soi-même. (CA,320).

In her mid-teens, Violette began to identify increasingly with her image of the "séducteur" - the man who had so disrupted her mother's life. Her mother, with her ambivalence towards both André and Violette, had always compared them: she often told her daughter that she resembled André, who had proved himself "lâche, paresseux, incapable". (B, 24). Soon after Berthe's marriage, Violette had to have her adenoids removed. She enjoyed resuscitating the image of André dying of tuberculosis; she enjoyed the pain her suffering caused her mother who, she knew, was haunted by the fear that Violette had inherited her father's fragility and would suffer the same fate. Violette was pleased to unsettle her mother in her new happiness:

Je réincarnais André, la blessure dans ma gorge humiliait encore ma mère jusque dans son mariage, jusque dans la maison de commerce où elle réussissait. Je répondais "non" méchamment quand elle me demandait si je souffrais. Je souffrais et ruminais. Elle voulut m'aider à me déshabiller, à me déchausser. Je refusais. Je me baissai, je dénouai mes lacets, je couvris de sang mes richelieu. /.../ Je suis sûre aujourd'hui que je voulais cracher le sang comme il le crachait; je voulais me rattacher à lui, je commençais à payer pour lui. (B, 59).

At school she played on the sympathy of her companions, emphasizing her physical fragility in a manner similar to the emotional blackmail she used with her mother:

Je suppliais mes compagnes, je leur expliquais que je gelottais. Elles acceptaient de me céder leur place près du radiateur. (B, 57).

Violette's choice of being was not only negative in that she assumed a negative destiny, choosing to be pitied, to be ugly and miserable. It was also negative in that, having made this choice, she blamed those around her, and particularly her mother, for the fate she had chosen. It was as if she wanted to punish them for not loving her, for rejecting her. However, at the same time, she made herself unlovable. She says herself:

j'ai eu l'audace, le cynisme, l'injustice de reprocher à ma mère d'avoir mis au monde un être laid. (B, 62).

And yet, whilst pitying herself for it, she chose to be "un être laid" - a figure who set out to undermine or destroy beauty, love or friendship. Leduc herself is lucid about this, alluding to what she calls:

mon besoin de détruire ce qui existe. (CA, 199).

Berthe used to admonish her daughter to take her studies seriously:

"Apprends", me disait ma mère. "Je ne veux pas que tu souffres du manque d'instruction comme j'en ai souffert."  
(B, 62).

However, Violette seemed to want to suffer as her mother had done. (And later she did regret her ignorance). Although she admired those of her school companions who were intelligent and hard-working, she did not emulate them :

J'admirais les élèves studieuses, intelligentes, douées. Je ne pensais pas ceci: je n'ai qu'à m'y mettre. [ ... ] j'étais paresseuse. J'apprenais mes leçons sans comprendre, sans retenir. (B, 58).

Her mother often called her "paresseuse"<sup>(12)</sup> and Violette knew that her mother suspected her, at times, of being "un cancre". (B, 136). She seemed to set out to prove this negative judgement of her right, rather than turning with determination to her studies, in order to show that her mother was wrong. When she went to the Collège de D..., Violette was "la plus mauvaise élève" and thoroughly assumed her negative image:

Je déteste la directrice, je déteste la couture, la gymnastique, la chimie, je déteste tout et je fuis mes compagnes. C'est triste mais je ne veux pas m'en aller d'ici. (B, 76).

At the Lycée Racine, in Paris, Violette did not take her studies any more seriously:

je repris ma place au dernier rang de tous les cours sauf à celui des littératures étrangères. (B, 123).

A year or so after her mother's marriage, Violette's relationship with Berthe began to change. As she grew less dependent on her,

---

(12) La Bâtarde, p. 106 and p. 131.

Violette became conscious that she resented her mother, and her desire to punish her became more evident. She writes:

j'avais l'âge de la désobéissance, (B, 73),

but, more than this, she was becoming aware that Berthe was only a mere human being, who also had her "hésitations" and "faiblesses".<sup>(13)</sup>

She confesses:

Aussitôt qu'elle faiblissait, je lui en voulais. (B, 132).

Whereas before, Violette had ardently admired her mother's "dédain intérieur" and her "chic", (B, 74), now that she was married, Berthe was busy serving clients in the new business and being attentive to her husband. To Violette, she was more than ever "une étrangère" who "se donnait trop aux autres". (B, 61). Furthermore, when Violette was sixteen, her mother became pregnant and her daughter observed that she looked "grosse" and "alourdie". (B, 63).

Was it really "sans réfléchir", as she says, (B, 63), that Violette made a comment to her narcissistic mother which, she knew, could not have been more hurtful? Or did she resent the pride her mother took in the anticipation of an "enfant légitime" ? (B, 62). By contemplating her mother and asserting that:

une femme enceinte, c'est laid, (B, 63),

was she not taking advantage of the opportunity to taunt her mother in the very way in which she herself had always been victimized? Indeed, just as her mother's marriage had done, the birth of Michel made obvious Berthe's preference for another. Violette later commented bitterly:

---

(13) Simone de Beauvoir. Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté, p. 57. (See page 389 of the present study.)



Enfant légitime, vous avez droit à tous les égards, à toutes les craintes. (FT, 74).

By the time she was sixteen, Violette had become exceedingly self-conscious about her physical appearance. She tells us that because she limped and her posture was bad, she had had to go to Paris with her stepfather to be fitted with an orthopaedic shoe and a special ribbed corset. As for her face, she writes:

J'avais peur de présenter mon gros nez à des étrangers. (B, 67).

She tells us she had become convinced that:

les autres se moquaient de mon visage. (B, 124).

And yet, as she herself is the first to admit, Violette also chose to attract attention to her face. Describing herself later, in the nineteen thirties, she wrote:

Je durcissais mon visage baroque avec des cheveux coupés au rasoir au-dessus des tempes, je me voulais un concentré de curiosité pour le public d'un café, pour le promenoir d'un music-hall parce que j'avais honte de mon visage et qu'en même temps je l'imposais. (B, 166-167).

She derived a certain pleasure in drawing attention to her "ugliness" and, in so doing, was reinforcing her choix originel:

J'exposais mon visage, mon chagrin. (B, 239).

Leduc elicits the reader's sympathy by citing some of the cruel comments about her face made by people passing in the street,<sup>(14)</sup> and yet she did not make up her mind to have a nose operation.

---

(14) A young woman said to her friends: "Moi, si j'avais cette tête-là, je me suiciderais". (B, 221). A man commented to his companion, in earshot of Violette: "La nuit, tu devines à quel moment je lui mettrais la tête sous l'oreiller". (B, 346).

She was loathe to leave behind her "bons vieux moments de chagrin". (B, 451). After her friend Bernadette, who naïvely believed that plastic surgery would mitigate Violette's sufferings, (as well as her friends'), made her undergo the operation, Violette disliked her "nouveau nez". (B, 453). Moreover, she was still left with her "petits yeux" and her "grande bouche"; (B, 123), so that her chosen destiny was unchanged.

Occasionally, Violette would attract attention to herself by wearing spectacular, lavish clothes. At other times, she would enjoy looking unapologetically pitiful. For example, she admits that she once went to visit Simone de Beauvoir, in the hope that her pathetic appearance would cause the latter pain:

Je suis arrivée le nez brillant, les cheveux tirés, sans un grain de poudre. Un spectre laid comme un pou. [ ... ]  
Je suis venue chez elle avec la volonté de la punir de mon chagrin, de mon visage laid. (CA, 24).

Leduc is lucid about her "désir de souffrir et de stagner". (CA, 24). We have seen that she associates her "chagrin" with her "visage laid"; the words frequently appear juxtaposed, in the same sentence. In more objective moments, she is aware of the "frivolité" of her "chagrins désordonnés" about her "visage laid". (FT, 193). She recognizes that ugliness can be virtually irrelevant, such as when she comments about Sartre:

J'aime le visage de Sartre. On dit qu'il est laid. Il ne peut pas être laid: son intelligence irradie sur ses traits. (FT, 56).

Beauvoir's reflection about Leduc in her preface to La Bâtarde seems absolutely right:

Sa laideur n'a pas commandé son destin mais l'a symbolisé: elle a cherché dans son miroir des raisons de s'apitoyer sur soi. (15)

It is interesting to compare Violette Leduc's complicity with her misfortunes with what Sartre wrote about Baudelaire. Whereas Simone de Beauvoir achieved independence from her parents by judging the gaze which judged her and finding her own values, Violette, like Baudelaire, received judgement "dans l'attitude du ressentiment, non de la critique."<sup>(16)</sup> Neither managed to grow out of what Sartre called "le complexe théologique qui assimile les parents à des divinités".<sup>(17)</sup> Their mothers remained idols, even if they became "des idoles haïssables"<sup>(18)</sup>, for both mothers married and sent their child away to school. What Sartre writes of Baudelaire is also true of Leduc, who had felt rejected prior to her mother's marriage but now became resentful and bitter as well:

A sa fureur d'avoir été chassé se mêle un sentiment de déchéance profonde. (19)

According to Sartre, Baudelaire chose, after this, to "faire figure de victime."<sup>(20)</sup> He did this to "assouvir ses rancunes", ("il veut donner des remords à sa mère"),<sup>(21)</sup> and he chose his suffering because he took pleasure in his unhappiness, in his faults, in his guilt.

---

(15) Préface, p. 8.

(16) J-P Sartre. Baudelaire, p. 65.

(17) *ibid.*, p. 67

(18) *ibid.*, p. 65

(19) *ibid.*, p. 20

(20) *ibid.*, p. 113

(21) *ibid.*, p. 114

He assumed the image of himself with which he was confronted at the time of his mother's marriage. He felt lonely and, writes Sartre:

Déjà il pense cet isolement comme une destinée. Cela signifie qu'il ne se borne pas à le souhaiter passivement [...]: il s'y précipite avec rage au contraire, il s'y enferme et, puisqu'on l'y a condamné, il veut du moins que la condamnation soit définitive. (22)

Is this not remarkably similar to Violette Leduc, who declared emphatically in her autobiographical novel L'Affamée:

Ma laideur m'isolera jusqu'à ma mort ? (23)

She internalized her mother's judgement of her and, even though she resented the judgement, she assumed the negative image which she read reflected in the gaze of others. She seemed to set out to prove it right. She chose to be unlovable - ugly and pitiful. The extent to which she - like Baudelaire - chose her solitude is clear from what she tells us about her relationship with others.

## II. The choice of solitude

From an early age, Violette Leduc associated love with the absence of the loved one. Because of her mother's love for André and her own love for her mother, she seems to have imagined that the recipient of love was always someone inaccessible and aloof, who felt disdain for the person who loved. Between the age of seventeen and her mid-twenties, we witness the beginnings of a life-long pattern in Leduc's relation to others. She was consistently fascinated by people who were inaccessible, whose life was "ailleurs",<sup>(24)</sup>

(22) J-P Sartre. Baudelaire, p. 20

(23) L'Affamée. Paris: Gallimard, 1948 (Coll. "Folio". 1974, p.192).

(24) Simone de Beauvoir told Violette: "Ma vie est ailleurs". (FT, 67).

and whose love it was impossible for her to obtain. To anyone who was foolish enough to show her affection, she responded with impatience and contempt.

The image of her father and of her mother's life-long love for him made a deep impression on Violette and left its mark on her own behaviour. Berthe had never really known the man who was father to her daughter, yet she would tell Violette:

Je n'ai aimé que lui, je n'ai aimé qu'une fois. (B, 20).

Berthe's love for André was nothing more than a fantasy, for he could not have been more inaccessible to her. As a maid in the family, uneducated and Catholic, she was in love with the idea of the young Protestant aristocrat, with his good education and fine gestures. Once pregnant, this "voyeuse de fils de famille", this "voyeuse d'aristo", (B, 23), as Violette sardonically calls her mother, was obliged to remove herself from André's sight. In Arras, with the baby born, "cette amoureuse inusable" (B, 26) would stand for long hours at the window, waiting in vain for the man she believed she loved. When she eventually went back to Valenciennes to ask André for money, he was already dead.

Ironical as she often is when she writes about her mother's evocation of this "inconnu", (B, 28), Violette's own dreams were influenced by her mother. She admits that for her, too, "un être lointain" was "un irrésistible". (FT, 183). She has the same fascination with money, fine clothes, polished manners and "des gestes précieux". (FT, 144). In La Folie en tête and La chasse à l'amour,

Violette writes of her passion, later in life, for Jacques Guérin, a passion doomed to be frustrated because he was a homosexual whom she scarcely knew.<sup>(25)</sup> However, his wealth, his luxurious life-style and his aristocratic mannerisms evoked the image of her father.<sup>(26)</sup>

Berthe, as we have seen, was also an inaccessible figure to Violette. When she was working long hours or when she sent Violette to boarding school, she was a "mère absente". (B, 53). However, even her presence did not bring her closer to Violette, who writes:

Aucune mère n'aura été plus abstraite que toi. (B, 25).

In L'Asphyxie, Violette asked herself whether it was not the very impossibility of ever reaching her mother which most kindled her passion:

N'était-ce pas l'impossible en elle qui me passionnait plus qu'elle-même? (27)

Even when Violette felt close to her mother, Berthe remained "une étrangère". (FT, 190).

Violette's feelings towards her mother were extremely ambivalent - as were all her later "passions". Berthe was at the same time a "mère adorée" and a "mère détestée". (FT, 73). Whenever she sensed that her mother was "indifférente", (FT, 190), Violette restored to childlike and masochistic behaviour, obsessed with her own "chagrin". (FT, 190). An episode which Violette relates when she

(25) Leduc met Jacques Guérin in 1947. He was a friend of Jean Genet. She dedicated L'Affamée to him.

(26) Leduc writes of Jacques: "Il est mon père exécré". (FT, 402).

(27) L'Asphyxie, p. 182.

was in her forties demonstrates the extent to which this life-long pattern of behaviour reflected her choix originel. Berthe had been staying with Violette in Paris; and the daughter was seeing her off at the station:

Je lui envoyais plusieurs baisers, son visage n'exprimait rien. [...] Etait-elle indifférente? [...] Je courus le long du train. [...] J'ai trop de chagrin, ce n'est pas permis d'avoir autant de chagrin. [...] Je me calmai après trois heures de larmes, de plaintes, de gémissements, de sanglots, de paroles balbutiées dans ma chambre. (FT, 190).

The complementary aspect of her "passion" for her mother was Violette's sadism. She tells us that at twenty-two, living in the best room of her mother and stepfather's apartment in Paris, she would steal money from her mother's handbag. We know that when she was ill, her mother would look after her for weeks or months on end; however, when her mother was ill, later in her life, Violette was capable of ignoring her completely and tells us so in the autobiography:

Seule dans l'appartement, livrée à une femme de ménage, à la visite quotidienne du médecin et de l'infirmière, elle ne pouvait pas se tenir debout. Sa maladie dura de longues semaines. [...] Tu vois, lecteur, je ne dissimule pas mon ingratitude et ma cruauté. (B, 358). (28)

Indeed, Leduc is not hiding her ingratitude and cruelty. On the contrary, she is demonstrating her original choice by showing herself once more to be unlovable. She herself does not seem to be aware of the extent to which she does this. Not able to understand her relationship with her mother, she asks herself:

(28) Leduc admits: "J'ai déserté à chacune de ses maladies". (CA, 307).

Je me vois mal agir et ne peux agir autrement. Je l'aime trop ou je ne l'aime pas assez? (CA, 323).

She knows her pattern of behaviour. First she deprives her mother and then, she predicts:

Je cultiverai mes remords. (CA, 323).

Sartre made the point about Baudelaire that his "remords" had "une importance fonctionnelle":

C'est lui /le remords/ qui fait de l'acte un péché; un crime dont on ne se repent pas n'est plus un crime, mais tout au plus une malchance. (29)

Leduc, too, needed to feel guilty and not just a victim, in order to see herself as an unlovable "monstre de laideur". It means that whichever way she reacted to her mother, she arranged it so that her "chagrin" was immense, for she was either feeling unloved or unlovable.

This pattern of interaction with her mother repeated itself in all of Leduc's later "passions". Whereas Simone de Beauvoir, in her adolescence, was consciously searching for new models to replace the parental judgement which she rejected, Violette Leduc did all she could to make sure that her mother's judgement was confirmed by others. Beauvoir identified with and emulated the models she chose; Leduc made the gap between herself and the object of her love unbridgeable. Beauvoir thrived on identification with positive models; Leduc thrived on what she calls "adoration".

Adoration est un mot qui ne me fatigue pas. (CA, 44).

However, in the autobiography, she shows on numerous occasions with what ease she could forget about or turn against those she believed she adored.

---

(29) J-P Sartre. Baudelaire, p. 103.



When she was seventeen and going to the Collège de D..., Violette developed a passion for Isabelle, an eighteen year old who was preparing for her final examination. As "la meilleure élève", (B, 76), Isabelle enjoyed special prestige in Violette's eyes. She intimidated Violette, for she was both beautiful and intelligent; as well, she was defiantly independent and aloof. Violette did not pour out her tribulations to Isabelle, for she was aware that Isabelle "s'en ficherait". (FT, 50). Isabelle, with her "air moqueur" and her "arrogance" (B, 106) became Violette's lover, while managing to keep her distance.

Isabelle left school to take up a position as a "surveillante" in Compiègne. In her loneliness, she turned to Violette and it was then that the latter's passion evaporated:

Je recevais des lettres tristes d'Isabelle. La superbe Isabelle devenait minable. Je lui répondais, je ne lui répondis plus. Je l'abandonnai ... (B, 111).

Violette had no time for Isabelle because she had become infatuated with Hermine. Hermine was older and a "surveillante" at the Collège de D.... Violette admired this "grande musicienne studieuse", full of zest for life and ambition for her music. (B, 111). Furthermore, she was aroused by Hermine's body. One night, she seduced Hermine, remaining in her room till the morning. They were denounced and Hermine was expelled from the school.

When they met again, clandestinely, Hermine asked her, like "une élève suppliante":

- Vous êtes fâchée? Ça vous déplaît de me retrouver?  
(B, 114).

Her subservience irritated Violette, who comments:

Je me demande pourquoi je me raidissais. (B, 114).

Indeed, Hermine's affection for Violette meant that their relationship was doomed. It gave Violette the opportunity to be demanding and sadistic. In Ravages, Cécile, the character in whom we recognize Hermine, says to Thérèse (Violette):

- Tu fais tout ce que tu peux pour me dégôûter de toi. (30)

Eight years later, Hermine decided to put an end to the "tyrannie". (B, 238). It was when she became inaccessible, when she became involved with another woman, that Violette's "passion" returned. Just as she did when her mother appeared indifferent, she became humble and self-pitying:

J'avais pleuré du matin au soir pour qu'elle m'aime comme elle m'avait aimée. [ ... ] Plus elle détestait mes supplications, mes lamentations, mes délectations, plus je m'y vautrais. (B, 238-239).

She admits that her "lamentations" were also her "délectations".

The extent to which Violette was attempting to re-enact her relationship with her mother with Isabelle and Hermine will be further explored in the next chapter. One last object of her youthful infatuations was Adrienne Monnier, who might also be regarded as a mother-figure.

As a respected friend of the avant-garde Parisian literati and owner of the bookshop and lending library, Adrienne Monnier was

---

(30) Ravages. Paris: Gallimard, 1955, (coll. "Folio", 1975, p. 191).

revered by Violette, whose visits to the bookshop resembled a kind of pilgrimage. She writes:

Mon coeur battait plus fort aussitôt que j'arrivais carrefour de l'Odéon. C'était automatique, j'entrais chez une fleuriste, [ ]... j'achetais un bouquet, je me vérifiais dans la glace rue de l'Odéon [ ]... J'entrais, je donnais mon bouquet à Adrienne Monnier. (B, 231).

After Adrienne once chatted very amicably with Violette, the latter tells us\* that she lost all sense of perspective: "je perdis la tête". (B, 233). When she discovered that Adrienne treated others with "la même amabilité", Violette became "lugubre, plaignarde" and "larmoyante". (B, 233). And when Adrienne employed "une jeune fille désagréable", as Violette jealously calls her, to help in the bookshop, Violette writes: "je devins tragique". (B, 233). She had a short moment of triumph when Adrienne took her in the back room to ask her the reason for her "chagrin", whereupon Violette fell to her knees and muttered "des fadaises compliquées". (B, 233). However, the young assistant then entered the room and Adrienne was covered with embarrassment.

Leduc writes scornfully:

Sa gêne à cause d'une collégienne demeurée, sa transfiguration pour une employée raide comme la justice me dégoûta, m'emmerda. (B, 233).

The episode marked the end of her passion for Adrienne Monnier.

Violette Leduc herself is perfectly aware that it was she who destroyed any chance of reciprocity with others, that she reconstructed the pattern of interaction she had had, as an adolescent with her mother, and that, in so doing, she was destroying herself. Without saying so, she seems to see the way in which she made herself unlovable as her choix originel:

J'étais incapable d'aimer [ ]...], de m'oublier [ ]...].  
 Je demeurais une enfant dont il fallait s'occuper. [ ]...].  
 La mante religieuse se dévorant elle-même. (B, 393).

And Beauvoir, commenting on Leduc's relation to others, makes the same point, stressing the element of choice:

Quand, l'un après l'autre, ils la quittent pour toujours, elle se désespère; et pourtant elle a atteint son but. [ ]...]. Parce qu'elle visa sa propre destruction. (31)

---

(31) Préface to La Bâtarde, p. 10.

CHAPTER FOUR

VIOLETTE LEDUC AS A PHYSICAL BEING

Violette Leduc, unlike Simone de Beauvoir, was very conscious of and very willing to write about the problems which she encountered as a physical being. Indeed, she emphasizes this aspect of her existence in the autobiography. We have seen that Leduc made it an aim of her writing to write openly about her own sexuality and to

approcher un peu la sensation dans l'érotisme, la décrire.<sup>(1)</sup>

She believed that it was particularly by attempting to portray female sexuality that she could make a contribution to the exploration and understanding of female experience.

Jane Rule, commenting on the first two volumes of Leduc's autobiography in her book Lesbian Images, claims that Violette Leduc:

has produced the most exact, sensual, emotional, and psychological record there is of a woman defined and diminished by her sexuality.<sup>(2)</sup>

Leduc shared Beauvoir's ambivalence towards her female body - but for different reasons, and with different consequences. Beauvoir, as an independent woman, rebelled against the status of object to which her female sexuality reduced her in the eyes of others. In Le Deuxième Sexe, she had commented on the "perpétuelle tension" felt by any woman who was striving to fulfill both her desire for autonomy and her "vocation sexuelle"<sup>(3)</sup> - a tension which I have

---

(1) Madeleine Chapsal. "Violette Leduc. La Bâtarde", p. 71.

(2) Jane Rule. Lesbian Images. London: Peter Davies, 1975, p.139.

(3) Le Deuxième Sexe, II, p. 539.

shown she felt herself. Leduc, too, experienced a tension between her sexuality and her position as a woman in society. In her case, she lacked feminine grace and "séduction", (B, 54), yet she was not a male either, endowed with the sexual attraction of male prestige. Indeed, she longed to be a desirable sex object. However, since she did not aim for reciprocity with others, her sexuality was not the problem to her very sense of identity which Beauvoir found hers. In fact, her sexual desires reinforced rather than conflicted with her choix originel. She desired the impossible; she tried to seduce those who were obviously inaccessible. She used her sexuality to manipulate others and as a means of destruction. Having discovered that, as a woman, she was "defined and diminished by her sexuality"<sup>(4)</sup>, she chose this destiny with a certain pleasure.

As is apparent in the case of Simone de Beauvoir, Violette's assumptions about female sexuality were conditioned by cultural influences within and outside the family.

#### I. Childhood

Violette's perception of her own body was, from the first, very negative. From an early age, she was conscious of her "fragilité" (B, 36) and that this made her distinct from other children, an out-cast amongst them.

She soon discovered that she was different from other children, too, in that she had had no father. She and her mother and Fideline

---

(4) Jane Rule. Lesbian Images, p. 139.

seemed to live on a "terre sans hommes" (B, 57). Men were distant beings - both frightening and fascinating. Indeed, as far as men were concerned, Violette was indoctrinated with her mother's own fears, prejudices and dreams. On the one hand, Berthe told her time and time again that:

Tous les hommes étaient des salauds, tous les hommes  
étaient des sans-coeur, (B, 39),

and she looked at her daughter in such a way that Violette knew she was identified with the enemy. On the other hand, although she had every reason to resent André, Berthe still glowed with passion when she told Violette about him:

Pas beau, mais quelle séduction. Toutes les femmes  
étaient toquées de lui (B, 23).

As well, Violette was witness to the efforts her coquettish mother made to please men; she saw how important it was to her to be "belle" and "élégante" (B, 47) whenever she was meeting "l'homme aux lorgnons" (B, 48). And the mother who had taught her daughter to beware of men betrayed her for a man: she married "l'homme aux lorgnons" and sent Violette away to school. Throughout her life, Violette felt the same ambivalence as her mother towards men: a mixture of resentment and idealization, fear and desire.

Simone de Beauvoir's childhood was spent in an ordered world in which the mind appeared to dominate the body; passion was an emotion which she only sensed through books, and pregnancies were happy events, which occurred only with marriage. We recollect that she never saw an adult undressed, and was taught never to contemplate her own body. Violette was brought up in a more chaotic, less rational universe, one in which - as she observed - people's

bodily desires led them to do strange things which were not always comprehensible. To Violette, passion seemed to be fundamentally physical and irrational.

When Violette was around the age of ten, she used to observe a half-wit neighbour, called Cataplame, court a woman whose husband was away fighting at the front. For days on end he would stare up at her window. With any sign from Madame Armande, he would emit "des cris inarticulés" and "sa braguette gonflait" (B, 43). One day Violette saw him actually being let into the house, whereupon the shutters were closed and the house became silent. Even in the evenings, after the crickets had stopped making their din, Violette would hear nothing when she pressed her ear against the door of the house. Weeks later, she found a small crowd of people in front of the house and a young girl told her excitedly:

- Cataplame a tranché la gorge de sa maîtresse. (B, 44).

Then there was Estelle, a girl who, whilst still living in her parent's house, "vivait pour la nuit, pour les hommes" (B, 39). Violette did not understand what that meant, but she did understand, when Estelle thought that she was pregnant, that her body might have led her into disaster:

je compris qu'elle attendait le sang et que c'était une attente terrible. Estelle allait et venait, elle vérifiait son linge. Cent fois, deux cent fois, elle s'essuya en marchant. [ ... ] "Je t'achèterai des pralines si elles viennent", me dit-elle. (B, 39).

Buying pralines during the war was, Violette reminds us, "une folie", but Estelle was lucky and Violette reaped the benefit of her relief.



If sexuality seemed to Violette to be associated with anxiety and madness and destruction, this was certainly reinforced by her mother. Her mother led her to believe that to "céder" to a man, in a moment of desire, meant:

Ne pas revoir le sang, grossir jusqu'à ce qu'un enfant sorte de vous, tombe dans le ruisseau avec vous. (B, 40).

Not only had Violette witnessed Estelle's obsession, but she was also constantly aware that she herself was the disastrous consequence of her mother's biggest mistake. She was made to see pregnancy as a calamity and maternity as a burden.

Berthe intimated to Violette that it was always women who suffered the consequences of sexual relationships. Men were "tous des cochons":

Abuser de vous, voilà leur but. (B, 39).

And, indeed, on one occasion, Violette found out for herself that males, having done with a woman's body what they wanted, could exhibit a cruel lack of feeling. A twelve year old boy, with whom she liked to play, arranged a clandestine meeting with her. With a great sense of ceremony, he told Violette to procure the house keys of a friend, to close the shutters and to wait for him. When he arrived, he told her to undress, and did the same. He lay on top of her and told her not to breathe, and he also held his breath. Then he said: "Je vous ai épousée". (B, 46). Her former playmate then:

se leva, il se rhabilla en me tournant le dos, il s'en alla sans me dire au revoir. [ ... ] Le garçon m'ignora chaque fois qu'il revint dans notre quartier. (B, 46).

Living as she did amongst women, Violette was made familiar with the mature female body and she knew about menstruation. She used to scrub her mother's back when she bathed, and she saw "le sang de chaque mois sur les bandes". (B, 39). When Estelle was afraid that she was pregnant, she showed Violette "le linge blanc" and later, overjoyed, showed her "le linge rougi". (B, 39). She even took Violette's hand and guided it over her genitals to show the little girl that there was no sign, yet, of any blood.

Adult male bodies, however, remained a mystery to Violette and, because of this, they were both frightening and alluring. During the war, when she was nine or ten, she was entrusted, by a friend of Estelle's, to take a private notebook to another friend. Told on no account to open it, Violette's curiosity was aroused. In it:

Une femme racontait sa nuit de nocces, elle comparait à une anguille le sexe d'un homme dans le sexe d'une femme. (B, 36-37).

Violette was incredulous; however, her imagination was fired. She writes:

Je voyais des anguilles chez les poissonniers: j'imaginai la virilité sinieuse sous le pantalon, depuis le nombril jusqu'à la cheville. (B, 37).

Despite these sinister associations with the male body, and despite all her mother's warnings, Violette was still able to enjoy a certain physical intimacy with males up until the time she reached puberty. However, solicitous adults stressed continually that it was dangerous and shameful to take pleasure in the company of males.

Aimé Patureau, a seventeen year old boy in the neighbourhood, had injured his foot and was confined alone in his parent's house.

One day, soon after the notebook incident, he beckoned to Violette from the window and, as they talked together, Violette, standing close to the injured boy's chair, felt a stealthy hand on her:

Sa main légère monta sous ma jupe. (B, 37).

Violette claims that she was not aroused by the boy's caresses. However, her cheeks were flushed when, some time later, Berthe rang the doorbell, "hagarde" and "furieuse". Violette never admitted to her mother how she and Aimé had passed the time, and her mother's harassed questioning merely had the effect of making her "complicité" with the boy seem particularly precious to Violette. (B, 37). She went back to see the boy as soon as she could.

When Violette was thirteen and convalescing in the country with her Aunt Laure, another such occasion arose. She was delivering a litre of milk, one Sunday evening, to the local cabaret when she was asked to dance by a young man:

Je répondis "oui" de tout mon coeur. [ ... ] il me serrait contre sa chemise trempée de sueur. [ ... ] J'aurais valsé jusqu'à l'aube. Le lendemain, Laure me gronda. Je m'étais amusée dans un endroit de perdution, je ne devais pas recommencer. Je trouvais la leçon stupide et indigne de Laure. Le dimanche suivant je portai le lait sans regarder du côté de l'estaminet. J'avais honte et je désirais recommencer. (B,52-53).

Violette's eagerness to see Aimé Patureau again, her wish to keep dancing with the young man in the cabaret indicate that she very much liked to feel desired. However, these were isolated incidents amongst a series of rejections. Above all, Violette felt rejected by the person she most loved - her mother. This resulted in a mother-fixation which seems to have played a crucial role in her early sexual preferences.

## II. The mother-fixation

In her chapter "La Lesbienne" in Le Deuxième Sexe, Simone de Beauvoir mentions "la fixation sur la mère"<sup>(5)</sup> as a frequent component of lesbian love. She comments:

C'est très souvent quand l'enfant a été frustrée de la tendresse maternelle que le besoin de cette tendresse la hante tout au long de sa vie d'adulte.<sup>(6)</sup>

Charlotte Wolff, a psychiatrist, goes further and makes the claim in her book, Love between Women, that "the real crux of lesbianism lies in emotional and not in sexual fixation"<sup>(7)</sup> and that:

Emotional incest with the mother is indeed the very essence of lesbianism.<sup>(8)</sup>

According to Wolff, it is either because she had been her mother's favourite or because her mother had not cared about her, that the mother's love is a priority and an obsession for many lesbians.

Violette Leduc herself is very aware of the obsessive nature of her relationship with her mother. Indeed, long before she had begun to write her autobiography, she had decided, with Maurice Sachs, that:

l'enfant en moi devra se libérer de la mère. (B, 363).

---

(5) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 193.

(6) *ibid.*, p. 181.

(7) Charlotte Wolff. Love between Women. London: Gerald Duckworth and Co., 1971, p. 147.

(8) *ibid.*, p. 60.

She portrays her relationship with her mother during her childhood and adolescence as quasi-sexual, and strongly implies that her lesbian loves between the ages of sixteen and twenty-nine were derived from her relationship with her mother. We know that Violette liked to think of herself, before her mother married, as Berthe's "mari". (B,40). She would imagine that she was going to work for her mother, bringing home "l'argent de la semaine", (B, 44),<sup>(9)</sup> and that she protected her mother, who looked more feminine than she did:

je la protégeais parce que de nous deux elle était la plus féminine, la plus belle. (B, 134).

In Thérèse et Isabelle, Violette writes bitterly about her mother's marriage, remembering with nostalgia the time, during the war, when they shared the same bed, to keep each other warm:

Nous aurions fait de grandes choses ensemble: nous nous serions suffi. J'avais chaud dans son lit. Elle m'appelait son petit gueux. [ ... ] Je lui disais que j'étais son fiancé.<sup>(10)</sup>

It is significant that it was soon after her mother's marriage that Violette first became obsessed with another woman - the assistant mistress at her boarding school in Valenciennes. As always, her adoration of another primarily meant suffering, both in the absence and in the presence of the adored one:

J'ignorais ce que je voulais. Je souffrais de son éloignement, je souffrais de son rapprochement. (B, 59).

---

(9) Violette Leduc also writes of this fantasy in Thérèse et Isabelle, bemoaning the thought that after her mother's marriage: "Je ne serai pas son homme de journée, je ne serai pas l'usinier qui lui apportera de l'argent. (p. 21).

(10) Thérèse et Isabelle, pp. 21-22.

On those Sundays when she was allowed to leave college, she took pleasure in telling her mother about her new heroine, perhaps hoping that her mother was jealous, as she herself was of her step-father:

Je lui décrivais mes émois, j'aimais mon auditrice, cependant ma mère commençait à ne plus être l'unique. (B, 59-60).

Violette's intimacy with her mother was further shattered by the intrusion, when she was fifteen, of a baby brother. Leduc writes that she did not feel jealous:

Pourtant, je souhaitais des amours extravagantes, de l'inceste. Je voulais une compensation, une revanche avec de l'anormal. (B, 63). (11)

Soon after the birth of her half-brother, it was decided by Berthe that Violette should become a Protestant, like her father had been. Violette attended confirmation classes on Sundays and there she met a pretty young girl called Aline. Sitting next to Violette in Church, Aline indicated the passages which were being read with her "main potelée". (B, 68). Violette was charmed:

Le soir, dans mon lit, pour m'aider à me souvenir de ce visage, de cette main surtout, mes doigts bouclaient ma toison. (B, 69).

Next time they were in church together, Aline was more friendly still:

Son bras se glissa sous le mien, ma main était dans la sienne, ses doigts entre les miens. (B, 70).

Holding her hand was a gesture which Violette complained in L'Asphyxie that her mother used never to make. Even Fideline had

---

(11) Leduc's wild desires for "amours extravagantes" and "inceste" were doubtless influenced in part by her reading. Unmoved by Racine and Corneille, she writes that she read Chateaubriand around this time and was greatly moved by his passion for his sister, Lucile (about whom he wrote in his Mémoires d'outre-tombe): "Je frémis enfin pour Chateaubriand, pour Lucile. J'espérais que l'inceste était consommé." (B, 58).

not held the little girl's hand in Church.<sup>(12)</sup> Violette was all the more flattered and delighted when Aline did so. She began to live for Sundays, when she would see Aline in Church.

One evening, she was invited to Aline's house and, since it was late, it was decided that Violette should stay the night. Sharing the same bed, Aline squeezed Violette's hand and went off to sleep, leaving her companion, "cet arc tendu de l'attente", very much awake. (B, 71). Violette stole a kiss from the sleeping girl, just as she used to kiss her mother when she was asleep.

Je m'approchai d'Aline, je cherchai sa bouche, je volai le baiser que je donnai. Aline ne s'éveilla pas, mes lèvres sur les siennes n'insistèrent pas. J'avais eu l'haleine de l'églantine dans ma bouche, cela me suffisait. (B, 71).

That night, "dans le lit de la pure Aline", (B, 71), a frustrated Violette decided that she had had enough of the Protestant Church and the catechism. With the Church, she lost "le bras, la main, les doigts d'Aline. (B, 72).

Violette was seventeen when she started to board at the Collège de D ... and met eighteen year old Isabelle. Just as with her own mother, Violette was intimidated by Isabelle's "arrogance" (B, 79) and her beauty. She told her:

---

(12) Violette recalls the "longues heures" spent in the Catholic Church with Fideline when she, too, was transformed into an "absente". (B, 30). "Un jour, je voulus désunir ses mains jointes. Elle me fixa avec tant de reproche et tant de tristesse que je joignis mes mains et remuai mes lèvres afin de lui ressembler. (B, 30-31).

- Je ne suis pas belle. Vous m'intimidez. (B, 93).

Isabelle calls Violette "ma femme, mon enfant" (B, 89), and "Thérèse", (in Thérèse et Isabelle) asserts that with Isabelle:

Je redevins une enfant. (13)

For a brief moment, on one of their passionate and sleepless nights in Isabelle's cubicle, the latter fell asleep. Violette describes the lips with which she kissed Isabelle's unresponding mouth as "mes lèvres de petite fille de huit ans". (14) It was at this age, during the war, that Violette used to sleep in her mother's bed and, presumably, steal kisses from her sleeping mother.

In both La Bâtarde and Thérèse et Isabelle, Leduc stresses that Isabelle's passion filled a gap left by her mother. In the autobiography, Leduc reminds us:

Ma mère s'est mariée, ma mère m'a trompée. (B, 76).

In Isabelle's bed, wrapped in her arms, she comments:

J'ai su que j'avais été privée d'elle avant de la rencontrer. (B, 82).

In Thérèse et Isabelle, she bitterly alludes to her mother's marriage, recalling things that her mother either said to her in response to the girl's demands, or things that Violette would have liked her mother to have said. As Isabelle's lover, she enjoyed a sweet revenge:

Sur terre il n'y a que toi, sur terre je n'aime que toi, me dit-elle, mais elle a quelqu'un. J'ai rencontré Isabelle, j'ai quelqu'un. Je suis à Isabelle, je n'appartiens plus à ma mère. (15)

---

(13) Thérèse et Isabelle, p. 24.

(14) *ibid.*, p. 33.

(15) *ibid.*, p. 22.



Violette admits her "divine ignorance" (FT, 296) of Isabelle as anything other than a sexual being. She was associated, in Violette's mind, with her mother, and she provided "une compensation". As well as this, Isabelle more than answered Violette's dreams of "amours extravagantes" and "une revanche avec de l'anormal". (B, 63). Isabelle was the incarnation of revolt and defiance of authority. In comparison with her "reine débraillée", (FT, 296), Violette was as Isabelle liked to point out, a "petite peureuse".<sup>(16)</sup> With an assistant mistress only a few cubicles away, the two girls visited each other in bed night after night. Both girls believed that love meant a commitment which entailed self-destruction. Hence, in Thérèse et Isabelle, Thérèse says to Isabelle: "Mourons, veux-tu?"<sup>(17)</sup> and, on another occasion:

Isabelle me signifia que nous ne nous regardions pas avec assez d'intensité. L'amour est surmenage.<sup>(18)</sup>

Despite Violette's passionate involvement with Isabelle, when she introduced the latter to her mother and was caught in between the opposing desires of the two women and their claims to her attention, she admits:

Je penchais du côté de l'intimité maternelle. (B, 107).

When Isabelle left the school, Violette developed a passion for Hermine, an assistant teacher. This time, it was Violette who seduced the other woman. However, she found Hermine too welcoming, too passive, with none of the aloofness which Violette admired in Isabelle and in her mother. After their first night together, she comments brutally:

---

(16) Thérèse et Isabelle, p. 87

(17) *ibid.*, p. 22

(18) *ibid.*, p. 87

Isabelle me manquait. (B, 111).

Just as had been the case with her mother and with Isabelle, Violette was very conscious that Hermine was more beautiful, more "féminine" than she was:

De nous deux, c'était elle la plus jolie, la plus féminine. (B, 154).

Like Berthe, Hermine was preoccupied by her appearance and Violette played the role of "son miroir" (B, 154). Violette writes that she was asked "si je voulais être son enfant" (B, 155), and Hermine used to call Violette affectionately "mon enfant à moi". (B, 181). As her mother had done, Hermine tried to make Violette dress in a more feminine manner and to interest her in fashion.

Violette soon became as possessive with Hermine as she had been with her mother and Isabelle. At the same time, her old fear re-emerged: her fear of rejection. She had plagued Isabelle with questions which betrayed this anxiety, such as:

- Si j'avais la lèpre est-ce que tu m'abandonnerais?<sup>(19)</sup>

And yet she had been eager to make Isabelle jealous, and made sure that she paraded her budding sexual interest in Hermine before her. Likewise, she constantly asked Hermine:

- Tu ne me quitteras pas ? (B, 197).

At the same time, she made unreasonable demands, particularly when she felt rejected:

Au début je n'exigeais rien. Maintenant, j'exigeais qu'elle vît moins les siens. Je méprisais leur vie de famille, leur spontanéité parce que je désirais cette vie et que toujours j'en serais rejetée. (B, 167).

---

(19) Thérèse et Isabelle, p. 127.

Whenever she felt left out of a part of Hermine's life, Violette seemed to want to hurt her, just as she had wanted to hurt her mother after Berthe's marriage. Not only was she jealous and possessive herself, but she wanted Hermine to be the same with her. When Hermine showed no sign of any jealousy after Violette continually came home reporting that she had been followed by men in the street, the latter burst out:

Ces hommes qui me suivent, tu t'en fiches. Tu ne pourrais pas être jalouse? Tu ne pourrais pas me retenir ici? (B, 224).

As Leduc admits herself, she even did everything she could to make sure that Hermine did leave her, just as her mother had left her:

J'avais travaillé jour et nuit à notre rupture. (B, 242).

Charlotte Wolff, in her book Love between Women, indicates some common elements frequently found in the childhood of women who choose other women as their lovers. According to this, Violette Leduc had a typical upbringing of a lesbian. Wolff comments on the striking number, amongst the subjects she analysed, of "powerful mothers [ . . . ] of a narcissistic, immature type, who had little or no motherly feeling."<sup>(20)</sup> Very many of her subjects were only children, which naturally made the relationship with the subject more intense. Many experienced, in their childhood, "the sudden intrusion of a man who took mother's full attention away from the girl".<sup>(21)</sup> Wolff also mentions that brothers, as well as father-figures, are frequent rivals in the girl's desire for mother love.

(20) Charlotte Wolff. Love between Women, p. 121.

(21) Since several of the subjects investigated by Wolff were born during the Second World War, this "traumatic experience" was the return home of the father.

These factors sound extremely similar to those common elements found in the families of "schizophrenics" as described by Bateson & Laing. (See p.387). Wolff does indicate that there is a certain correlation between homosexuality in women and the "incidence of neurosis and psychosis."

Although Violette was sixteen when Michel was born, and therefore somewhat older than the young girls mentioned by Wolff, the fact that he was not only a boy, but also legitimate, made the rivalry felt by Violette particularly acute.

Wolff, writing in 1971, considered what Beauvoir had to say on "la lesbienne" in Le Deuxième Sexe: "the most enlightened view on the subject which I have come across so far".<sup>(22)</sup> However, she takes the view that lesbianism is a destiny beyond choice (for the girl does not choose the emotional bonds which form her), and thus she disagrees with Beauvoir's stated belief that:

aucun destin sexuel ne gouverne la vie de l'individu: son érotisme traduit au contraire son attitude globale à l'égard de l'existence. [...] il s'agit toujours d'un choix effectué au coeur d'un ensemble complexe et reposant sur une libre décision.<sup>(23)</sup>

Simone de Beauvoir's conviction that homosexuality is a choice certainly seems true in the case of Leduc. As far as we know from the autobiography, Leduc's sexual orientation was solely homosexual up until her own marriage in 1939, and thereafter she only ever slept with men, although it is obvious that, throughout her life, she was attracted to both women and men. She herself believes, for this is what she suggests in her autobiography, that in her early lesbian relationships she was trying to reconstruct her former relationship with her mother - with all its possessiveness, self-abnegation and mutual destructiveness.

---

(22) Charlotte Wolff. Love between Women, p. 6.

(23) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 185.

She also stresses that her mother had made her afraid of men - and, in particular, fearful of conception. It is clear that because of this, Violette chose to be sexually attracted to those with whom she felt most safe - namely women and, later, male homosexuals. The extent to which her sexual experiences were chosen may also be gauged by the way in which they reflected her choix originel.

### III. Sexuality

Various factors influenced Violette Leduc's attitude to sex. We have seen that her mother-fixation led her, at first, to look to women for love-objects. However, women lacked social prestige, and Violette had learnt from her mother to value the attention and approval of men - the superior cast in patriarchal society. She had also learnt from her mother to fear and to beware of men. Her ambivalence towards the opposite sex and her view of sexual relations as a conflict for power stamped her sexual behaviour and fantasies throughout her life.

It is striking that what Simone de Beauvoir wrote, in Le Deuxième Sexe, about adolescent female sexuality applied to Violette Leduc until she reached menopause. Beauvoir points out that the frequency of a quite neurotic behaviour amongst adolescent girls can be explained by "l'ambivalence du désir et de l'anxiété" which they feel towards men.<sup>(24)</sup> Often, "par peur de la violence, du viol",<sup>(25)</sup> the adolescent girl turns first to another woman for

---

(24) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 108.

(25) ibid., p. 100.

love. Such love between women, Beauvoir claims, is often regarded as "une transition, une initiation, une attente",<sup>(26)</sup> for the young woman's cultural conditioning leads her to look for "une supériorité exceptionnelle" in her love-object, and another woman "perd vite son aura".<sup>(27)</sup>

L'autre qui a été choisie justement parce qu'elle était proche et n'intimidait pas n'est pas assez autre pour s'imposer longtemps; les dieux mâles sont plus solidement installés parce que leur ciel est plus lointain.<sup>(28)</sup>

If she does turn to men, as objects of her passion, in order to avoid "les contacts physiques qui effraient la sensibilité virginale",<sup>(29)</sup> the young woman cultivates her "goût de l'impossible".<sup>(30)</sup> In other words, she cherishes the hope of seducing someone who is absolutely inaccessible:

elle sait qu'elle échouera dans son entreprise et c'est là une des raisons de son choix.<sup>(31)</sup>

Because Leduc did not overcome her fear of men, of penetration and, above all, of conception until she was fifty, she retained, even as an adult, the behaviour pattern which Beauvoir observes is common amongst adolescent girls.

Violette writes that she was pleased when she first began to menstruate, at the age of fifteen:

---

(26) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 101.

(27) *ibid.*

(28) *ibid.*

(29) *ibid.*, p. 105.

(30) *ibid.*, p. 106.

(31) *ibid.*, p. 106.

J'entrai dans les cabinets, je plaquai ma main, je vérifiai ce que j'espérais, ce que je pressentais. (B, 57).

No doubt it helped Violette to be warned of what to expect. And, living amongst women at home and at boarding school, she was in the same position as everyone else, and happy to identify with her mother and with Estelle.

Beauvoir had claimed, in Le Deuxième Sexe, that whether warned or not of what to expect, the adolescent girl always found beginning to menstruate "répugnant et humiliant".<sup>(32)</sup> Leduc's reaction would appear to contradict this. It is significant, however, that Beauvoir had been horrified to be suddenly defined by her female body. As for Leduc, a similar crisis had occurred when she was thirteen, when she had read in her mother's eyes that her body made her unlovable. Since then, she had chosen to be defined by her body, choosing to be unlovable. It seems, then, that for her, too, it had constituted a crisis to be seen, suddenly, as an object. However, having accepted this and chosen it, she reacted quite differently to menstruating. It is possible, even, that she may have found it "répugnant et humiliant" and accepted it willingly because of this.

Violette seems to have happily accepted becoming a woman, even though she was acutely aware of its implications - implications which her mother had made seem very negative. As a child, Violette had let boys caress her without fear; from puberty onwards she was wary of males:

je me préservais des garçons, des privautés. Ma virginité ... mon bien, ma relique, mon trésor incomparable. Je me voulais vierge, poigne de fer, femme gangster qui ne déroge pas. Je ne flirtais pas: c'était une règle d'acier. (FT, 296).

(32) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 61

Her dreams of being a "femme gangster" with a "poigne de fer" were dreams of power. It was also because of a desire to dominate that Leduc was attracted to women - for men frightened her.

It was through Isabelle that Violette learnt what it meant to enjoy the power of giving or retaining bodily pleasure. When she became aware that Isabelle desired her, Violette felt triumphant:

je voulais en finir avec la joie: je m'exaltais jusqu'à l'orgueil. (B, 80).

The power which her caresses gave her over Isabelle delighted her:

J'étais sadique. Attendre et faire attendre est une délicateuse perdition. (33)

Violette was to enjoy this effective, even if short-lasting, dominance over her sexual partner on several occasions later in life. Indeed, sex, to Violette, was essentially a power game - and one in which she enjoyed both being the winner and the loser. In her liking for this game, she differed radically from Simone de Beauvoir, who aimed for reciprocity in her relationships, and who comments, about Leduc:

son malheur c'est de ne connaître avec personne un rapport de réciprocité: ou l'autre (34) est pour elle un objet, ou elle se fait objet pour lui.

It was her sadistic and self-punitive urges which induced Violette to make love to Hermine in front of a paying voyeur - knowing well that Hermine found the act both abhorrent and deeply humiliating. In fact, the episode finally persuaded Hermine that she was no longer able to love Violette.

---

(33) Thérèse et Isabelle, p. 52.

(34) Préface, p. 9



Violette Leduc herself intimates that she regarded lesbianism as an "initiation" and a "transition" - the typically adolescent attitude described by Beauvoir. The following image suggests that she turned to women as a result of emotional rejection:

J'étais allée vers les femmes comme le paysan isolé, un soir de neige, s'en va vers une crèche. (B, 274).

This image evokes the love of women as a source of comfort and warmth, rather than a source of excitement or sexual passion. After Hermine left her, Violette declares:

J'étais vierge malgré mes souillures. (B, 274).

In her restlessness and loneliness, it was to men to whom she turned her thoughts.

Throughout her life, Violette Leduc was fascinated by men who were inaccessible to her. Beauvoir's comment on the adolescent girl's "goût de l'impossible" is strikingly true of Leduc, and the latter is aware of it herself, for she asserts:

Je vins au monde, je fis le serment d'avoir la passion de l'impossible. (B, 393).

The men who were most decidedly unavailable to her, as sexual partners, were male homosexuals. Violette Leduc was attracted to a number of such men.

Violette met Maurice Sachs soon after Hermine left her, which was in 1934. He had a "bouche de femme", (B, 259), and he, too, called her "ma chère enfant" (B, 280), and yet he had a great advantage over Isabelle and Hermine: he was a man, with social prestige. Violette decided that she was in love with him, admitting,

in her autobiography that the impossibility of reciprocity was the very attraction of the passion - referring to her "séjour au paradis de l'amour impossible". (B, 398)<sup>(35)</sup> She comments:

On dit que les homosexuels abusent des femmes qui sont folles d'eux. Tant pis pour elles, tant pis pour moi. La folie d'un sentiment se paie de trente-six façons. Les aimer est un égarement luxueux. (B, 351).

The more her desire for Sachs seemed to be "folie", the more she believed it to be true (unreciprocated) passion. In more sober moments, she asked herself:

Mon désir de lui qu'est-ce que c'est? Mes entrailles montées à la tête. Beaucoup de vanité. Changer un homosexuel en une barre de fer rougie, plier cette barre. (B, 367).

She is lucid about the way in which she was exhilarated by the thought of power and she admits that her mind was influencing her "entrailles". However, it was not so much "vanité" which induced Violette to desire Sachs as the unlikelihood of success which attracted her. She chose to flounder "dans le brasier de l'impossible." (B, 383).

As well as the fascination of inaccessibility, homosexuals, particularly, had another enticement. To choose homosexuals as love objects was to choose to be rejected because of her body. Violette was able to extend the symbol of her unlovability from her ugly face to the whole of her female body. Thus she describes her self-consciousness when with Sachs:

Je marchai devant lui l'.... Je tendais mes muscles afin qu'il oubliât mes femmes féminines. (B, 260).

And after spending the evening with him, Violette comments humourously to the reader:

---

(35) Italics mine.

J'avais honte de mes hanches de femme quand je lui dis au revoir. Je me prenais pour Aphrodite, j'assassinais ma croupe. Me métamorphoser en jeune torero sortant vainqueur et glorieux de l'arène ... (B, 265).

By loving a homosexual, Leduc was asking to feel rejected, left out. She chose it because it made her miserable to be a woman amongst men who loved men. She writes:

les rapports d'amour ou d'amitié qu'ont les hommes entre eux me dévastaient. (B, 309).

Since she could not interest Sachs sexually, Violette took comfort in seeing herself in her habitual role of a "ratée". (B, 265).

Violette Leduc met Jean Genet in 1947, the year after the publication of Miracle de la Rose and L'Asphyxie. She immediately threw herself into a new impossible passion - quite forgetting Sachs. She writes about this with lucid self-mockery:

[...] pendant que Maurice Sachs disparaissait de plus en plus en Allemagne et que je ne m'en souciais pas, je m'acheminais vers Genet avec les fragiles nuances d'un début. Un homosexual de génie, quel programme de sacrifices inouïs, quelles suaves immolations en perspective! (FT, 125-126).

With Genet, too, Leduc never forgot that her body made it impossible for him to return her passion. She complains:

j'étais empêtrée dans ma féminité. (FT, 142).

She was convinced that his "sourire ironique" was directed at her "doigts de femme" and at her female body, which she disparagingly calls "un moule à enfants". (FT, 201).

Genet did not conceal from Violette that he found her obnoxiousness with him intolerable, and Leduc laments - as if it were the end of an affair:

Genet ne me supporte pas, l'histoire est finie. (FT, 208).

However, Leduc's behaviour was no different with Jacques Guérin, whom she met through Genet. Not only was Jacques a homosexual, but he was also extremely wealthy. Whereas Genet, who made no concessions to Violette, reminded her of her mother<sup>(36)</sup>, Jacques, with his wealth and luxurious surroundings, his studied manners and practised gestures, evoked her father.<sup>(37)</sup> She knew Jacques scarcely better than her mother had known André, and her infatuation with him - as she herself is aware in more lucid moments - was fantasy. However, her passion for Jacques is as much a leitmotif in La Folie en tête and La Chasse à l'amour as is her adoration of Simone de Beauvoir. Echoing her mother's proclamation of her love for André,<sup>(38)</sup> Violette decides that Jacques:

est le premier homme que j'aime et que j'aimerai jusqu'à la fin. (FT, 409).

He remained an object of her adoration from their meeting, in 1947, until the end of La Chasse à l'amour, in 1964, and probably beyond this date. Leduc seems to have been determined to show herself as constant in her passion as her mother had been with André.

---

(36) "Genet ressemblait à ma mère". (FT, 145).

(37) "je me demandais si mon père avait ces gestes-là ou non". (FT, 144).

(38) Berthe told Violette: "Je n'ai aimé que lui, je n'ai aimé qu'une fois". (B, 20).

To choose to love Jacques was to ostentatiously and determinedly choose rejection. Soon after their first meeting, Violette declares:

j'aime Jacques et ne finirai pas de l'aimer. Miserere,  
miserere. (FT, 209).

Since these men were homosexuals, Leduc was not risking the physical intimacy with them which terrified her. Nevertheless, they had male bodies - which attracted her. She admired Genet's "nuque d'homme" (FT,202) and Jacques' hand which, she noted, was "plus masculine que celle de Genet". (FT, 147). Even Jacques' cigarette was "une cigarette d'homme". (FT, 284). Since, to her, a cigarette evoked a "sexe blanc, sexe étroit, sexe en papier, sexe tatoué"(FT,232), she liked to imagine that being offered a cigarette had a symbolic meaning. Fascinated by the row of Gitanes in Jacques' black leather case, she writes:

Je rêve qu'il m'offre une Gitane, je la palpe avant de l'allumer. (FT, 285).

However, despite her fantasies, Jacques remained such a physical abstraction that Violette once asked herself:

A-t-il une braguette? Je ne l'ai jamais vue. (FT, 220).

Whilst Violette Leduc only fell in love with inaccessible homosexual men, she would also occasionally respond to the invitations of men she met in the street - apparently with the aim of proving to herself that she could seduce a man if she wished - or dared. Once again, she was using sex as a power game rather than acting upon any actual sexual desire. She was also confirming to herself the negative picture of men which her mother had painted.

As a "femme plaquée" (B, 272), abandoned by Hermine, Violette was eager for new experiences. She once accepted a lift with a man - well knowing what he desired from her. Having confirmed the truth of her mother's warnings about men, Violette, disgusted, comments:

Les hommes toujours disponibles m'étonnent autant que des météores. Ils rencontrent une bouche, ils se jettent dedans. (B, 267).

When the man lifted up her skirt, she became frightened, and fled.

Gabriel Mercier, being an effeminate male and a latent homosexual, proved to be a transition from homo- to heterosexuality. Violette had first met Gabriel when she was nineteen, living in Paris, and involved with Hermine. He was sitting next to her in a cinema, and she offered him a cigarette, hoping that he would follow her. He did. She portrays him, at twenty-six, as "frêle" (B, 296), with a "démarche un peu féminine" (B, 126). In Ravages, Marc has "une taille de jeune fille" and "des bras de jeune fille". (39)

For Violette, Gabriel represented a kind of "sécurité." (B, 129). Despite his effeminacy, he was a man, with a "bouche d'homme". (B, 125). Having a man beside her, offering her things, made her feel more worthwhile.

J'entrai dans le troupeau des femmes à qui un homme offre quelque chose. (B, 125).

To Leduc, this was new and flattering. Above all, Gabriel liked her - and, as Leduc points out, "je plais rarement". (B, 128).

Violette Leduc was not at all physically attracted to this

---

(39) Ravages, p. 162.

frail man:

Je ne désirais pas Gabriel, je ne voulais pas qu'il me désirât. (B, 125).

He was short, she was tall. His clothes were dirty and shabby and made Violette ashamed to be with him. Furthermore, he did not have the lure of inaccessibility: he was socially and sexually available to Violette. She describes her caresses as "frauduleuses" (B, 129); the kisses she gave him were "forcés" (B, 133). Indeed, most of the time he treated her like another man, calling her "bonhomme" and encouraging her to do "manly" things such as to smoke in the street.

J'étais son homme, il était ma femme dans ce corps à corps de l'amitié. (B, 188).

When Violette moved in with Hermine and, under her influence, became more feminine in her dress and behaviour, Gabriel disappeared from her life. Years later, after Hermine had left her, Violette's thoughts turned to Gabriel again. She wanted a male lover, and Gabriel, with his "douceur" and "patience" (B, 126) appeared to her less threatening than other males.

Je souhaitais souvent retrouver Gabriel, pour commencer avec lui. (B, 274).

After ten years of absence, she met Gabriel again. However, when she had her chance, Violette still could not bring herself to make love, as a woman, with a man:

J'ai demandé à Gabriel de m'aimer comme un homme aime un autre homme. La frousse, la terreur sacrée de la petite croix à côté de la date sur le calendrier? Au premier plan, oui. /.../ Au second plan le souhait d'un couple d'homosexuels sur ma couche. (B, 287).

There is no suggestion of physical desire or sexual fulfilment in Leduc's description of her sexual relationship with Gabriel. Describing their anal intercourse in more detail in Ravages, Leduc experienced it as an ordeal. She felt nothing - other than pain, followed by gratitude. Sex merely brought her psychological fulfilment. Having a male lover meant that she could hold her head up in public:

J'arrivais le matin au travail la tête haute - il me semblait que les miroirs me courtoisaient -, je partais le soir en donnant des coups d'éperon avec les talons de mes escarpins, je toisais les femmes pendues au bras de leur amant, je leur lançais: moi aussi c'est dans un lit que je serre un homme dans mes bras. (B, 288).

Soon after the war broke out, they married - at Violette's request. She was proud of what she still considered her virginity:

j'étais fière de mon tabernacle sous ma toison. (B, 293).

Having married, she wanted them to make love like a heterosexual couple. Her fear of conception had diminished: as a married woman, she was in no danger of repeating her mother's mistake. However, the act of vaginal penetration still frightened her. In Ravages, in which Leduc claims to have given a true account of the beginning of their married life,<sup>(40)</sup> she describes the disappointment and the relief she felt after her initiation:

Ce n'est que cela, me disais-je, mais j'essuyais avec gratitude la sueur sur son front. Je n'ai pas mal, me disais-je.<sup>(41)</sup>

---

(40) "J'ai raconté mes premières amours singulières dans Ravages." (B, 287). "J'ai raconté dans Ravages notre installation, nos débuts [ ... ], nos drames." (B, 296).

(41) Ravages, p. 281.



For his part, Gabriel was no longer sexually attracted to Violette - if he ever had been. On their wedding night, he suggested to her that they live together "comme frère et soeur". (B, 295). As we would expect, his lack of interest aroused Violette's desire. Their sexual relations, reflecting their emotional relationship, became a struggle of wills. The more Gabriel refused to make love, the more Violette begged for it. She writes:

Son argent, c'était encore son sexe qu'il me refusait. (B, 324).

The extent to which sex merely gratified Leduc's desire to manipulate people, rather than reflecting any physical desire, is made further apparent by an episode in which she tried to take vengeance upon Gabriel for his lack of interest in her. In order to spite, and to arouse the jealousy of her husband, she arranged to have sex with a street-seller. She admits:

Il me dégoûtait et c'était dégoûtant notre arrangement. (B, 347).

However, her physical disgust was secondary to her aim to "trionpher". (B, 347). In a sense she did triumph, for as she herself says, about her relationship with Gabriel:

Je m'acharnais à le garder en m'acharnant à le perdre. (B, 325).

She lost him - after a brief period of cohabitation.

In 1947, Patrice, a schoolboy, wrote to Violette Leduc about L'Asphyxie, which he had liked. Violette was flattered, but, more than this, she writes that she immediately had designs on him:

Un lecteur serait-il une proie sur laquelle j'allais me jeter? /.../ j'étais tentée par l'abîme qui sépare une femme de quarante ans d'un adolescent de dix-sept ans. (FT, 213).

Tempted by the power she could wield over an inexperienced young male, Violette did not succeed in making him her "proie". However, this did not prevent her from trying, after that, to seduce Flavien, Patrice's eighteen year old schoolfriend. Waiting for the unknown schoolboy to turn up (late) at her hotel room in his town in Normandy where she had gone to meet him, she reflects that this was another occasion on which a man had triumphed over her:

je suis dans une chambre où j'attends un gamin. [ ... ]  
 Pas de chance, je tombe chaque fois sur des hommes qui se font désirer. Des hommes? Deux hommes: Jacques et Gabriel. Huit heures trois, je suis une délaissée, il se fout de moi. [ ... ] Pourquoi suis-je ici, pourquoi suis-je venue? [ ... ] Pourquoi la réserve de Patrice ne me suffisait-elle pas? A quoi vais-je jouer avec Flavien? (FT, 267).

It is abundantly clear, even to Leduc, that it is not a question of "chance", or lack thereof, which made her "desire" certain men. She planned to seduce Patrice and Flavien before she ever set eyes on them. What attracted her was both the lure of power and the high risk of failure.

Full of self-pity, Leduc emphasizes her sexual frustration. She complains that, in the company of Flavien:

[ ... ] mes ovaires et le reste ont faim. (FT, 271).

In fact, however, Leduc herself knew that her sexual desires were a product of her own choice. If it was really sexual gratification that she wanted, she knew that there were more likely sources than either homosexuals or two timid young schoolboys. In reference to sex, she writes:

J'aime mendier, j'aime demander, obtenir, profiter. (B, 324).

In actual fact, she rarely had a chance to "profiter", for she chose

circumstances that made it unlikely that she would obtain what she liked to believe she wanted: power over another and sexual fulfillment.

When Violette reached menopause, she was liberated from her fear of conception. At fifty, she seems to have really enjoyed sex as a physical pleasure. For the first time, she slept with a man to whom she was physically attracted and without fear of pregnancy. At this age, she experienced her "premier orgasme". (CA, 186).

Whereas, to Simone de Beauvoir, menopause represented a loss of sexual desirability - a situation which caused her considerable anguish -, for Violette Leduc menopause meant, above all, the release from her fear of pregnancy. At forty, when she was planning to seduce Patrice, she still first calculated whether she was safe from the risk of conception:

Enfin le calendrier me surveilla avec mes dernières gouttes de sang ... Quelle horreur, mes raisonnements. (FT, 253).

Since Gabriel had left her, she no longer had the respectability of marriage, should she become pregnant. Thus she greeted menopause as a relief: "merveilleuse stérilité". (CA, 187). As for her mother, she reacted as if Violette had been released from an evil spell cast upon her since puberty:

Ma mère a respiré, aussi fort qu'un professeur de culture physique. [ ... ] Elle me souriait, j'avais un sexe anodin de petite fille [ ... ]  
 - Pauvre enfant, tu l'as bien mérité, [ ... ] tu vas pouvoir en profiter ...  
 - Profiter de quoi?, ai-je demandé  
 - Prendre quelqu'un. [ ... ] estime-toi heureuse. Il y en a qui perdent la tête. (FT, 166-167).

Thirty-three years after the affair with Isabelle, René reintroduced Violette to the heights of sensuality. In René, she found someone who was sufficiently "autre" to excite her.<sup>(42)</sup> He represented the virile maleness which she had never known, never dared to know:

Un homme, un vrai. (CA, 145). [ ... ] Enfin un homme. (CA, 144). [ ... ] Pas d'équivoque avec René. (CA, 183).

This "beau mâle" (CA, 153) was "un homme fort"; (CA, 159); he was "puissant". (CA, 169). To Violette, he seemed the embodiment of "virilité". (CA, 270).

At fifty, however, almost twenty years after her brief cohabitation with Gabriel, Violette still feared penetration. The first time they slept together, she writes:

Je m'ouvre pour souffrir, pour gémir ... il y a si longtemps. [ ... ] C'est terrible: un sexe énorme. J'étais redevenue vierge. [ ... ] Je serrais mes dents pour souffrir. [ ... ] Une vieille enfant a demandé à être violée. [ ... ] (CA, 170).

To reassure herself, she imagines for a moment that she is the man - the aggressor - and he her female prey:

Je me rassure. Il est une femme, je suis un homme. (CA, 160).

After her initial fear, however, Leduc was delighted to feel like a woman with this man, and to feel she resembled other women:

Je suis contente, je ressemble aux autres femmes. (CA, 170).

Having a man in her bed seemed to her to give her new worth in society. She declares:

---

(42) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 101

je suis solide, j'ai un homme dans ma vie. (CA, 170).

and

Je suis belle, un homme se plaît chez moi. (CA, 180).

Above all, she seems to have been happy to identify with her mother's weakness for an egocentric predator of the female body. Vis à vis René, she had no rights at all. Just as André had done with Berthe, René, writes Violette, "m'a quittée tout de suite après son plaisir." (CA, 280). He visited her when he felt like sex and did not conceal to her that he had come for that purpose alone.

Violette asks herself:

Une femme hors du lit valait-elle moins qu'une mouche sur une vitre? (CA, 253).

Was she reminded of her mother's role of maid in André's house when René told her to put on her "petit tablier" to serve him his meal?<sup>(43)</sup> (CA, 159).

As far as René's egoism is concerned, Violette calls herself "résignée" (CA, 288); however, she is more than this. She admits: "René excite mon imagination." (CA, 233). It is clear that Violette was sexually aroused by feeling humiliated. Even her sexual fantasies place her in a humiliating role, such as when, contemplating René's penis, she addresses it silently:

Votre balancement m'enivre. [ ... ] Sortez de votre fourreau, donnez-moi le sexe cru d'un chien. (CA, 290).<sup>(44)</sup>

(43) In La Bâtarde, Violette imagines that André had been excited by her mother's "petit tablier blanc" which she wore as a maid. (B, 24).

(44) Violette has this same fantasy when she makes love with Isabelle. She writes about Isabelle's exploratory finger: "Je l'aspirais, je le refoulais, je le changeais en sexe de chien, rouge, nu." (Thérèse et Isabelle, p. 108).

The fantasy recurs when she is masturbating in La Chasse à l'amour. She announces: "La chienne est prête." (p. 23).

She knew that the only hold she had over René was in her seductive caresses:

Je garderai René des heures si je lui donne mes doigts de velours, ma matrice en satin. (CA, 288).

At such times, she feels triumphant:

un autre est à ma merci. (CA, 289).

However, her power was short-lasting. René came and went as he pleased, and one day he left her and never came back.

Between Leduc's disastrous sexual relationships were long periods of abstinence. In these, Violette tells us, she resorted to masturbation. In the preface to La Bâtarde, Beauvoir comments that:

le narcissisme s'achève dans l'onanisme.<sup>(45)</sup>

And Violette herself, while masturbating, acknowledges her fundamental narcissism:

Je désire, je ne peux désirer que moi. (FT, 210).

In Le Deuxième Sexe, Beauvoir maintains that adolescent lesbianism is often hardly distinguishable from "la délectation narcissiste."<sup>(46)</sup> Indeed, the element of narcissism in Leduc's description of her love-making with Isabelle is blatantly apparent. Isabelle's body is frequently described as an extension of her own. "Notre chair nous aimait",<sup>(47)</sup> writes Leduc, describing the movements of "notre doigt consciencieux".<sup>(48)</sup> The effect is one of a confusion between bodies rather than a sharing of bodies.

---

(45) Préface, p.16.

(46) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 96.

(47) Thérèse et Isabelle, p. 33.

(48) *ibid.*, p. 34.

It was due to Hermine's influence that Violette had begun to masturbate, when she was twenty-eight years old.

Hermine m'apprit qu'elle avait appris en lisant un livre de Freud. (FT, 211).

Leduc admits that at the time she thought that: "Ce sont de vilaines manies." (FT, 212). However, her attitude changed with time, so that she wrote about it in the autobiography with a certain pride. In La Folie en tête, reflecting on herself at the time of writing - 1965 - Leduc affirms:

J'aurai bientôt soixante ans. Je suis plutôt fière de le signaler: ma vigueur me revient plusieurs fois par an. Je cède à cette monotonie vertigineuse. Pas une plage de tendresse pour se reposer après, comme après l'acte de d'amour à deux. Le feu a tout brûlé. (FT, 212).

On the subject of masturbation, Leduc is deliberately daring to write what women have rarely dared to touch upon before her, aware that, in so doing, she is helping to liberate the female experience from the traditional silence imposed upon it:

Je l'ai caché jusqu'à maintenant. Je viens d'enlever mon bâillon. Absurde bâillon. Si quelqu'un m'avait prise en flagrant délit, s'il l'avait raconté, je serais tombée malade de honte. (FT, 211).

To conclude these comments about Leduc's sexuality, it is evident that, despite her ambivalence towards her female body, her own conflicts were quite different from those of Simone de Beauvoir. Leduc was not striving for autonomy or reciprocity or dignity within relationships. On the contrary, she used eroticism as a means of demeaning her sexual partners and herself. Thus, contrary to Simone de Beauvoir, her sexuality did not conflict with her choix originel. Her physical existence reflected and paralleled her emotional existence.

IV. Maternity

Since Violette Leduc's fear of conception was an integral component of her sexuality, this subject has already been touched upon in the previous section. Evidently she was terrified of repeating her mother's experience. Not only had she internalized her mother's warning, but she herself had suffered acutely as a result of her illegitimate status.

Such was her fear of pregnancy that as soon as she became pregnant, when she was married to Gabriel, she envisaged an abortion.

Le sang ne coula plus. Je ne voulais pas garder l'enfant.  
(B, 354).

Although Violette was a married woman, Berthe was horrified and Violette comments:

elle confondait sa fille mariée avec une jeune fille séduite. (B, 354).

Gabriel, on the other hand, wanted to keep the child. In Ravages, "Thérèse" makes it clear that she was partially exhilarated by the prospect of abortion. It seems that she was not sorry to disappoint Gabriel and to be, once more, her mother's "miroir aux déceptions".<sup>(49)</sup> Describing her first of many trips, in a matter of weeks, to an abortionist, Leduc wrote in Ravages, (and again, she refers to this as a true account of the events):<sup>(50)</sup>

---

(49) Ravages, p. 450.

(50) "Je l'ai écrit dans Ravages". (La Bâtarde, p. 354).



Je me préparai pour mon expédition, je dépliai mon linge sur une chaise, je rassemblai le coton, les bandes, les épingles. [...] J'aurais été joyeuse et déçue si le sang était revenu pendant mes préparatifs. (51)

As she made her way to the abortionist, having told neither her mother nor her husband, "Thérèse" reflected:

Que ma mère sera satisfaite quand elle saura que je me suis débrouillée. (52)

In fact, Violette's pride in her independence was shortlived. She made several trips to the abortionist and all were failures. She went to another address and this time, five and a half months pregnant, the intervention was successful, but almost killed her. After some time in hospital, she was confined to bed for several months - once again dependent on her mother's care.

She had almost died with her miscarriage, just as her mother had almost died giving birth to her. However, unlike Fideline and unlike Berthe, Violette had refused maternity.

Leduc does not give any reasons for not wanting the child. We know that her image of motherhood was certainly not positive. However, what seems more significant still is that Violette was constantly making herself into a child figure in her relations with others, unable to identify with her mother to the extent of seeing herself as a mother figure. In Ravages, "Thérèse" gives as her reason for wanting an abortion:

---

(51) Ravages, p. 427.

(52) ibid., p. 429.

- Je veux redevenir une jeune fille dans un collège. (53)

Elsewhere in the autobiography, she observes that a constant pattern in her interaction with others has been her role of child:

Je demeurais une enfant dont il fallait s'occuper. (B, 393).

Leduc's abortion took place in 1940 or 1941, and when La Bâtarde was published, in 1964, abortion was still illegal in France. It was thus a political act of a certain courage to write about her abortion in her autobiography. We recollect that, for whatever reason, Beauvoir, who wrote about an abortion in the early forties in Le Sang des autres, did not mention, in her autobiography, whether she had had to face the dilemma herself.

However, in the autobiography, Leduc scarcely touches upon the problems associated with illegal abortion. In Ravages, she describes in more detail the "sage-femme" to whom she returned fourteen times in vain, the old woman's anxiousness that Violette should not be seen leaving the apartment, the sparkle in her eyes when Violette mentioned the payment. The second woman to whom she went agreed to abort her at five and a half months, and when she had finished with her, she pushed her outside and shut her door, leaving Violette wondering whether she would die before she reached the ground floor. In hospital, Berthe told Violette not to admit to the doctors what she had had done - even though, by this time, Violette was close to death. Violette had septicaemia - caused by the unhygienic conditions of the abortion.

---

(53) Ravages, p. 443.

By the mid sixties, Leduc's attitude to abortion, like her attitude to masturbation, had changed. In 1971 she, along with Beauvoir and other well-known women, signed the Manifeste des 343, in protest against the abortion laws in France. And in La Chasse à l'amour, written in the early seventies, Leduc declared:

Je suis pour l'avortement libre. (CA, 196-197).

Thus, as far as sexuality is concerned, the autobiography is very much an attack on certain social - particularly sexual - taboos.

As far as Leduc's attitude to old age is concerned, the autobiography reveals very little.

In La Chasse à l'amour, Leduc recounted her life up until 1964 - when she was fifty-seven. Her death, in 1972, put an end to her plans to continue the autobiography. We do not know whether René was her last lover, although Leduc believed he would be at the time; commenting pragmatically:

C'est le premier, c'est le dernier. Après pubis deviendra gris. Les vieux cheveux ne sont pas pour les amants. (CA, 242).

The ending of La Chasse à l'amour, some of it written from the viewpoint of the author in 1971, is serene. Living in Faucon, far from the bustle of Paris, she seemed to experience nature as a companion - friendly and consoling. She felt, for once, in harmony with her surroundings:

Comment je vieillis? En me traînant. L'ouïe résiste.  
J'entends les trémolos et les trilles au loin. (CA, 406).

For the first time, she had chosen her solitude, and, alluding to phrases of Sartre and Gide, she proclaims:

Je suis seule, je suis la bienheureuse parce que l'enfer  
ce sont les autres.

[...]  
Familles, je ne vous hais pas. Je me suis retirée. (CA, 405).

It seems likely that the ageing of her body brought this narcissist a certain liberation from her obsession with her ugliness and with her sexual power relationships. For the first time since puberty, she chose not to be "defined and diminished by her sexuality".<sup>(54)</sup> She had become a successful writer; she no longer needed the approval of any particular male in order to feel valid as a woman.

To conclude, I have argued that Violette Leduc's attitude to her own body and to sexuality - like Beauvoir's - was primarily linked to emotional and psychological factors stemming both from her specific situation and from contemporary social attitudes towards women.

Leduc's "ugliness" was a biological given, but it is apparent, as Beauvoir argues, that:

sa laideur n'a pas commandé son destin.<sup>(55)</sup>

After all, Leduc sexually attracted both women and men. Rather, it was, as Leduc once admitted herself, her "tête" which commanded her

(54) Jane Rule. Lesbian Images, p. 139.

(55) Préface, p. 8.

"entraîlles". (B, 367). Her sexuality was inextricably linked with her choix originel.

Generally, Leduc saw women as inferior creatures, but since she had already accepted her own identity as inferior, her sense of self did not conflict with her female body. Leduc liked to feel inferior - this was the basis of any of her "passions". Indeed, Leduc used her sexuality to further debase herself.

I suggested earlier that Simone de Beauvoir's virtual silence, in her autobiography, about her sexual existence was not merely due to discretion but also due to the conflicts and anguish which it caused her. Her desire to portray herself as a model independent woman meant that she scarcely touched upon the subject of sexuality. Leduc, on the other hand, writes a great deal about herself as a physical being - precisely because in this, as in so much else, hers was a "vie de ratée". (FT, 331). One woman considered herself an overall success and so wrote little about a major area of conflict; the other considered herself an overall failure and flaunted her sexual experience as an example of this. The picture we are left with is certainly not a positive one.

Indeed, these two autobiographical accounts seem to reinforce what Beauvoir wrote about the "choice" open to women in Le Deuxième Sexe. We have seen that Beauvoir, at times in her life, chose to "répudier son sexe" for the sake of her dignity as an independent subject. Leduc, on the other hand, used her "rôle de femelle" to

reinforce her choice: "se mutiler".<sup>(56)</sup> As Beauvoir pointed out in her essay, either choice involved "une mutilation".<sup>(57)</sup>

---

(56) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 524.

(57) "C'est ce conflit qui caractérise singulièrement la situation de la femme affranchie. Elle refuse de se cantonner dans son rôle de femelle parce qu'elle ne veut pas se mutiler; mais ce serait aussi une mutilation de répudier son sexe. (Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 524).

CHAPTER FIVE

THE THREE IMAGES OF WOMEN.

Leduc's account of female experience is a striking illustration of one of Simone de Beauvoir's claims: that a woman is "entourée de tentations presque irrésistibles" and that "tout l'incite à suivre la pente de la facilité".<sup>(1)</sup> Indeed, the women whom Violette Leduc portrays in any detail are shown as choosing one of three roles: dévouement, narcissism or independence. Some women are shown to assume different roles at different times - which further indicates that Leduc considers them roles rather than personality traits.

Like Beauvoir, Leduc intimates that the dévouée and the "narcissiste" are fleeing from reality and that, in so doing, they are consciously choosing to deceive themselves. The one exception to this is Zézette, who is a dévouée in a working class family, living in the same apartment block as Leduc. The latter, who greatly respected Zézette, seems to be suggesting that her dévouement is entirely authentic behaviour, for she is shown to have established a relationship of equality and reciprocity with her husband.

Leduc sees herself as a supreme narcissist, and narcissism is the behaviour in women which she best understands.

Leduc ardently admired independent women and, of these, the best portrait is that of Simone de Beauvoir. Nevertheless, Leduc never knew any of these women, who were often her idols, at all well, and she was always conscious of an unbridgeable distance between them and herself.

Although Leduc mocks the dévouée and the narcissist with her savage irony, and although she looks up to the independent woman as an ideal, the moral

---

(1) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 480.

dimension which dominates Beauvoir's autobiography is not an aspect of Leduc's writing. Just as she makes no real effort herself to emulate the independent women she admires, she does not expect exemplary authentic behaviour from others. There is no suggestion of rewards and punishments for moral courage or for self-deception.

We are rarely given the opportunity to view the characters over time. They do not interest Violette after they have disappeared from her life - as most do. Other women are only ever described in relation to herself. Bearing this limitation in mind, let us see how Violette Leduc describes women in their various roles.



I. "La D vou e"

Unlike Simone de Beauvoir, Violette Leduc was not brought up with the idea of "la grandeur du d vouement".<sup>(2)</sup> Religion did not play an important role in her childhood, despite her grandmother's piety. Without a man in the house, Berthe could only idolize the memory of Andr , who, as even she was forced to admit, had proved himself "l che, paresseux, incapable". (B, 24). Nevertheless, Leduc shows that Berthe liked to justify herself by immersing herself, if only temporarily, in the role of d vou e .

Leduc does not condemn d vouement per se; her reaction to it depends on whether she sees it as a complacent choice or as an inherent part of the woman's situation. Leduc presents Berthe, Hermine and Julienne in a critical manner, for all of them chose this role with obvious mauvaise foi , preferring their "conception magique de la r alit ",<sup>(3)</sup> as Beauvoir had described it, to reality itself. In Le Deuxi me Sexe, the latter had described such a woman as less selfless than she liked to make out:

La plupart du temps, c'est d'abord la justification, l'exaltation de son ego qu'elle demande   son amant. <sup>(4)</sup>

Leduc shows this to be particularly true in the case of Hermine and Julienne. On the other hand, Leduc writes with respect and affection about Z zette - a working class woman, who did not need to project an image of martyrdom in order to justify her existence.

The first glimpse of d vouement in the autobiography is the picture Leduc constructs of the twenty-one year old Berthe, pregnant and in love, leaving the town of Valenciennes for the sake of her seducer's reputation. She had set out on what Leduc, with the advantage of hindsight, calls her "marche au sacrifice".

---

(2) Une Mort tr s douce, p. 53.

(3) Le Deuxi me Sexe II, p. 431

(4) ibid., p. 482.

Once Violette was born, the "grande amoureuse" (B, 27) is conjured up, in Violette's imagination, perpetually hovering by a window, hoping for the sound of André's carriage - so insistently love-sick that her mother and her friend, Clarisse, became impatient with her naïvety. Clinging, despite his indifference, to the myth of an "amour définitif", (B, 24) Berthe told Violette years later, even though she had married another man, that André was her unique love:

je n'ai aimé que lui, je n'ai aimé qu'une fois. (B, 20).

One evening - just one, when Violette was two months old, André did visit her, and Violette describes how her mother had always chosen to recall the episode:

Je dormais, ma mère entendait enfin le roulement de la calèche, l'arrêt des roues, le claquement de la portière, le pas dans l'escalier, le pas trop pressé dans le couloir aux rats. Un monsieur en tenue de soirée entrant, il tapotait le menton de la mère et celui de l'enfant, il ne voulait pas donner sa maladie. Ma mère resplendit quand elle dit: "Il ne t'a pas embrassée une seule fois. Tu m'entends? Pas une seule fois! C'est un champion de la prudence. L'heure, la montre plate. "Je vais dans le monde, petite, je m'en vais." Elle doit lui demander: l'ange Fideline se fâcherait, il ne comprend pas l'extase. Elle demande, il donne deux louis, il s'éclipse, la calèche roule avec plus de légèreté. Je le voyais, cela me suffisait, le reste ne m'intéressait pas, rêve-t-elle." (B, 26).

Although Berthe does not appear to have been in love with the man she eventually married, she tried to repay her gratitude to him for marrying her by sacrificing herself to him. Violette writes bitterly:

Elle a abdiqué sa personnalité en se mariant. (FT, 45).

As a married woman, she worked in the business from eight in the morning till eleven at night with "courage", "volonté", "énergie" and "générosité". (B, 61). Years later, after the Second World War, Berthe left Paris, where she had loved to live, to go with her husband to the country, which she had always disliked. Violette describes her mother on her farm, no longer well off, and, in her sixties, playing the role of the devoted farmer's wife, sacrificing herself, even where there was no need:

J'aurais voulu sangloter. Pourquoi? Pour ses galoches, pour ses belles jambes de citadine. [...] Ma mère était trop méticuleuse quand elle nettoyait l'étable et le poulailler plusieurs fois dans la journée. (FT, 379) (5)

Violette does not portray her mother as a totally submissive dévouée. It was a role Berthe adopted to justify herself, but, at heart, she was too egocentric to find lasting happiness in self-sacrifice. As Violette puts it:

Ma mère a des accès de courage, des crises de dévouement, ensuite elle se repose et se plaint. (CA, 306).

She began to complain to Violette about her husband, and one day, even packed her bags and left, but by the end of the day, it was obvious to Violette that she needed her long-suffering role of wife and mother:

Ma mère ne pouvait pas vivre séparée de son mari et de son fils. Nous parlions d'eux sans cesser. (B, 131).

The sacrifices she did make, she liked to make well known. As a mother, as well as a lover and wife, she thought of herself as devoted: "une mère irréprochable". (6) In this way, the apparent martyr became the oppressor in the way described by Simone de Beauvoir in Le Deuxième Sexe:

le don devient exigence selon l'ordinaire dialectique du dévouement. (7)

The privations which Berthe suffered because of Violette bound the latter to her with chains of guilt and gratitude. Berthe, whom Violette calls "trop humble et trop envahissante", (CA, 308) would complain:

- Je fais tout pour toi, [...] je fais tout pour que tu sois contente. Qu'est-ce que tu as à me reprocher? (B, 132).

The role played by Berthe was so oppressive to the daughter that she internalized it herself. When Violette was stricken with pleurisy, her description of her efforts not to wake her mother with her coughing shows that she had learnt to play a self-abnegating role in exactly the same way:

(5) Italics mine.

(6) L'Asphyxie, p. 188.

(7) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 496.

ma période d'amour, mon abnégation, mes sacrifices pour ne pas l'éveiller la nuit. (B, 47).

The portrait of Hermine describes a far more selfless woman still. Hermine, writes Violette, was "une droguée de sacrifices". (B, 155).<sup>(8)</sup> Violette rapidly became the reason for her existence, and in order to justify living for love, she was, Violette suggests, addicted to self-sacrifice. If "elle voulait être une martyre", (B, 154) Leduc implies that it was because it was only in so doing that she felt indispensable.

When Violette first met her, Hermine, at twenty-three, seemed to be "une grande musicienne studieuse". (B, 111). She practised the piano for hours each day, studied harmony at the conservatorium and talked to Violette passionately about music.

After their first night together, Violette already hints at Hermine's passivity, for suddenly she poignantly missed Isabelle. Because of this sole night spent together, someone denounced them and Hermine was told to leave the school. She became a primary teacher in Auvigny, a village far away from the piano she needed for her career, and far from her family to whom she was devoted. When Violette visited her in the village, some time later, she comments, incredulous:

Sa vie était foutue, Hermine rayonnait. (B, 152).

It is significant that both Hermine and Berthe felt guilty, for this seems to have reinforced their tendency towards dévouement. Hermine felt that she had gravely erred. Because it was she, and not Violette who was

---

(8) Italics mine.

expelled as a result of their night together, when she next saw Violette, she asked, like an "élève suppliante":

Vous êtes fâchée? Ça vous déplaît de me retrouver? (B, 115).

She asked this even though it was Violette who had taken it upon herself to visit her in her room at night. Berthe, too, felt that she had sinned, even though André had seduced her, visiting her in her maid's room. Because she was a domestic servant and he a "fils de famille", (B, 24) she felt guilty not only of losing her virginity, but also of trespassing, as she thought, into what was considered a superior social class. Fifteen years later, she was extremely grateful to the man who was prepared to marry her, just as Hermine was relieved that Violette still loved her. (9)

In the description of her relationship with Hermine, Violette constantly expresses disappointment, impatience and anger with her lover's subservience and self-effacement. The gratuitousness of Hermine's sacrifices lowered her in Violette's eyes. On her first visit to Hermine in the village where she had become not a music teacher, but a primary school teacher, Violette was stricken, as she observed Hermine busying herself around her flat, with "une crise d'ennui". (B, 153). Hermine had been preparing for her visit for days; she had made a new nightdress for the occasion:

La chemise de nuit avec l'empiècement de dentelle ocre cousue au point de bourdon me plaisait-elle? Oui, elle me plaisait. Elle devait me plaire. (B, 152).

Hermine insisted on serving Violette in bed. When Violette asked how she spent her evenings, far away from her family, the reply came:

- Je couds, je t'attends, je t'écris, je lis tes lettres. (B, 155).

---

(9) We recall that Madame de Beauvoir, another dévouée also felt grateful to her husband for loving her, especially as she was unable to provide the dowry her father had promised. (See p. 210).

She no longer had a piano and when Violette urged her to rent one, Hermine was adamant:

- Non puisque je vais demander mon changement pour me rapprocher de toi. (B, 155).

Hermine obtained a transfer to Paris and Violette left her family to move in with her. From this time onwards, their relationship steadily degenerated. Hermine became totally immersed in her "rôle de servante", (B, 253). and Violette felt increasingly stifled by it.

Elle me tue et je n'ai rien à lui reprocher, me disais-je pendant qu'Hermine préparait notre dîner, qu'elle m'expliquait un point de tricot, qu'elle me promettait la lune. (B, 188).

Hermine's sole desire was to please Violette, and her musical ambition was diverted into this obsession. She used to buy fashion magazines and material to make clothes not for her but for Violette. Sometimes, in order to alter or finish making something she would stay up all night sewing. As for when they made love, Violette writes:

Hermine voulait ce que je voulais. (B, 169).

So determined was Hermine to maintain their respective roles intact that nothing, not even lying, was a challenge for Violette. Warming up to a story she was telling Hermine about the flattering comments which she claimed were made to her by men in the street, Violette asked provocatively:

- Si je mentais tu me croirais?

Hermine replied, ("avec amour"):

- Je te croirais. (B, 209).

In the episode with the voyeur, too, Hermine remains in her role of naïve dévouée. She disarmingly asked the man about his wife - "avec un bon sourire honnête". (B, 228). Finally, having failed to persuade Violette to leave the

hotel and not to comply with the man's wishes, she sighed and made her decision to remain with Violette into one more sacrifice offered up in the name of love:

- Soit. Je ne m'en irai pas puisque tu ne veux pas partir. (B, 229).

However, Hermine had not completely lost her critical faculties and capacity for independent thinking. It was this episode and Violette's constant attacks, designed to wound Hermine's pride as much as possible - such as when Violette told her:

- De nous deux c'est toi qui penses le plus à toi, (B, 224)

that made Hermine finally revolt.

The fact that Hermine's dévouée role was a conscious choice and that no role is ever permanent is made clear by the way in which Hermine could step out of the part. When she realized that she no longer loved Violette, the change was extraordinary. She decided that the endless sewing bored her, so she gave up. Instead of making Violette's desires her own, "elle commandait". (B, 237). She suddenly had whims of her own and would often refuse to comply with Violette - who knew this was a sign of the end:

Ses désirs ressemblaient à des adieux. (B, 237).

Whereas before she had always been very retiring, now she liked to stand out.

On their last holiday together in Cannes, Hermine, Violette recalls:

se donnait des airs de grue avec son short plus court que celui des autres et ses hauts talons. Je lui disais que Cannes s'habillait, que nous étions trop dévêtues. Elle riait, elle s'en fichait. (B, 237)

We know, however, that with her next girlfriend, she resumed her old role. When Violette briefly met her again, she was shocked by the sight of the hands which Hermine had always looked after with such care. Hermine explained: "C'est la vaisselle". (B, 246).

Thirty years after their separation, Violette Leduc still writes about Hermine with bitterness. Indeed, there is only one other person towards whom

Violette shows a comparable degree of animosity - her mother. Doubtless, this was partly because they were the only women on whom Violette was emotionally dependent. (Isabelle, Simone de Beauvoir and other friends retained a certain distance.) It was also because both women had had to make major sacrifices on account of Violette. They had lost nothing less than their jobs and their social respectability because of her. Violette resented the psychological tyranny - the guilt and the gratitude - which their dévouement brought about. Just as Simone de Beauvoir does, she shows that by sacrificing herself, the dévouée had found the surest means of chaining her loved one. (10)

After the departure of Hermine from her life, Violette became friends with Julienne, a twenty-six year old secretary colleague of hers. Impressed by her "vitalité", "vivacité" and "la flamme de son intelligence", (B, 256-257), Violette soon discovered that Julienne's inner fortitude came from her pantheistic religiosity and from her idealization of men and love. A member of the Dominican order, she recommended to Violette Les Pères de l'Eglise and Saint Jean de la Croix. However, her ardour was not only directed towards religion but at nature and more particularly at men. Violette and the other secretaries in the office exchanged mocking smiles behind Julienne's back, for the naïvety of the young woman never ceased to amaze them:

Son aveuglement, je veux dire sa générosité lorsqu'il s'agissait de sentiments pour l'autre sexe était stupéfiante. [..] Julienne espérait, souhaitait, attendait le mariage avec une lumière de légende dans ses yeux. [..] Elle faisait confiance à tous les hommes. (B, 271).

In her "musiques", her "lectures", her "promenades" and her "aspirations", Julienne, writes Leduc with irony, was constructing an image of her future:

---

(10) It is significant that Leduc writes that she could not have left Hermine on her own initiative: "J'avais été toujours lasse d'Hermine, c'est ainsi. Je ne l'aurais pas quittée." (B, 275).



Elle sculptait son mariage, son mari. (B, 271).

Her "méditations", her "prières" and her "insomnies" were centred on her image of "l'époux de l'avenir" with his "beauté à la Byron" and "ses cheveux, comme ceux de Jésus". (B, 271). Just as Beauvoir had written of "l'Amoureuse", "l'amour" was a central part of Julienne's "religion".<sup>(11)</sup> When she went out with Violette, she would cease to take part in the conversation and would gaze, "extasiée" at young couples in love. As for young men, Violette comments pointedly:

Julienne les regardait avec avidité, elle ignorait qu'elle les désirait tous. (B, 270).

One summer, on holiday in the south of France, Julienne met Roland:

Cet homme qu'elle avait toujours connu, qu'elle rencontrait enfin, répondait à toutes ses prières. (B, 274).

She returned to the office in Paris, "une radieuse somnambule". (B, 273). She knew virtually nothing about her lover, not even whether or not he had a job. However, since she had given him nothing less than her virginity, and like Berthe, she liked to think of love as "définitif", (B, 247), she busied herself ecstatically making "des projets de mariage". (B, 274). From this time on:

elle ne vivait que pour lui et le midi. (B, 289).<sup>(12)</sup>

Like Berthe and like Hermine, Julienne's mauvaise foi was such that she was prepared to arrange reality with great ingenuity in order for it to coincide with her "conception magique de la réalité".<sup>(13)</sup> It scarcely seemed to matter to Julienne that although she and Roland had become engaged by correspondence, he had not come to Paris, as arranged, to meet her parents.

Bien sûr qu'il viendra, elle n'en doute pas. (B, 289).

(11) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 478.

(12) Beauvoir had written about the relation of "l'amoureuse" to her "amant": "il faut que tout ce qu'elle est, tout ce qu'elle a, tous les instants de sa vie lui soient dévoués et trouvent ainsi leur raison d'être." (Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 487).

When, one day, she discovered that Roland's love letters to her were copies of Diderot's letters to Sophie Volland, her serenity remained unshattered. Not in the least disturbed that she had been deceived and that her "petits rires de plaisir" had been in response to what another man had written to another woman, she felt enthusiastic rather than humiliated:

- C'est magnifique. Roland est magnifique. (B, 275).

Months later, the situation was unchanged. Roland, who had still not appeared, had asked Julienne for money and she had sent him some. Her myth of ideal love was still intact:

Incapable d'amertume, elle reconstruit. (B, 349).

Whereas Leduc clearly shows the element of complacency, "l'exaltation de son ego",<sup>(14)</sup> in the behaviour of Berthe, Hermine and Julienne, her attitude is quite different towards Zézette, whom she describes, this time with admiration, as a "femme dévouée". (FT, 302). Her dévouement was not a flight from reality; nor was she seeking any special merit through sacrifice. "Ses sacrifices", writes Violette, "tous silencieux". (CA, 80).<sup>(15)</sup>

Zézette was a woman of action, with her feet firmly planted on the ground - "une femme solide". (CA, 79). Indeed, "elle trônait dans son royaume de femme toujours raisonnable". (CA, 291). When Violette first met her, Zézette was a young wife, expecting her first child, and one of the gauges of passing time in the autobiography are the appearances of Zézette, who, each time we meet her, has another child, and soon has four. In order to rear four children on worker's

---

(13) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 431.

(14) *ibid.*, p. 482.

(15) *Italics mine.*

wages, she needed all "sa force, son énergie", (FT, 79) and her capacity commanded respect. ("Tous respectaient Zézette". (CA, 80) ). She was too busy to play at virtue. Her house was cheery rather than in impeccable order. (Leduc writes: "Leur salle à manger en désordre m'envoûtait". (CA, 80) ). She did not interfere with her children's games or exhibit her privations on their behalf. (16)

Violette, whose childhood was so different, was drawn to the warm, loving atmosphere in which the children grew up and in which she was always a welcome visitor:

Zézette portait le même manteau pendant dix ans. [..] Elle achetait pour les siens, elle était soulevée de terre. Zézette criait mais elle les aimait d'un amour parfait. Etre seuls pendant une soirée, ses enfants n'auront pas su ce que c'était. Elle leur a donné du bonheur et de la gaiété. (CA, 80).

Zézette, Leduc assures us, "ne pensait pas à elle". (CA, 79). However, her concern with others did also take the form of an excessive interest in their affairs. Human, rather than saint-like, she was addicted to talk: "Elle se soulait de paroles". Furthermore, (Leduc cannot resist a little gentle irony) "elle enjolivait avec l'opium des mensonges inoffensifs". Because of this, she was "la vedette" in the neighbours' kitchens where "elle énumérait les nouvelles du quartier" on her way here or there. (CA, 79).

Basile, Zézette's husband, had to work overtime to support the large family, but Violette remarks that Zézette and Basile were "heureux au-delà de leurs acrobaties pour leur fin de mois". (CA, 123). She who, on every other occasion, is the great cynic about "amour parfait", is struck with the sincerity of the love and compassion of this happy, noisy, struggling family, and declares:

J'aurais voulu célébrer leur entente, leur bonheur, leur union sur le violon d'un Vivaldi. (CA, 123).

---

(16) Leduc gives us a beautiful description of the children's occupations. The eldest, Baba, "s'enfermait. Elle lisait des romans, assise des heures sur la cuvette des cabinets. Antoine, doué pour le dessin, colorait les machines sorties de son imagination. Il se bagarrait avec les images d'un western à la Télévision. Le poêle tirait mal, la franchise explosive de Thierry assainissait leur salle à manger. [..] Clémentine, la dernière petite fille, dormait sur la table. (CA,

Thus, Zézette is hardly a dévouée in the negative sense given to the term by Simone de Beauvoir. Indeed, the label tends to lose its pejorative sense when taken out of the context of the self-regarding bourgeoisie. Beauvoir's autobiography lacks such portraits of working class women. However, in Le Deuxième Sexe, she made the point that, in underprivileged social groups, the man may well have less autonomy and sense of fulfilment than the woman at home, for:

cuisinant, lessivant; menant sa maison, élevant ses enfants, elle manifeste plus d'initiative et d'indépendance que l'homme asservi à des consignes; il doit tout le jour obéir à des supérieurs [...] ; elle peut traîner en peignoir dans son appartement, chanter, rire avec ses voisines; elle agit à sa guise, prend de menus risques, cherche à atteindre efficacement certains résultats. Elle vit beaucoup moins que son mari dans la convention et dans l'apparence.<sup>(17)</sup>

This description does seem to apply to Zézette and Basile. Zézette was not sacrificing her life or her own interests for her spouse and family any more than her husband, who came home from work at ten in the evening, had dinner and invariably fell asleep in front of the television. The children, who rarely saw him except after a hard day's work, regarded him as somewhat laughable:

Ses enfants se moquaient de lui s'il s'endormait la bouche ouverte, les yeux retournés, exténué. (CA, 123).

Because the sacrifices made by Basile and Zézette were equally necessary for the family, Zézette had neither reason nor inclination to project an image of martyrdom; she did not need to use such means to justify her existence. Her situation did not induce the "lumière de légende dans ses yeux",<sup>(18)</sup> which we notice in Berthe hoping for André's carriage, in Hermine waiting hand and foot on Violette, or in Julienne expecting her fiancé to turn up to marry her. Only Zézette's dévouement was genuine altruism, for her sacrifices were necessary for the survival of the family.

---

(17) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 452. (Italics mine).

(18) La Bâtarde, p. 271.

Violette Leduc was not acquainted with the pious, bourgeois dévouée committed to God, husband, family and her social status, with whom Beauvoir was familiar. The two mothers Leduc describes, Berthe and Zézette, were struggling to make ends meet. Berthe was an unmarried mother. Nor is Leduc writing about young girls who were destined to leave their private school to walk straight into marriage. Both Hermine and Julienne were working women, and self-supporting. Hermine was unconventional enough to love women. Of these people, it is only Julienne whom we know to have been deeply religious, as Zaza and Madame de Beauvoir were. And yet all these women, both generations of them, shared the same aspirations, dreams and hopes as Beauvoir's dévouées. All, except Zézette, defined themselves exclusively in relation to their loved one: hoping to earn the love of the other, and justify their own life, they made a cult of self-sacrifice. Significantly, the more obvious it became that their love was unreciprocated, the more ardently they clung to their role - or fantasy. Only Zézette, who was genuinely indispensable in the situation in which she lived, could assume the role with authenticity, for her sacrifices were necessary and justified. The implication, which Leduc makes, that Zézette, although a dévouée, was acting without mauvaise foi, is an important new aspect to the picture of dévouement presented in the two autobiographies.

## II. "La Narcissiste"

Violette Leduc never forgot herself for a moment; she was obsessed with her image in the eyes of others. Perhaps because she portrays herself as a narcissist, she is lucid about the social and psychological conditions which induce women, in particular, to contemplate themselves as if they were an outsider. She is no more indulgent towards the narcissist than towards the dévouée. However, trapped by narcissism herself, it is a temptation which she shows to be hard for women to avoid.

Violette believes that she acquired her excessive preoccupation with her image from her mother. Despite her dévouement in the family circle, and although she stressed to her daughter the importance of independence, Berthe was, above all, a narcissist. Always concerned with her image in the eyes of others, she would say to her small daughter, time and time again:

Qu'est-ce que vont dire les gens? Qu'est-ce que vont penser les gens? Qu'est-ce que diraient les gens? (B, 20).

Contrasting with its actual harshness was the web of fantasies which Berthe spun around her situation. For years she had played the part of "une grande amoureuse", (B, 27) deserted by the man she loved. Throughout Violette's childhood and adolescence, Berthe would emphasize to her daughter their link with the rich, Protestant family in Valenciennes - for she liked to think that they were related. Because her daughter was partly created from aristocratic blood, Berthe imagined that she was superior to other children. Thus, Violette writes, with her usual irony:

Je suis la fille non reconnue d'un fils de famille, je dois rivaliser en soins, en médaille et chaînette d'or, en robes de broderie, en longues anglaises, en teint clair, en cheveux soyeux avec les enfants riches de la ville lorsque ma grand-mère me promène dans le Jardin public. L'ange se charge en gouvernante. [..] déhors c'est la représentation. (B, 27) (19)

Berthe would tell Violette about her "grand-mère" who spoke "comme un livre", (B, 21) and would point out members of the family when she saw them walking in Valenciennes. In L'Asphyxie, Leduc writes how, when they passed a certain elderly gentleman in the street, who, upon seeing them, would invariably cross the street, (casting side-long glances at Violette) Berthe would tell her daughter proudly: "Cet homme-là, c'est ton grand-père".<sup>(20)</sup> Violette was not allowed to go along "la rue la plus imposante de la ville", because, her mother explained to her, "c'est ta rue".<sup>(21)</sup> And, despite the fact that she did not inherit her father's name, Berthe decided that Violette should be confirmed in her father's Church. "Il était protestant, tu seras protestante". (B, 68).

If Berthe liked to cheat a little with reality, she did have one very real advantage - of which she was well aware: her beauty. Her vanity and her desire for perfection made not only her but also her daughter "une maniaque de ses toilettes". (FT, 164). Violette remembers her mother at twenty-five:

J'ai cinq ans, j'ai mes gants blancs, elle s'habille, se déshabille, se rhabille, nous sortirons j'aurai pour mère la femme la plus chic de la ville". (FT, 380).

Because, as Leduc writes, "dehors c'est la représentation", (B, 27) Berthe hated to be caught unawares. In L'Asphyxie, Violette describes her mother's reaction when someone rang the doorbell at a moment when she did not look her best:

- Je n'y suis pour personne, dit ma mère qui se déplaisait. <sup>(22)</sup>

Generally, however, the narcissist is not caught unprepared, for, even alone, she imagines herself in the gaze of others. Violette, who learnt this from her mother, admits:

Nous avons besoin d'être attifées quand nous ne sortons pas. (FT, 165).

---

(20) L'Asphyxie, p.9.

(21) *ibid.*, p. 39.

(22) *ibid.*, p. 131.

When Violette was surprised by a visit, one afternoon in 1947, her reaction was immediately to think of the impression she would create:

Je ne remerciais d'avoir ciré le fauteuil et les chaises, d'avoir savonné et repassé ma blouse de ménagère à carreaux bleus et blancs. [...] Quelle bonne idée j'ai eue de laver mes cheveux hier soir. (FT, 133).

When Violette was an adolescent, Berthe encouraged her to care for her appearance. After Berthe's marriage, their new affluence meant that the two women had at last money to spend on clothes. This became one of the few pre-occupations which mother and daughter were able to share:

Nous dépensions sans compter quand nous choisissions de la lingerie, des chemisiers. [...] Ma mère se donnait à ses achats. (B, 72).

Berthe occasionally made Violette clothes herself, but she particularly enjoyed shopping. The magnetic attraction of Paris, which she loved, were the opportunities for the consumer, and the chance of finding bargain items of clothing in the sales - a habit which made an impact on her daughter. On one of her trips to Paris, before she moved there, Berthe brought back a dress for her seventeen year old daughter, who writes:

Ma mère encourageait ma coquetterie. (B, 107).

Indeed, when she was seventy and her daughter fifty, Berthe continued to play the same role. Just as adept at spotting bargains as ever, she rummaged "dans un déballage de jupes, de robes, de foulards, de lingerie" and offered Violette a present:

- Je te l'offre. Tu as vu son chic? Mets-le devant toi. Je l'ai mis devant moi. [...] Quel tricot, quelle coupe. Des rayures bleues, des rayures blanches, un col russe. (CA, 325-326).

Later, Violette was extremely flattered when Paolo Vallorz, the painter, asked her to pose for him - wearing the same knitted jersey.



A woman who prided herself on being fashionable, Berthe's mind was filled with names of fashion designers, shops and beauty products. After a trip to Paris, she told Violette:

- Les soldes chez Amy Linker étaient moches. (B, 105).

The blue and white jersey was discovered "entre les Nouvelles Galeries et les Produits d'Auvergne". (CA, 325). As for beauty products, Berthe showed how she had internalized an advertising slogan when she told her daughter:

Il n'y a que le pétrole Hahn. (B, 202).

Berthe was also prompt to come out with various "feminine" clichés which she had either read or heard:

Ma mère le dit et le redit: un chapeau vous rajeunit, un chapeau vous ombrage. (B, 203).

Her advice to Violette as to how to "catch" a man is characteristic of the effect of women's magazines on their readers. Femininity is understood as narcissistic passivity:

Il faut être tellement adroite avec un homme... Se laisser désirer. Pas trop. Suffisamment. (CA, 313).

Leduc shows that the narcissist learns to look at herself with an imagined male gaze, as if she herself were a man and an authority. Berthe, writes Violette, was "hautaine avec son image".

Elle a pour se voir et se reconnaître, le visage sérieux d'un savant. (B, 172).

Just as Leduc describes Paolo Vallorz in the process of creating a work of art, as if it were a "question de vie ou de mort entre lui et la toile", (CA, 349) Berthe, too, was passionately involved in creating an image - her own. Violette refers to her as "un chef-d'oeuvre". (FT, 167).

The judgement of the narcissist, both of herself and of other women, is shown to be more critical than the average male gaze. Conscious of her own

flaws and the effort which had gone into camouflaging them, she is quick to spot them in other women. When Berthe is introduced to Violette's friend, Isabelle, Violette notices:

Ma mère l'étudiait. Elle étudiait surtout les formes, l'habillement.  
(B, 106).

Always conscious of the judgement of others, when Berthe was young and with sufficient money to be a "tâche d'élégance" wherever she went, (B, 119) she made no attempt to conceal her vanity. When Violette met her in Paris, after not having seen her for several months, Berthe's first words were:

"Ma robe te plaît-elle?" (B, 119).

Violette learnt from her mother to look at other women in exactly the same way, and she is aware of this when she describes how she once casually met her friend Monique Lange and judged her physique:

Le regard d'acier de ma mère déshabillait Monique. Elle doit maigrir sinon ses jambes paraîtront grêles. (CA, 192).

However, it was her harsh self-judgement and her awareness of the judgement of others which made it so hard for the ageing narcissist to accept her condition. When she was sixty, and compelled, through lack of money, to wear out her old clothes, Berthe asked her daughter obsessively:

"Est-ce que je vieillis, Violette, est-ce que je suis finie? [...] Est-ce que je suis un vieux machin?" (FT, 173).

Berthe's fears were totally justified because Violette, despite her emotional involvement with her mother, appraised her with the detachment common to narcissists, who view themselves and others like objects of art. She found her ageing mother's pendulous bottom lip "obscène", (CA, 317) and was impatient with her mother's "cheveux gris trop frisés". (CA, 319).

Less endowed with beauty than Berthe, Hermine was also extremely conscious of appearance. With Violette, she played the same role as Berthe, sewing and

buying clothes for her, encouraging her to pay more attention to her appearance. "Hermine me féminisait", Violette complains, well aware, because of her mother's indoctrination, of the passivity of "femininity".

J'entendis ma mère au loin. Sois femme. Quand seras-tu femme? (B, 178).

During the years in which the two women lived together in Paris, Hermine used to buy Vogue, Fémina and Le Jardin des Modes. It was after Violette's illness, when, having given up work, she had become increasingly bored and ego-centric that, encouraged by Hermine and the fashion magazines, she allowed herself to be lured into the trap of consumerism. Following beauty tips and advertising, she drank orange juice for her complexion, did exercises for her figure and bought beauty products for her face. Obsessed with making her body conform to the current image of the seductive woman, she did not think, at the time, of the impossibility of ever becoming the woman the beauty industry suggested she should be:

Ma tête dans mes mains, je lisais conseils, avertissements avec anxiété. Rides, patte d'oie, pellicules, points noirs, cellulite atteignaient l'aigu des calamités de Jérémie. (B, 189).

Another aspect of the myth was the glorification of youth, and Leduc mocks her next aim with equal relentlessness:

Je voulais rajeunir avant ma vingt-cinquième année. (B, 189).

The fact that a twenty-four year old should wish to appear younger highlights the nature of the narcissistic endeavour to become a stereotype of beauty. Violette's perusal of beauty magazines brought her nothing but an empty and restless dissatisfaction, an effect in which she, as she is fully aware, was consciously manipulated:

De page en page je me désolais sans me regarder.

Stressing the vacuity of her total preoccupation with herself, she adds:

Je ne travaillais pas, je ne voyais pas le travail des autres. (B, 189).

Indeed, the preoccupation with "being" an image excludes all thought of "doing".

Another thing which encouraged narcissism in women was the theatre and the cinema. The film industry made their fantasies seem possible, for certain actresses were universally idolized as sex-symbols both on and off the screen. The early thirties saw the rise of Greta Garbo, and seeing her provided Berthe and Violette with food for more fantasies:

J'envoyai ma mère dans une salle de l'avenue de la Grand-Armée. Elle la vit, [Greta Garbo] il lui fallut plusieurs nuits avant de retrouver son sommeil. [..] Des heures sont insuffisantes pour nous extasier. Le dimanche après midi, ma mère - elle préférerait être seule pour mieux "goûter" - voyait Ludmilla Pitoëff dans le rôle de Sainte Jeanne. (B, 164).

Violette's dream was to have:

la voix rauque de Marlène [Dietrich] pour répondre aux compliments". (B, 203).

As for her hair, at one moment she wished to look like Ginger Rogers. (B, 202).

When she went, on another occasion, to have her hair done at the famous "Antoine's" she asked to be "coiffée comme Joan Crawford". (B, 213).

Parisian haute couture exerted such fascination for Violette that, at times, it almost eclipsed the splendour of the Parisian literary milieu. A name such as that of the fashion designer, Schiaparelli, she confesses "m'envoûtait, m'obsédait, m'éblouissait". (B, 190). A sale at Schiaparelli's gave Hermine the audacious idea that they should go and make a purchase. Violette was dazzled:

- Tu oserais? Tu oserais entrer chez Schiaparelli? (B, 191).

Once inside, Violette oscillated between awe and cynicism. The select atmosphere, the sensual, all-pervasive aroma of perfume, the elegance of the other clients tantalized her. At the same time, she had no illusions about the calculating way in which the saleswomen appealed to the vanity of the clients:

Je demandai les soldes entre le "n'est-il pas inouï, n'est-il pas exquis, n'est-il pas crée pour vous?" d'une vendeuse et le "je dois dire qu'il est ravissant, je dois dire qu'il me tente" de la cliente à la vendeuse. (B, 194).

Reflected in the maze of mirrors are mere beautiful objects. It is not the dress that is created for the woman, as the shopwoman suggests, but the woman who is made into an image. Even the language used by the woman merely reproduces the clichés of snobbish advertisements. It is tacitly understood that the women are there to "payer pour être belle, payer pour être plus belle". (B, 194). The narcissistic woman with money is encouraged, by the fashion industry, to believe that, in return for payment, she can buy a new image, become a new woman. All she needs to do is to spend money in order to buy elegance, charm and sex-appeal. Listening to the saleswoman at Schiaparelli's, Violette wonders:

Où achète-t-elle son timbre de voix avant de vendre? Je voudrais devenir persuasive. (B, 201).

In the Schiaparelli changing room, Violette was enraptured by her image in "la glace à trois faces". (B, 202). It appeared to her that, like Narcissus himself, she had an admirer in "l'eau du miroir". Imagining her mirror as a lover, she reflects:

C'est chic, un miroir. Ça ne fatigue pas. Il prend, il rend, l'amour, toujours l'amour.

Unfortunately, however, the mirror does not always beam back love.. Unlike Ovid's Narcissus, Narcissus-the-consumer is never content with her image for long, always imagining she would be closer to perfection if only she purchased something else. Having bought a beautiful, expensive Schiaparelli suit, which the shopwoman casually mentioned would look superb with a lamé blouse, Violette, encouraged by Hermine, bought a silk gold lamé blouse from Colcombet, a Rose Descat felt hat and delicate shoes to match. - which had the desired visual effect but hurt her because they were too narrow. (23)

---

(23) The narcissist is prepared to put up with the physical discomfort for the visual effect. Berthe, in her old age, did not give up her high heels which, she felt, showed off her beautiful legs. Violette writes: "elle chancelait, ses hauts talons la fatiguaient, je la grondais, des talons bottier c'est idéal; elle me donnait le bras, elle ne répondait pas." (FT, 175).

Having bought all this finery, Violette was anxious to expose herself to a larger public. Feeling "toute neuve", (B, 203) she went walking in the street to elicit a reaction. Just as she had always seen her mother doing, she used every window she passed as a mirror:

Je t'en prie, Paris, sois plus transparent. Je ne me vois pas dans chaque vitrine. (B, 203).

Busy looking everywhere for reflections of herself and looking to see who was looking at her, she fantasized:

L'agent a souri en me voyant, une dame dans son auto m'a regardée. Oui, elle a tourné la tête de mon côté. Bientôt le fleuve d'automobiles sera glacé, les conducteurs monteront sur le toit de leur voiture pour me détailler. (B, 203).

Leduc shows how a woman's consciousness of her body is given constant reinforcement by the fact that she is observed in the street and is invariably the target of comments from men - and sometimes from women accompanied by men. This aspect of Latin behaviour reinforces the tendency of women to see themselves as sex objects,<sup>(24)</sup> regarding the verdict of passers-by as a crucial test of their femininity. Thus, when Violette came home after walking in the streets in her new clothes, Hermine asked her:

- Parle-moi des regards que tu as eus? On se retournait? [...]  
Qu'est-ce qu'ils t'ont dit? (B, 208-209).

At home, Violette mocked Hermine's curiosity. However, whilst walking, she had been eagerly watching the reactions to her appearance, wanting desperately to be treated as a desirable sex object:

Je passe, inaperçue. C'est injuste. Je ne peux pas tourner la tête. Ma mère m'apprenait que c'est mal élevé. J'espère qu'un homme va me suivre. (B, 204).

---

(24) Beauvoir makes us aware of this aspect of French society in her autobiography, too. When Lise was in her early twenties, she writes: "Elle faisait sensation quand elle entrait au 'Flore'. Partout où elle passait on la remarquait." (FA, 489). She writes that Leduc was stared at too, ("dans la rue on se retournait sur son passage",) because her face, in her old age, contrasted with her "silhouette juvénile". (TCF, 60).

As well as Berthe, Hermine and Violette, Bernadette, too, is shown to be concerned with fashion. A wealthy woman, whom Violette met in the late nineteenth-thirties, she was a regular patron of the Parisian fashion houses. When Violette admired her suit, she replied, flattered:

- Une folie. [...] Il vient de chez Balenciaga. (B, 279).

she proposed to Violette that they go and find her something from the sale at Balenciaga, telling her persuasively:

- Vous avez de l'allure. Vous portez bien la toilette. La vitalité c'est tout pour une femme et vous en avez. (B, 280).

Obviously very conscious of her image, and with money and leisure, Bernadette was "toujours élégante à la fin de la journée". (B, 286). It was she who, believing that a nose operation would change Violette's attitude towards herself, made sure that the unwilling client went through with it.

Berthe was able to impress with her beauty. Bernadette obviously believed in the importance of elegance and vitality. Violette was not beautiful and although she was very conscious of clothes, she could not aspire to impress as a beauty. She harboured other dreams. Just as Berthe liked to imagine herself associated with the rich family in Valenciennes, Violette was her greatest admirer of herself as a writer. When she lived for a time with Maurice Sachs in Normandy, she writes:

Je me crois extraordinaire parce que je vis avec Sachs, [...] parce que je me prends pour lui. (B, 363).

Having admired Simone de Beauvoir at work in the Café de Flore, Violette rushed away excitedly to look at her own reflection in a mirror, imagining she was contemplating the woman she had just seen:

- Quel petit visage elle a, ai-je dit tout bas à l'armoire à glace. Je me regardais sans dégoût puisque je regardais aussi le visage de la femme qui écrivait dans un café. (FT, 33).

Always imagining the impression she was making on the other person, when she was with someone, Violette was more conscious of herself than of her

companion. A "cabotine infatigable", (CA, 90) she tells us that in the company of Bernadette:

Je fabrique des sourires, des contenance, des silences. (FT, 26).

With Beauvoir, too, she was conscious of playing a role, of having to act "natural":

je travaillai mon expression jusqu'à ce que j'obtienne du naturel, une disponibilité sur tout mon visage. Je jouais le contraire d'une comédie. (FT, 68).

On the subject of the narcissist, Beauvoir, we recall, had written in

Le Deuxième Sexe:

c'est au dépens de la vie réelle que la comédie narcissiste se déroule; [..] la femme en proie à son moi perd toute prise sur le monde concret, elle ne se soucie d'établir avec autrui aucun rapport réel. (25)

This was the case with Violette Leduc, who calls herself derisively "une actrice sans public". (CA, 90). Her autobiography shows us clearly how she is always observing herself playing a role, aware that she is acting but not able to stop. It is striking that whereas Leduc the woman is caught up in mauvaise foi, Leduc the writer is strangely lucid about her behaviour.

It is evident, from the autobiography, that Leduc was incapable of an authentic relationship with another person. She shows, too, how for a time she lost "toute prise sur le monde concret". Bored<sup>(26)</sup> and lonely, she imagined herself the target of a large group of persecutors. She believed that even Jean-Paul Sartre was aiming his writing at her. Thus, when he wrote about Tintoretto's ugliness, he was actually writing about her.<sup>(27)</sup> His play, Les Séquestrés d'Altona<sup>(28)</sup> was directed at her:

(25) Le Deuxième Sexe II, p. 473.

(26) Leduc says herself: "Mon malheur, ne serait-ce pas l'ennui?" (CA, 11).

(27) "Le Séquestré de Venise." Situations, IV. Paris: Gallimard, 1964.

(28) Les Séquestrés d'Altona appeared in Les Temps Modernes, 164, (octobre 1959) and 165, (novembre 1959).



Ce séquestré c'est moi, ai-je soutenu à Simone de Beauvoir. [...] Sartre me vise. (CA, 77).

She told Beauvoir she was convinced that the crabs, in the play, were Sartre's means of mocking her. When an excerpt from Górz' Le Traître appeared in Les Temps Modernes, she knew that the editorial board was getting at her:

Si l'on parle d'un traître dans la revue, ce traître c'est moi. [...] Le comité de rédaction m'avertit. Je suis pourrie et il le sait. [...] Oui, Sartre m'en veut; il me pousse du pied sur le côté pourtant je ne suis jamais sur son passage. (FT, 409-410).

By means of madness, she managed to believe that her role in Sartre's life was not nearly as insignificant as it actually was, and that the writers associated with Les Temps Modernes were also preoccupied with her, Violette Leduc. As both Freud and Beauvoir claimed, the narcissist, through her paranoia, again sees herself as the object of the gaze of others. (29)

---

(29) See p. 302, n. 134.

### III. "La Femme Indépendante"

Only a few women in the autobiography escape Violette Leduc's irony. They are women with whom she is much less well acquainted: women whom she ardently admires as independent women. For Leduc, these women have the prestige, the abstractness of men, rather than of women. They remain distant figures and idols, with whom Violette constantly compares herself - unfavourably.

These women are admired by Violette Leduc for what they represent, rather than for what they are, for she never knows any of them at all intimately. With them she constantly feels that their life is "ailleurs". (FT, 67). However, it is she herself who increases the distance between them and her. It is significant that she always feels like an adolescent in their presence. By forcing them into a quasi maternal role and by behaving, as she once put it, like a "collégienne demeurée" herself, (B, 233) she destroys potential reciprocity and, with it, any possibility of real friendship. For this reason, when we look at the image of independent women in Leduc's autobiography, we must also consider Leduc's peculiar relationship with these women, for the interaction explains the portraits just as the portraits elucidate the interaction.

Berthe, as we have seen, was both a dévouée and a narcissist, depending on her situation, but she also implanted in Violette's mind the dread of dependence. Lucid about the opportunities she never had, she was constantly stressing to her adolescent daughter the importance of education and a profession:

"Apprends, me disait ma mère. Je ne veux pas que tu souffres du manque d'instruction comme j'en ai souffert." (B, 62).

She pleaded with Violette to train for a profession:

"Deviens institutrice", suppliait ma mère. [.] Si je ne devenais pas institutrice, ma vieillesse ressemblerait à son enfance misérable. Ma vieillesse l'effrayait. (B, 119)

Berthe herself, just after her marriage in 1921, provided an example of an enterprising spirit. Elegant and efficient, working in the interior decorating business with her husband and driving a motor car very capably, Violette was proud of her mother. One senses that Berthe might have been an inspiring model to her daughter, had she enjoyed such favourable circumstances rather earlier.

However, it was particularly intellectual women who impressed Violette. We have seen that she did not identify with them; rather she remained conscious of an unbridgeable gap between her and them, so that they remained superior beings rather than effective models. She writes:

J'admire les femmes intelligentes? Je les respecte. Je me tiens à distance d'elles. (CA, 303).

As soon as she went to college, after her mother's marriage, it was the studious, intelligent girls who captured her imagination. At school in Valenciennes, she admired a diligent nineteen year old girl, who, as "surveillante", supervised the homework sessions in the evening:

Elle préparait un concours, elle étudiait plus que nous. (B, 59).

Another person she looked up to was Mademoiselle Godfroy, a young teacher from Paris, whose eyes sparkled with "le feu de l'intelligence" (B, 64) - an intelligence which seemed to promise new realms whose existence Violette could only guess at:

L'univers qu'elle mettait à notre portée [...] grandissait jusqu'à l'infini, parce que Mlle Godfroy réfléchissait. (B, 65).

When Violette moved to the Collège de D..., her new infatuation became Isabelle, who, as "la meilleure élève", was "studieuse sans zèle et sans suffisance". (B, 79). In the evening study sessions, Isabelle was able to concentrate and forget herself in her work, whereas Violette could only think of her:

Je ne peux pas l'aborder, je ne peux pas la sortir de son livre. [...] J'ouvris un livre pour lui ressembler. (B, 87).

We recollect that when she lived in Paris, Adrienne Monnier became a new idol. Leduc admired the way she moved with ease and dignity in the "monde inabordable des écrivains" - a world in which she was conscious that she would flounder, with her "timidité", "sottise" and "amour-propre". (B, 232). Once again, her idolization of an independent woman did not mean that she was tempted to emulate her; on the contrary, the comparison merely served to highlight her own deficiencies in her mind. This was evidently part of the strange pleasure that she took in such comparisons.

It was Denise Batcheff, the impresario for whom Violette was working at the time, who arranged for her to meet Bernadette. We are not told who Bernadette actually was, whether she worked or not and whether she lived alone. She was a little older than Violette's twenty-eight years, wealthy and worldly. Violette could not understand, since Bernadette "connaissait sûrement cinq cents personnes à Paris", (B, 277) why she should take the time to see and help her - "une standardiste déchuée". (B, 277). It seems, however, that Bernadette saw herself as a "rçanimatrice". (FT, 27). Violette was bitterly aware that Bernadette had a tendency to "collect" what she called "des neurasses", (FT, 27)<sup>(30)</sup> and listen to their "confidences" and "jérémiades". (FT, 27). A benefactress, rather than a dévouée, for she did not live for the gratitude of others, she showed "compassion" (FT, 26), "bienveillance" (B, 277) and "gentillesse". (FT, 27). She obviously enjoyed being generous with her time and money.

Violette admired Bernadette's "souple intelligence" (B, 277) and her "oubli de soi". (B, 277). She, in contrast, was demanding and possessive. Instead of following the example of Bernadette's altruism, she merely resented, just as she had with Adrienne Monnier, that Bernadette's generosity was directed at others besides herself. She writes jealously:

Si elle était ma mère, je la prendrais à la gorge pour tant de gentillesse semée aux quatre vents. (FT, 27).

---

(30) "Neurasses". Violette explains, meant "neurasthéniques". (FT, 27).

Likewise, although Violette appreciated Bernadette's "optimisme" and the rule which Violette guesses she had made for herself: "ne pas s'apitoyer sur elle-même", (B, 277) the younger woman took advantage of her meetings with Bernadette to pour out her woes.

For her part, Bernadette made it her business to help Violette acquire a degree of independence. She found Violette another job, she telephoned her regularly and took her out, encouraging her in her work and her writing. Believing that a nose operation would help Violette's self-confidence, she was the one who took her to the hospital, after Violette had deliberately slept in. When Violette was living off the black market, it was Bernadette who provided the list of names of people who would buy the butter and meat. As for Violette's writing:

Bernadette m'expliquait que je serais son poulain. (FT, 16).

Bernadette introduced her to Clara Malraux, to whom she gave the draft of L'Asphyxie to read. And through her friend, Gégé, she arranged for Simone de Beauvoir to read Violette's work.

Despite all her thoughtful attention, Violette was aware that Bernadette, too, belonged to a different sphere.

Je n'existais pas dans son univers de femme du monde et de bon garçon. (B, 277).

As for Clara Malraux, Violette felt separated from her because of what she chose to see as the disparity in their intelligence:

son intelligence déliée comme des doigts de virtuose, l'atrophie de mon cerveau me séparaient d'elle. (B, 276-277).

Violette was intimidated by both women, but her admiration for Bernadette was curbed by some reservations. Bernadette, who reminded Violette of the models in Vogue and Fémina, was too eager to make Violette more feminine. Perhaps she

was, in this respect, too similar to the sort of woman Violette knew well. And, after all, she was not an intellectual. In any event, she disappears from the autobiography, without any comment from Leduc.

Before Violette had even thought of giving Simone de Beauvoir her manuscript to read, when she came to Paris at the weekends, with her black market products, she often used to go to the Café de Flore to admire the author at work. To Violette, who, at thirty-eight, was beginning to see herself as a writer, this "femme-écrivain", (FT, 32) this "femme de grand talent", (FT, 51) with her "intelligence extraordinaire" (CA, 85) represented the ultimate model of an independent woman.

Violette was first struck by Beauvoir's extraordinary lack of self-display. Despite her beauty, she was "vêtue comme tout le monde", always wearing the same "petit manteau de fourrure". (FT, 32-33). Although she worked in a public place, "ce n'était pas du cinéma":

Elle ne regardait pas autour d'elle. Elle s'effaçait sous l'effort.  
(FT, 32)

We recollect that Violette, who was always conscious of the gaze of others herself, had admired this same quality in Isabelle.

In accordance with her previous pattern, Violette felt "anéantie" (FT, 42) by the contrast between Beauvoir's qualities and her own failings. With her, she remained "une adolescente de trente-huit ans" (FT, 113) in the presence of her idol. Beauvoir lived "dans le monde des idées", whereas she lived "dans le monde des ressassements". (CA, 25). Her idol was constantly "vive et pressée"; she herself was "amorphe et résignée". (CA, 24). Beauvoir's "énergie" and "courage" and her "journées remplies" (CA, 78-79) contrasted with Violette's "désir de souffrir et de stagner", (CA, 24) her "inactivité" and her "journées de débauche". (CA, 78-79).

As well as being "une femme puissante dans l'effort, dans le travail", (FT, 235) Beauvoir, like Bernadette, was compassionate, generous, with a "bonne volonté illimitée". (FT, 235). She encouraged and promoted Leduc's writing:

Elle rayonne quand mon travail lui plaît. (FT, 408).

She listened to Violette's "jérémiades", (CA, 46) offering her understanding and support:

Elle veut me fortifier. (FT, 311).

Violette responded by telling Beauvoir about herself "avec une ivresse d'égo-centriste", wallowing in self-pity "en maniaque du désespoir". (FT, 311).

Simone de Beauvoir was always keen to bring their conversations back to the subject of Leduc's writing, asking Violette whether she had been working:

- Avez-vous travaillé? me dit-elle avec sa bienveillance habituelle.  
C'est qui compte pour elle. Ce sont nos liens. (FT, 319).

She lost no time, at the beginning of their acquaintance, in making clear to Violette the nature of their relationship. In answer to a letter from Violette, the contents of which we can imagine, she wrote back with "une mise au point définitive": (FT, 67)

Elle peut me donner de l'amitié, elle me la donnera. Avenir consolidé. Un mot m'a fait pleurer. C'est le mot "mirage". [...] Elle m'explique que mon sentiment pour elle est un mirage. [...] Sa vie est ailleurs. (FT, 67).

Instead of the "complice" which Violette had sought, she had found "une amie lucide". (FT, 319). As Beauvoir knew, and even Violette admits:

Plus elle me tient à distance, plus elle me préserve d'une détérioration. (FT, 115).

Despite the distance she managed to preserve between them, Beauvoir needed to be exceptionally patient and understanding to retain a constant and collegial relationship with Leduc. It is greatly to her credit that she managed to maintain the role she did in Leduc's life for almost thirty years, whereas all Leduc's other friends and idols disappeared from her life. It is clear that the passion

Violette felt for Simone de Beauvoir was, in fact, egocentric and narcissistic, as were all her passions for independent women. She saw in Beauvoir the image of what she would like to be, and yet, when she was with Beauvoir, she became dependent and childlike - the exact opposite of her idol. Contrasting with the constancy of Simone de Beauvoir, Leduc's attitude to her was vicissitudinous. One moment she admits generously: "je lui dois tout", (FT, 313) and the next moment she bitterly resents the inflexibility of Beauvoir's work schedule. She oscillates between clear-sightedness and gratitude, and resentment and revolting obsequiousness. The change of mood is shown in the following two passages:

Je ne peux rien lui reprocher. Elle m'a donné trois heures de son emploi du temps. Donné? Sacrifié. Aujourd'hui, je ne l'accompagne pas jusqu'à la porte de l'immeuble de Sartre. Elle a refermé la sienne dans un élan. Elle se retrouve pour travailler. Je le comprends. (CA, 27).

and, on another occasion:

Je ne mérite pas un bref arrêt de travail? Je ne mérite pas l'arrêt d'une discussion de vous avec Sartre? Je suis un petit chat, on l'a noyé mais il est revenu à la surface, il s'en est sorti, il vit sans vivre tout à fait. Séchez-le avec votre serviette de table, Simone de Beauvoir. Flattez-moi de la main, je râperai le dessus de votre main avec mon bout de langue, je vous prouverai ma reconnaissance. (CA, 194).

Simone de Beauvoir introduced Violette to Colette Audry and Nathalie Sarraute. Audry, who obviously made a point of keeping her distance, impressed Leduc with her "clartés d'intelligence" (FT, 59) and her "robustesse physique et morale". (FT, 59). As Leduc admits, she was attracted to what Audry represented, rather than to her personality, which she did not know:

Colette Audry était professeur, elle m'en imposait. (FT, 356-357)

and:

C'est une agrégée, elle a publié deux livres, je la mets en valeur, j'essaie de l'attirer. (FT, 364).



Sarraute, writes Leduc admiringly, was a "droguée de littérature": (FT, 70)

Elle faisait ses recherches et ses expériences avec la littérature, c'était ce qu'elle aimait le plus au monde. (FT, 59).

The two women became friends for a brief period. However, Violette discovered Nathalie's vulnerability, and this triggered off the kinds of sadistic games which Violette did not dare to play with women who intimidated her. They soon ceased to see each other.

One final portrait of a woman whom Violette admired for her independence is that of Emilie. In her early eighties, Emilie lived in Faucon, the village in Vaucluse where Violette bought a house in 1965. She had previously been a headmistress of a primary school and in her retirement she continued to lead a vigorous life. She subscribed to L'Express, to L'Observateur and to Les Temps Modernes. (B, 323). She was "à la pointe de toutes les actualités (CA, 359) and discussed things "avec une fougue de lion". (B, 323). Enthusiastic about Sartre, Beauvoir and Schwartz-Bart, she was also eager to see the first films of Louis Bunuel. (31)

Emilie suivait les meilleures émissions à la télévision, elle les commentait avec frénésie. Elle écoutait du jazz et des classiques sur son électrophone. Le XX<sup>e</sup> siècle ne la rebutait pas. Elle fonçait sur notre époque. (CA, 359).

For the first time, Leduc expresses admiration for political commitment - an aspect of Beauvoir and Audry which she does not mention:

Femme de gauche, certes. Elle n'adhérait pas à un parti, mais elle défendait ses opinions et ses convictions avec la fougue d'une militante. (CA, 359).

---

(31) It is possible that "Manette", the mother of André in Beauvoir's L'Age de discrétion, is modelled on the same woman:

"elle a quatre-vingt-quatre ans, elle vit seule dans sa maison de Villeneuve-lès-Avignon. [...] elle milite encore farouchement dans les rangs du P.C. [...] Institutrice, trois enfants, la retraite a été pour elle un bonheur qu'elle n'a pas encore épuisé. (p. 21).

Widowed for many years, Emilie "adorait" her daughter, Georgette, who was working in Paris, and was delighted whenever there was a letter in her post-box from her. She liked to exchange a friendly word with the school children when they passed her house. However, she was not dependent on anyone:

Elle se suffisait. [...] Elle ne fréquentait presque personne.  
(CA, 359-360).

She seemed neither to indulge in nostalgia for her past nor did she fill in her time with unnecessary chores:

Grande, la mise plutôt négligée. Le désordre dans sa cuisine?  
Une bataille d'idées. (CA, 359).

Once again, Violette felt inferior by comparison:

Elle se suffit. Je ne me suffis pas. (CA, 371).

Furthermore, she made sure that she was inferior. Emilie put her up in her house while Violette looked for other accommodation, stressing to Violette that this arrangement was "provisoire". (CA, 360). After three weeks, Emilie left for a short holiday, telling Violette firmly to use the time to find another place to live. Meanwhile, Violette was entrusted with her hostess' beloved cats. Returning Emilie's hospitality and firm benevolence with resentment, Violette told herself sulkily:

Essence supérieure. [...] Elle dédaigne les autres. (CA, 374).

Proceeding to behave like a refractory adolescent, she decided:

Je ne nourrirai pas ses chats. Je priverai ses chats. Je volerai ses chats en prenant pour moi ce qu'elle a acheté pour eux. (CA, 374).

Not surprisingly, when Emilie returned, any chance of friendship with the forceful old lady was shattered:

Elle me chassait. Elle ne m'a pas dit au revoir. Je l'avais trompée. (CA, 380).

What, then, did these women whom Leduc admired - and sometimes idolized - have in common? They all appreciated education and culture; most of them dazzled Leduc because of their intelligence and intellectualism. They were energetic, hard-working, strong-willed women with a zest for life. They were not preoccupied with themselves or complacent, but concerned with their work and passionately involved in projects outside themselves. We never glimpse these women dependent on anyone else, and yet they liked to give generously of themselves. They all had the good sense and presence of mind to preserve a certain distance with Violette (except Nathalie Sarraute, who then ceased to see her). Simone de Beauvoir was well aware of what she represented for Leduc and duly assumed her responsibility.

It is striking that the sort of women Leduc admired were also the sort of women for whom Beauvoir felt great respect. The difference is that Beauvoir always strove to live up to her ideal herself, whereas, with Leduc, the strength of independent women brought to the surface her weakness; their independence made her dependent and child-like. Trying to re-enact with them the relationship she had had with her mother, she was unable to live the life of a mature, autonomous individual for which they provided a model.

CONCLUSION

## CONCLUSION

The attempts made by Simone de Beauvoir and Violette Leduc to come to terms with the female experience give the impression of being a success in the one instance and a failure in the other. Beauvoir's autobiography portrays the rich and satisfying existence of an independent woman. Leduc's portrays the narrow and lonely existence of a woman obsessed with herself.

Further examination, however, reveals that their female experience is more complicated than this. It becomes apparent that Simone de Beauvoir achieved independence only at a great cost to herself, and that she understates a number of conflicts in her autobiography. Leduc, on the other hand, embraced rather than struggled against the obstacles in the way of her autonomy and self-fulfilment, accepting them as insurmountable.

The different reactions of Beauvoir and Leduc to being a woman reflect an attitude towards themselves which emerged from their different personal circumstances. For both women, their choix originel was a consequence of a crisis provoked by a sudden confrontation with an image of themselves which was negative. They responded to this personal crisis in the same way that they responded to what they experienced as their negative image as women in society. Beauvoir, who in the early years of her life had acquired a strong sense of her own worth, was determined to re-establish her early sovereignty, despite being a female. Leduc, who had never developed any pride or confidence in her own self, accepted and gave reinforcement to her negative self-image. Internalizing patriarchal values, she saw her femininity as a part of her inferiority.

The fact is that their image of themselves as individuals could not be divorced from the image which Simone de Beauvoir and Violette Leduc had of women generally, and neither of them had any reason to feel particularly proud

to be a woman. By the time they were adolescents, both were conscious that they belonged to the "second sex". Beauvoir was told that with her intelligence, she should have been a male; Leduc was constantly reminded that she belonged to an ill-fated sex whose greatest curse was the danger of pregnancy. Both were extremely ambivalent about their female bodies. Beauvoir, who was determined to prove herself an independent subject, felt betrayed by her body which, she was aware, all too often reduced her to a status of object. Leduc's female sexuality did not so much conflict with her chosen identity, as make her feel painfully vulnerable and afraid of men. As females, and thus the object of the male gaze, both experienced the trauma of being judged physically unattractive. For Beauvoir this was for the duration of her "âge ingrat"; for Leduc this had been the case since childhood.

It is significant that Beauvoir, from puberty onwards, looked to males for approval and chose one man, in particular, as her supreme judge. Leduc, who had also learnt to rate male approval more highly, made no attempt to earn the respect of men, and was only ever attracted to men who she knew would reject her.

Beauvoir did not want to please men by means of her femininity - which, she knew, merely amounted to male fascination with female passivity. She wanted the respect of men. In order to earn this, she was determined to prove herself their equal: an independent subject, responsible for herself. However, this involved ignoring certain of her needs and desires as a woman. Aware that one of her most formidable obstacles was her conditioning as a female, Beauvoir's tendency was to ignore her "femininity", unless she was forced to confront it by some crisis in which the image of herself reflected by her environment conflicted with her self image. At such times, we have seen, she re-established her sense of sovereignty by means of rationalization or repression.

Contrary to the opinion expressed by Roy Pascal and Philippe Lejeune as to what constitutes "good" autobiographies, the present study suggests that the very consistency of Beauvoir's life and autobiography is its greatest limitation. In order to sustain it, she had to reject important areas of her experience. Her strength of character, which both these critics generally admire in autobiographers, involved suppressing or resisting those aspects of her self which she took to be weaknesses.

Beauvoir's autobiography fits her experience rather too neatly into the intellectual framework of Le Deuxième Sexe. Unfortunately, her eagerness to make certain points means that Beauvoir skips over or rationalizes a number of uncertainties, ambiguities and contradictions. Her view of experience, categorized in black and white binary oppositions such as Subject versus Object, activity versus passivity, transcendence versus immanence, authenticity versus mauvaise foi prevents her from exploring the female experience in all its complexity or from seeing all the possibilities of women as women.

The absence of any kind of overt moralizing is certainly one of Leduc's strengths. She is not ashamed to appear either weak or ridiculous. On the contrary, although she portrays herself and most other women in a light which is quite unflattering, her tone is rarely condemnatory, for she understands why women are like they are, and conveys this to the reader.

Another point in Leduc's favour is that she does not attempt to justify or neutralize her emotions by placing them in a conceptual framework. She writes openly and unabashedly about her desires, her failings and her confusion. Nor does she try to rationalize her obsessions and her madness.

However, the same qualities which are positive in Leduc's writing were negative in her life. Her sincerity and her openness are rooted in her

narcissism, complacency and her resistance to change. She does not gloss over the contradictions in her female experience, but, instead, she uses them as an alibi. Her willingness to confront her experience is derived from a pre-occupation with her own experience, and her lack of interest in things outside herself. Indeed, it is as an honest account of destructiveness, particularly self-destructiveness, that Leduc's writing is most constructive as an analysis of female experience in patriarchal society.

Since the autobiographies of Simone de Beauvoir and Violette Leduc there have been some changes regarding the place of women in society. The laws concerning women are constantly changing, and, in particular, the feminist movement since the seventies has done much to transform attitudes towards the female experience. However, many of the dilemmas faced by women, which Beauvoir and Leduc wrote about in their autobiographies, still exist. Living, as they do, in a patriarchal culture, and writing about their experience through this medium, women have still to struggle to find an authentic self and to discover their possibilities as women. The precise nature of the female experience is still not understood, and the relationship between biological and cultural factors remains a major issue of debate amongst feminists today. It is only by continuing the task which Simone de Beauvoir and Violette Leduc began, by confronting and exploring the female experience in all its complexity, without trivialising it or sentimentalizing it, that this neglected half of human experience can offer any challenge to patriarchal culture.



CONCLUSION

BIBLIOGRAPHY\*I. WORKS BY SIMONE de BEAUVOIR AND VIOLETTE LEDUC.A. Simone de BeauvoirAutobiography

Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée. Paris: Gallimard, 1958.

La Force de l'âge. Dédié à Jean-Paul Sartre. Paris: Gallimard, 1960.

La Force des choses. Paris: Gallimard, 1963.

Tout compte fait. Dédié "A Sylvie". Paris: Gallimard, 1972.

Une Mort très douce. Dédié "A ma soeur". Paris: Gallimard, 1964.

Fiction

L'Invitée. Dédié à Olga Kosakievicz. Paris: Gallimard, 1943.

Coll. "Le Livre de Poche", Paris: Gallimard, 1961.

Le Sang des autres. Dédié à Nathalie Sorokine. Paris: Gallimard, 1945.

Tous les hommes sont mortels. Dédié à Jean-Paul Sartre. Paris: Gallimard, 1946.

Les Mandarins. Dédié à Nelson Algren. (Prix Goncourt). Paris: Gallimard, 1954.

Coll. "Folio", n<sup>os</sup> 114-115, Paris: Gallimard, 1972.

Les Belles Images. Dédié à Claude Lanzmann. Paris: Gallimard, 1966.

La Femme rompue. Paris: Gallimard, 1968.

Coll. "Folio", n<sup>o</sup> 76, Paris: Gallimard, 1972.

Quand prime le spirituel. Paris: Gallimard, 1979.

\*N.B.: This bibliography does not list all the material consulted, but only those books and papers which I found relevant and helpful, and those specifically noted in the text or footnotes.

Drama

Les Bouches inutiles. Dédié "A ma mère". Paris: Gallimard, 1945.

Essays

Pyrrhus et Cinéas. Dédié "A cette dame".  
Coll. "Les Essais", Paris: Gallimard, 1944.

Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté. Dédié "A Bianca".  
Coll. "Les Essais", Paris: Gallimard, 1947.

L'Existentialisme et la Sagesse des nations. Dédié  
"A Hélène et à Lionel".  
Coll. "Pensées", Paris: Nagel, 1948.

L'Amérique au jour le jour. Dédié à Ellen et Richard  
Wright. Paris: Morihien, 1948.

Le Deuxième Sexe. Dédié à Jacques Bost. Tome I, "Les  
Faits et les Mythes"; tome II, "L'Expérience Vécue".  
Paris: Gallimard, 1949.

Privilèges. "Faut-il brûler Sade?", "La Pensée de droite  
aujourd'hui", "Merleau-Ponty et le pseudo-Sartrisme".  
Coll. "Les Essais", Paris: Gallimard, 1955.

La Longue Marche, essai sur la Chine. Paris: Gallimard,  
1957.

La Vieillesse. Paris: Gallimard, 1970.

Prefaces

CAYRON, Claire. Divorcé en France. Paris: Denoël-Gonthier,  
1974.

HALIMI, Gisèle, en collaboration avec Simone de Beauvoir.  
Djamila Boupacha. Paris: Gallimard, 1962.

KRONHAUSEN, E. and P. La Majorité sexuelle de la femme.  
Paris: Bûchet-Chastel, 1966.

LEDUC, Violette. La Bâtarde. Paris: Gallimard, 1964.

OPHIR, Anne. Regards féminins. Paris: coll. "Femmes",  
Denoël-Gonthier, 1976.

PISAN, Annie de and Anne Tristan. Histoire du M.L.F.  
Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1977.

STEINER, Jean-François. Treblinka. Paris: Fayard, 1966.

WEILL-HALLE, Marie-Andrée Lagroua. Le Planning familial. Paris: Maloine, 1959.

WEILL-HALLE, Marie-Andrée Lagroua. La Grand' Peur d'aimer. Paris: Julliard-Sequana, 1960.

#### Collective Works

Les Femmes s'entêtent. Paris: coll. "Idées", Gallimard, 1975. Re-edition of a special number of Les Temps Modernes: "Les femmes s'entêtent ... perturbation ma soeur". (avril-mai, 1974).

Avortement: Une loi en procès. L'Affaire de Bobigny, par l'Association "Choisir". Coll. "Idées actuelles", Paris: Gallimard, 1973.

#### Film

Simone de Beauvoir. Un film de Josée Dayan et Malka Ribowska, réalisé par Josée Dayan. Paris: Gallimard, 1979.

### B. Violette Leduc

#### Autobiography

La Bâtarde. Préface de Simone de Beauvoir. Paris: Gallimard, 1964.

La Folie en tête. Paris: Gallimard, 1970.

La Chasse à l'amour. Foreward by Simone de Beauvoir. Paris: Gallimard, 1973.

#### Journal de voyage

Trésors à prendre. Dédié à Simone de Beauvoir. Paris: Gallimard, 1960.

Coll. "Folio", n° 1039, Paris: Gallimard, 1978.

#### Fiction

L'Asphyxie. Coll. "L'Espoir". Paris: Gallimard, 1946.

L'Affamée. Dédié à Jacques Guérin. Paris: Gallimard, 1948.

Coll. "Folio", n° 643, Paris: Gallimard, 1974.

Ravages. Dédié à Simone de Beauvoir. Paris: Gallimard, 1955.

Coll. "Folio", n° 691, Paris: Gallimard, 1975.

La Vieille Fille et le mort. Paris: Gallimard, 1958.

La Femme au petit renard. Paris: Gallimard, 1965.

Thérèse et Isabelle. Paris: Gallimard, 1966.

Coll. "Folio", n° 264, 1972.

Le Taxi. Paris: Gallimard, 1971.

#### Short Stories

"Désirée Hellé". Les Temps Modernes, LXXX, (juin, 1952).

"Les Mains sales". Les Temps Modernes, (décembre, 1946).

"Le Train noir". Les Temps Modernes, (mars, 1946).

"Au Village". Les Temps Modernes, (mars, 1951).

## II. SECONDARY LITERATURE ON BEAUVOIR AND LEDUC.

### A. On Simone de Beauvoir

#### Monographs

AUDET, Jean-Raymond. Simone de Beauvoir face à la mort. Lausanne: L'Age d'homme, 1979.

BIEBER, Konrad. Simone de Beauvoir. Twayne Publishers, G.K. Hall & Co., 1979.

CAYRON, Claire. La Nature chez Simone de Beauvoir. Coll. "Les Essais", Paris: Gallimard, 1973.

COTTRELL, Robert D. Simone de Beauvoir. N.Y.: Frederick Ungar, 1975.

DESCUBES, Madeleine. Connaître Simone de Beauvoir. Paris: Resma, 1974.

GAGNEBIN, Laurent. Simone de Beauvoir ou le Refus de l'indifférence. Paris: Fischbacher, 1968.

GENNARI, Geneviève. Simone de Beauvoir. Paris: Editions Universitaires, 1967.

JACCARD, Annie-Claire. Simone de Beauvoir. Zurich: Juris Druck & Verlag, 1968.

JEANSON, Francis. Simone de Beauvoir ou l'Entreprise de vivre. Paris: Seuil, 1966.

JULIENNE-CAFFIE, Serge. Simone de Beauvoir. "La bibliothèque idéale", Paris: Gallimard, 1966.

LASOCKI, Anne-Marie. Simone de Beauvoir ou l'Entreprise d'écrire. Essai de commentaires par les textes. La Haye: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971.

LEIGHTON, Jean. Simone de Beauvoir on Woman. Foreward by Henri Peyre. Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Presses Inc., 1975.

LILAR, Suzanne. Le Malentendu du deuxième sexe. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1969.

MADSEN, Axel. Hearts and Minds: The Common Journey of Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre. New York: William Morrow & Co., 1977.

MARKS, Elaine. Simone de Beauvoir. Encounters with Death. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1973.

MOUBACHIR, Chantal. Simone de Beauvoir ou le Souci de différence. Paris: Seghers, 1972.

NAHAS, Hélène. La femme dans la littérature existentielle. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1957.

WASMUND, Dagny. Der Skandal der Probleme der Selbstverwirklichung im Existentialismus, dargelegt an den Romangestalten Simone de Beauvoirs. Münchner romanistische Arbeiten, München: M. Hueber Verlag, 1963.

#### Interviews and Articles

See:

FRANCIS, Claude and Fernande Gontier. Les Ecrits de Simone de Beauvoir. La Vie - l'écriture, avec, en appendice, textes inédits ou retrouvés. Paris: Gallimard, 1979.

Also:

"Simone de Beauvoir interroge Jean-Paul Sartre". L'Arc, 61, (1975), pp. 3-12.

CHAPSAL, Madeleine. "Une interview de Simone de Beauvoir". Les Ecrivains en personne. Paris: Julliard, 1960, pp. 17-37.

DAVID, Catherine. "Beauvoir elle-même". Le Nouvel Observateur, (22 janvier 1979), pp. 82-90.

GERASSI, John. "Simone de Beauvoir. 'The Second Sex' 25 Years Later". Society, (Jan-Feb., 1976), pp. 79-85. (Translated back into French in Les Ecrits de Simone de Beauvoir, p. 547.

GOBEIL, Madeleine. "Simone de Beauvoir. An Interview". The Paris Review. 34, Spring-Summer 1965, pp.23-40. Translated back into French and reprinted in Julienne-Caffi 's Simone de Beauvoir.

GREGOIRE, M nie. "'La Force des choses'. Le Prix d'une R volte". Esprit. 326, (mars, 1964).

JARDINE, Alice. "Interview with Simone de Beauvoir". Signs, Vol. 5, No. 2, Winter 1979, pp. 224-236.

MCCALL, Dorothy Kaufmann. "Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, and Jean-Paul Sartre". Signs, Vol. 5, No. 2, Winter 1979, pp. 209-223.

ROLLAND, J-F. "Interview de Simone de Beauvoir". L'Humanit  Dimanche, (19 d cembre, 1954).

ROWLEY, Hazel & Renate Reismann. Interview with Simone de Beauvoir, Paris, November 1976. To appear in English in Hecate, Vol. VII, No. 2, 1981.

SCHWARTZER, Alice. "La femme r volt e", propos recueillis par Alice Schwartzer, Le Nouvel Observateur, 14 f vrier 1972, pp. 47-54.

SCHWARTZER, Alice. "Das ewig Weibliche ist eine L ge". Der Spiegel, 15, 5 avril 1976, pp. 190-197 and pp.200-201. The interview appeared in French under the title: "Simone de Beauvoir: 'Le Deuxi me Sexe' trente ans apr s", Marie-Claire, octobre 1976.

SICARD, Michel. "Interf rences. Entretien avec Simone de Beauvoir et Jean-Paul Sartre". Obliques, 18-19. Num ro sp cial sur Sartre, dirig  par Michel Sicard, pp. 325-329.

B. On Violette LeducArticles and Interviews

AURY, Dominique. "Violette Leduc". La Nouvelle Revue Française, 255, (mars 1974), pp.114-116.

BALAKIAN, Anna. "Mad in Pursuit' by Violette Leduc". Saturday Review, (September 18, 1971), pp. 47.

BELAVAL, Yvon. "L'Affamée". Les Temps Modernes, 44, (juin 1949), pp. 1124-1127.

BROC-LAPEYRE, Monique. "Du Trafic à la littérature". Critique, 279-280, (août-septembre, 1970), pp. 935-943.

CHALON, Jean. "Les Dernières Béatitudes de Violette". Le Figaro Littéraire, 1437, (décembre, 1973), p. 15.

CHAPSAL, Madeleine. "Violette Leduc, la bâtarde". L'Express, 696, (19-25 octobre, 1964), pp. 70-71.

CHAPSAL, Madeleine. "La Folle Solitude de Violette Leduc". L'Express, (25-31 octobre 1965), pp. 90-91.

COUFFON, Claude. "La Vieille Fille et le Mort". Les Temps Modernes, 156-157, (février-mars, 1959), pp. 1500-1504.

DEMERON, Pierre. Interview on Radio France-Culture. (1966). Translated by Hazel Rowley in Hecate, Vol. IV, No. I. (February, 1978), pp. 47-56.

FABRE-LUCE, Anne. "Le Mal d'être". La Quinzaine. (16-30 avril, 1970), p. 5.

FABRE-LUCE, Anne. "A la Proue du silence". La Quinzaine. (1-5 janvier, 1974), p. 15.

CALEY, Matthieu. "Les Cahiers d'angoisse". L'Express, (22-28 octobre, 1973), p. 79.

GANDON, Yves. "La Revue littéraire". La Revue des Deux Mondes. (octobre, 1970), pp. 164-167.

JOSSELIN, Jean-François. "Violette, suite et fin ...". Le Nouvel Observateur, 467, (22-28 octobre, 1973).

KAUPP, Katia D. "Les Renards de Violette Leduc". Le Nouvel Observateur. 52, (10-16 novembre, 1965), pp. 22-23.



KYRIA, Pierre. "La Sincérité de Violette Leduc". Le Magazine Littéraire, 41, (juin, 1970), pp. 34-35.

LANGE, Monique. "Les Passions de la Bâtarde". Le Nouvel Observateur, (23 mars, 1970), pp. 35-36.

PEYRE, Henri. "Passions of a Gallic Sappho". Saturday Review, (October 30, 1965), pp. 46-47.

PIATIER, Jacqueline. "Un Grand Livre: 'La Bâtarde' de Violette Leduc". Le Monde, 6139, XXL année, (10 octobre, 1964).

PIATIER, Jacqueline. "Violette Leduc est morte. Le beau cri d'une jeune fille 'dérangée' ". Le Monde Hebdomadaire, 1232, (1-7 juin 1972).

POIRET-DELPECH, Bertrand. "'La Chasse à l'amour' de Violette Leduc". Le Monde Hebdomadaire, 1304, (18-24 octobre, 1973).

SALEM, E.D. "Autobiography of a Lesbian". The Humanist, 80, (February, 1965), p. 51.

#### Dissertations

DOURTIVRON, Isabelle de. "Androgyny, Misogyny and Madness. Three Essays on Women in Literature". Ph.D. Brown University, 1973. 74-2999.

LIPTON, Virginia Anne. "Women in Today's World. A Study of Five French Women Novelists". (Bertin, Duras, Leduc, Mallet-Joris, Rochefort). Ph.D. University of Wisconsin, 1972. 73-9211.

### III. BACKGROUND READING.

#### A. On Autobiography

"L'Autobiographie". Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France, 75<sup>e</sup> Année, n<sup>o</sup> 6, (novembre-décembre, 1975).

BEAUJOUR, Michel. "Autobiographie et autoportrait". Poétique, 32, (novembre, 1977), pp. 442-458.

BOERNER, Peter. Tagebuch. Stuttgart: Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1969.

500.

BREE, Germaine. Narcissus Absconditus. The Problematic Art of Autobiography in Contemporary France. The Zaharoff Lecture for 1977-1978. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978.

BRUSS, Elizabeth W. "L'Autobiographie considérée comme acte littéraire". Poétique, 17, 1974, pp. 14-26.

BRUSS, Elizabeth W. Autobiographical Acts. The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre. Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1976.

BUTLER, Richard Austen. The Difficult Art of Autobiography. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968.

GIRARD, Alain. Le Journal intime. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963.

GOODWIN, James. "Narcissus and Autobiography". Genre, XII, Spring 1979, pp. 69-92.

GUSDORF, Georges. "Conditions et limites de l'autobiographie" in Formen der Selbstdarstellung. (Festgabe für Fritz Neubert). Ed. Günther Reichenkron & Erich Hasse. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1956, pp. 105-123.

HART, Francis. "Notes for an Anatomy of Modern Autobiography". New Literary History, I, Spring 1970, pp.485-511.

HOWARTH, William L. "Some Principles of Autobiography". New Literary History, V, Winter 1974, pp. 365-381.

JELINEK, Estelle C. Ed. Women's Autobiography. Essays in Criticism. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980.

LEJEUNE, Philippe. L'Autobiographie en France, Paris: Armand Colin, 1971.

LEJEUNE, Philippe. Le Pacte autobiographique. Paris: Le Seuil, 1975.

LEJEUNE, Philippe. Lire Leiris. Autobiographie et langage. Paris: Klincksieck, 1976.

LEJEUNE, Philippe. Je est un autre. L'Autobiographie, de la littérature, aux média. Paris: Le Seuil, 1980.

MANSELL-JONES, P. French Introspectives. From Montaigne to André Gide. Cambridge University Press, 1937.

MARKS, Elaine. "I am my Own Heroine. Some Thoughts about Women and Autobiography in France". Female Studies IX. Ed. Sidonie Cassirer. Old Westbury, New York: The Feminist Press, 1975.

MAY, Georges. L'Autobiographie. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1979.

MEHLMANN, Jeffrey. A Structural Study of Autobiography. Proust, Leiris, Sartre, Lévi-Strauss. New York: Cornell University Press, 1974.

MITSCHERLICH-NIELSEN, Margarete. "Wie weit reicht die Autobiographie?" Überlegungen Zum Thema Selbstdarstellung in Literatur und Wissenschaft. Kulturelles Wort, Hessischer Rundfunk, 20 Juni 1979.

MOFFAT, Mary Jane and Charlotte Painter. Ed. Revelations and Diaries of Women. New York: Random House, 1974.

MORRIS, John. Versions of the Self. New York: Basic Books, 1966.

NEUMANN, Bernd. Identität und Rollenzwang. Zur Theorie der Autobiographie. Frankfurt: Athenäum Verlag, 1970.

OLNEY, James. Metaphors of Self. The Meaning of Autobiography. Princeton University Press, 1972.

OLNEY, James. Ed. Autobiography. Essays Theoretical and Critical. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980.

PASCAL, Roy. Design and Truth in Autobiography. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960.

PICARD, H.R. Literarische Selbstdarstellung in zeitgenössisches Frankreich. Munchen: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1978.

SALAMAN, Esther. The Great Confession. From Aksakov and De Quincey to Tolstoy and Proust. London: Allen Lane, 1973.

SHAPIRO, Stephen A. "The Dark Continent of Literature: Autobiography". Comparative Literature Studies, 5, December 1968, pp. 421-454.

SHUMAKER, Wayne. English Autobiography. Its Emergence, Materials and Form. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1954.

SPACKS, Patricia M. "Reflecting Women". Yale Review, 63, (1973), pp. 26-42.

SPACKS, Patricia M. "Women's Stories, Women's Selves". Hudson Review, 30, (1977), pp. 29-46.

STAROBINSKI, Jean. Le Style de l'autobiographie. Poétique, I, 1970.

STURROCK, John. "The New Model Autobiographer". New Literary History, IX, Autumn 1977, pp. 51-63.

TRILLING, Lionel. Sincerity and Authenticity. London: Oxford University Press, 1972.

WINSTON, Elizabeth. "Women and Autobiography: the Need for a more inclusive Theory". Ph.D. Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1977. Microfilm 78-4893.

#### B. French Women's Autobiographical Writing

ADAM, Juliette. Le Roman de mon enfance et de ma jeunesse. Paris: A. Lemerre, 1902.

AUDRY, Colette. Aux Yeux du souvenir. Paris: Gallimard, 1947.

BARNEY, Nathalie Clifford. Souvenirs indiscrets. Paris: Flammarion, 1960.

BASHKIRTSEFF, Marie. Journal [1890]. Paris: Charpentier, 1922.

BOURIGNON, Antoinette. La Vie de Dam [sic] Antoinette Bourignon. Amsterdam, J. Riewerts et P. Arents, 1683.

CARDINAL, Marie. Les Mots pour le dire. Paris: Grasset, 1975.

CARDINAL, Marie. Autrement dit. Paris: Grasset, 1977.

CHAPSAL, Madeleine. Une Femme en exil. Paris: Grasset, 1978.

CLAIRON, Claire. Mémoires. Paris: Ponthieu, 1822.

COLETTE, Sidonie. Mes Apprentissages. Paris: Ferenczi et Fils, 1936.

CROZET, Charlotte. Voie privée. Paris: Gallimard, 1978.

DELARUE-MARDRUS, Lucie. Mes Mémoires. (1936-1938). Paris: Gallimard, 1938.

DESANTI, Dominique. Les Staliniens. 1944-1956. Paris: Fayard, 1975.

d'EAUBONNE, Françoise. Chienne de jeunesse. Paris: Julliard, 1965.

d'EAUBONNE, Françoise. Les Monstres de l'été. Paris: Julliard, 1966.

GENNARI, Geneviève. Ce Monde où je vis. Paris: Grasset, 1972.

GREGOIRE, Ménie. Telle que je suis. Paris: Robert Laffont, 1976.

GROULT, Benoîte. Ainsi soit-elle. Paris: Grasset, 1975.

GUERIN, Eugénie de. Journal et Fragments. Paris: Didier, 1868.

GUYON, Jeanne-Marie Bouvier de la Mothe. La Vie de J-M Bouvier de la Mothe Guyon, écrite par elle-même. Cologne: J. de la Pierre, 1720.

HALIMI, Gisèle. La Cause des femmes. Paris: Grasset, 1973.

HARPAIN, Marie-Eustelle. Récit de sa vie écrit par elle-même. Paris: La Rochelle, F. Boulet, 1843.

JOUHANDEAU, Elise. Joies et douleurs d'une belle excentrique.

Tomé I : Enfance et adolescence d'Elise. Paris: Flammarion, 1952.

Tomé II : L'Altesse des hasards. Paris: Le Portulan, 1954.

Tomé III: Le Spleen empanaché. Paris: Flammarion, 1960.

LILAR, Suzanne. Une Enfance gantoise. Paris: Grasset, 1976.

MALRAUX, Clara. Le Bruit de nos pas.

Tomé I : Apprendre à vivre. Paris: Grasset, 1963.

Tomé II : Nos vingt ans. Paris: Grasset, 1966.

Tomé III: Les Combats et les jeux. Paris: Grasset, 1969.

Tomé IV : Voici que vient l'été. Paris: Grasset, 1973.

Tomé V : La Fin et le commencement. Paris: Grasset, 1976.

Tomé VI : Et pourtant j'étais libre. Paris: Grasset, 1979.

MARIE de L'ENFANT-JESUS. Vie de Mère Marie de l'Enfant-Jésus, écrite par elle-même. Avignon: Aubanel Frères, 1912.

MICHELET, Madame Jules. Mémoires d'une enfant. Paris: Hachette, 1867.

MONNIER, Adrienne. Souvenir d'Adrienne Monnier. Paris: Mercure de France, 1955.

MONNIER, Thyde. Moi. Monaco: Editions du Rocher.  
 Tome I : Faux Départ, 1949.  
 Tome II : La Saison des amours. 1950.  
 Tome III: Sur la Corde raide. 1951.  
 Tome IV : Jetée aux bêtes. 1955.

ROCHEFORT, Christiane. Ma Vie, revue et corrigée. A partir d'entretiens avec Maurice Chavardès. Paris: Stock, 1978.

ROLAND de la PLATIERE, Marie-Jeanne Phlipon. Mémoires. Paris: Hachette, 1864.

SAINTE-SOLINE, Claire. Les Années fraîches. Paris: Grasset, 1966.

SAND, George. Histoire de ma vie, in Oeuvres autobiographiques. Ed. Georges Lubin. Paris: La Pléiade, 1976.

SOEUR Jeanne des ANGES. Autobiographie d'une hystérique possédée, d'après le manuscrit inédit de la bibliothèque de Tours. Préface de M. le professeur Charcot. Paris: aux bureaux du 'Progrès Médical', 1886.

STAAL de LAUNAY, Marguerite-Jeanne Cordier, Barronne de. Mémoires de Mme de Staal, écrits par elle-même. 1775.  
 Coll. "Le Temps retrouvé". Paris: Mercure de France, 1970.

STERN, Daniel (Marie d'AGOULT). Mes Souvenirs, (1806-1833). Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1877.

STERN, Daniel (Marie d'AGOULT). Mémoires. Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1927.

THERESE de L'ENFANT-JESUS (Sainte Thérèse de Lisieux). L'Histoire d'une âme. Office central de Lisieux, 1956.

THERESE de JESUS. Aimer et souffrir, ou Vie de la R<sup>de</sup> mère Sainte-Thérèse de Jésus, écrite par elle-même. Toulouse: E. Privat, 1884.

TRISTAN, Flora. Les Pérégrinations d'un paria. 1833-1834. Paris: François Maspero, 1979.

VIGEE-LEBRUN, Louise-Elizabeth. Souvenirs de Mme Louise-Elizabeth Vigée-Lebrun. Paris: H. Fournier, 1835-1837.

WEISS, Louise. Mémoires d'une européenne. (5 volumes). Paris: Albin Michel, 1968-1974.

C. Other Literary Works

ARLAND, Marcel. Etienne. Paris: Gallimard, 1925.

ARLAND, Marcel. Monique. Paris: Gallimard, 1926.

BOWEN, Elizabeth. The Hotel. London: Jonathon Cape, 1927.

COLETTE, Sidonie. Claudine à l'école. Paris: Ollendorff, 1900.

COLETTE, Sidonie. Claudine à Paris. Paris: Ollendorff, 1901.

COLETTE, Sidonie. Claudine en ménage. Paris: Mercure de France, 1902.

COLETTE, Sidonie. Claudine s'en va. Paris: Ollendorff, 1903.

COLETTE, Sidonie. La Retraite sentimentale. Paris: Mercure de France, 1907.

ETCHERELLI, Claire. Elise ou la vraie vie. Paris: Denoël, 1967.

GENET, Jean. Journal du voleur. Paris: Gallimard, 1949.

GENET, Jean. Miracle de la rose. Paris: Gallimard, 1951.

GENET, Jean. Pompes funèbres. Paris: Gallimard, 1953.

GIDE, André. Si le grain ne meurt. Paris: Gallimard, 1929.

GIDE, André. Et nunc manet in te. Neuchâtel: R. Heyd, 1947.

CORZ, André. Le Traître. Paris: Gallimard, 1958.

HALL, Radclyffe. The Well of Loneliness. London: Jonathon Cape, 1928.

JAMMES, Francis. Le Roman du lièvre. Paris: Mercure de France, 1934.

LEHMANN, Rosamond. Dusty Answer. London: Chatto and Windus, 1927.

LEIRIS, Michel. L'Age d'homme. Paris: Gallimard, 1946.

LEIRIS, Michel. La Règle du jeu. Paris: Gallimard.

Tome I : Biffures. 1948.

Tome II : Fourbis. 1961.

Tome III: Fibrilles. 1966.

MacCARTHY, Mary. Memories of a Catholic Girlhood. London: William Heinemann, 1957.

MALRAUX, André. La Condition humaine. Paris: Gallimard, 1946.

MALRAUX, Clara. Portrait de Grisélidis. Paris: Colbert, 1945.

MALRAUX, Clara. La Maison ne fait pas crédit. Paris: Bibliothèque Française, 1947.

MALRAUX, Clara. Par de plus longs chemins. Paris: Stock, 1953.

NIN, Anais. Journals. (6 Volumes) (1931-1966). London: Peter Owen, 1966-1976.

NIZAN, Paul. Aden Arabie. Nouvelle édition présentée par Jean-Paul Sartre. Paris: Maspéro; coll. "Cahiers libres", 1960.

OCCHIPINTI, Maria. Une Femme de Ragusa. Florence: Landi, 1960.

PROUST, Marcel. Du Côté de chez Swann. Paris: Gallimard, 1954.

ROUSSEAU, Jean-Jacques. Les Confessions. Ed. J. Voisine. Paris: Garnier, 1964.

SACHS, Maurice. L'Alias. Paris: Gallimard, 1935.

SACHS, Maurice. La Chasse à courre. Paris: Gallimard, 1949.

SACHS, Maurice. La Décade de l'illusion. Paris: Gallimard, 1951.



- SACHS, Maurice. Le Sabbat. Paris: Corrêa, 1946.
- SACHS, Maurice. Tableau des mœurs de ce temps. Paris: Gallimard, 1954.
- SARTRE, Jean-Paul. Les Chemins de la liberté. Paris: Gallimard, 1945.
- SARTRE, Jean-Paul. Huis clos. Paris: Gallimard, 1945.  
"Le livre de poche", n° 1132, 1964.
- SARTRE, Jean-Paul. Les Mots. Paris: Gallimard, 1964.  
Coll. "Folio", n° 607, 1977.
- SARTRE, Jean-Paul. La Nausée. Paris: Gallimard, 1938.
- STENDHAL, (Henri BEYLE). La Vie de Henri Brulard. Paris: Charpentier, 1890.
- STENDHAL, (Henri BEYLE). Souvenirs d'égotisme. Paris: Stryenski, 1892.
- D. General.
- ALBISTUR, M. and Daniel Armogathe. Histoires du féminisme français. Du Moyen Age à nos jours. (2 volumes). Paris: Ed. des femmes, 1977.
- ALZON, Claude. Femme mythifiée, femme mystifiée. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1978.
- ANDREAS SALOME, Lou. Sigmund Freud and Lou Andréas Salomé, letters. Ed. Ernst Pfeiffer. London: The Hogarth Press, 1972.
- AUDRY, Colette. " 'La Chasse à courre' par Maurice Sachs". Les Temps Modernes, 43, (mai 1949), pp.947-948.
- BALZAC, Honoré de. Physiologie du mariage. (1830). Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1903.
- BARRETT, William. Irrational Man. New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1962.
- BATESON, Gregory. Steps to an Ecology of Mind. New York: Ballantine, 1975.
- BENICHO, Paul. Morales du grand siècle. Paris: Gallimard, 1948.
- BREE, Germaine. Women Writers in France. Variations on a Theme. New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1973.

BRUNSCHVIG, Léon. Le Progrès de la conscience dans la philosophie occidentale. Paris: Alcan, 1927.

BURNIER, Michel-Antoine. Les Existentialistes et la politique. Paris: Gallimard, coll. "Idées", 1966.

CAUTE, David. Communism and the French Intellectuals. 1914-1960. London: Deutsch, 1964.

CAUTE, David. The Fellow-Travellers. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973.

CHAIINE, Catherine. "Sartre et les femmes. Un entretien avec Catherine Chaine". Le Nouvel Observateur, 638, (31 janvier - 6 février 1977), 639, (7-13 février 1977).

CHASSEGUET-SMIRGEL, Janine. La Sexualité féminine. Paris: Payot, 1964.

CHODOROW, Nancy. "Mothering, Object-Relations and the Female Oedipal Configuration". Feminist Studies, Vol. 4, No. 1, (February, 1978), pp. 137-158.

COMTE, Auguste. Correspondance générale et confessions. Ed. Paulo E. de Barrâdo Carneiro and Pierre Arnaud. Paris: Mouton, 1973-1977.

CONTAT, Michel et Michel RYBALKA. Les Ecrits de Sartre, Chronologie, bibliographie commentée. Paris: Gallimard, 1970.

CROSLAND, Margaret. Women of Iron and Velvet. New York: Taplinger, 1976.

CURTIS, Jean-Louis. "'La Décade de l'illusion' par Maurice Sachs". Les Temps Modernes, 68, (juin 1951), p. 2289.

DHAVERNAS, Odile. Droits des femmes, pouvoir des hommes. Paris: Seuil, 1978.

DOUBROVSKY, Serge. "Le Neuf de coeur. Fragment d'une psycholecture de la nausée". Obliques, 18-19 (numéro spécial sur Sartre), 1979.

DUPEUX, G. La Société française. 1789-1970. Paris: Armand Colin, 1972.

d'EAUBONNE, Françoise. Le Féminisme. Paris: Alain Moreau, 1972.

FIRESTONE, Shulamith. The Dialectic of Sex. New York: William Morrow, 1970.

FREUD, Sigmund. "A Childhood Recollection from 'Dichtung und Wahrheit' ". The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Vol. XVII. (1917-1919). Translated from the German under the editorship of James Strachey. London: The Hogarth Press, 1955.

FREUD, Sigmund. "Female Sexuality". (1931). The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Vol. XXI. Ed. James Strachey. London: The Hogarth Press, 1961.

FREUD, Sigmund. "Femininity". (1933). The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Vol. XXII. London: The Hogarth Press, 1964.

New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis. Pelican Books, 1973.

FREUD, Sigmund. The Interpretation of Dreams. (1900). The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Vol. V. London: The Hogarth Press, 1962.

FREUD, Sigmund. The Psychopathology of Everyday Life. (1901). The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Vol. VI. London: The Hogarth Press, 1960.

FREUD, Sigmund. "On Narcissism. An Introduction". (1914). Collected Papers. Vol. IV. Translated under supervision of Joan Rivière. London: The Hogarth Press, 1934.

GOLDMANN, Lucien. Le Dieu caché. Paris: Gallimard, 1955.

GOULD, Carol and M. WARTOFSKY. Ed. Women and Philosophy; Towards a Theory of Liberation. Putnam: "Capricorn Books, 1976.

HALL, Calvin S. and Gardner LINDZEY. Theories of Personality. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1957.

HERMANN, Claudine. Les Voleuses de langue. Paris: Editions des Femmes, 1976.

IRIGARAY, Luce. Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un. Paris: Edition de Minuit, coll. "Critique", 1977.

JANEWAY, Elizabeth. Man's World. Woman's Place. A Study in Social Mythology. N.Y.: William Morrow & Co., 1971.

JEANSON, Francis. Sartre dans sa vie. Paris: Seuil, 1974.

LAGARDE, André et Laurent MICHARD. XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle. Collection littéraire. Paris: Bordas, 1969.

LAING, R.D. The Divided Self. London: Tavistock, 1959. Pelican, 1965.

LAING, R.D. Self and Others. London: Tavistock, 1961.  
Pelican, 1971.

LECLERC, Annie. Parole de femme. Paris: Grasset, 1974.

LEDERER, Wolfgang. The Fear of Women. New York and  
London: Grune and Stratton, 1968.

MACHEREY, Pierre. Pour une théorie de la production  
littéraire. Paris: Maspero, 1966.

MARCUSE, Herbert. "Existentialism: Remarks on J-P Sartre's  
L'Etre et le néant". Philosophy and Phenomenological Research.  
Vol. VIII, No. 3, (Sept. 1947-June 1948).

MARCUSE, Herbert. Negations. London: Routledge & Kegan  
Paul, 1968.

MILL, John Stuart. The Subjection of Women. London:  
Longmans, Green, Reader & Dyer, 1869.

MITCHELL, Juliet. Psychoanalysis and Feminism. London:  
Allen Lane, 1974.

MITCHELL, Juliet. Woman's Estate. New York: Random  
House, 1971.

MONNIER, Thyde. De l'Homme à la femme. Essai sur les  
contacts sociaux, sexuels, affectifs de l'homme et de la  
femme. Givors: André Martel, 1954.

NIETZSCHE, Friedrich. The Antichrist. The Complete Works  
of Friedrich Nietzsche. Ed. Oscar Levy. Vol. XVI. Edinburgh:  
Foulis, 1909-1913. New York: Gordon, 1974.

NIETZSCHE, Friedrich. The Joyful Wisdom. The Complete  
Works of Friedrich Nietzsche. Ed. Oscar Levy. Vol. X.  
New York: Gordon, 1974.

NIETZSCHE, Friedrich. The Genealogy of Morals. The  
Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche. Ed. Oscar Levy.  
Vol. XIII. New York: Gordon, 1974.

OPHIR, Anne. Regards féminins. Paris: Denoël-Gonthier, 1976.

OZOUF, Mona. L'Ecole, l'église et la République. 1871-1914.  
Paris: Armand Colin, 1963.

PETERS, H.F. My Sister, My Spouse. Norton: Norton  
Library, 1974.

PEYRE, Henri. French Novelists of Today. Oxford University  
Press, 1967.

PEYRE, Henri. Literature and Sincerity. New Haven and  
London: Yale University Press, 1963.

PIERCE, Roy. Contemporary French Political Thought. London: Oxford University Press, 1966.

PISAN, Annie de et Annie TRISTAN. Histoire du M.L.F. Préface de Simone de Beauvoir. Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1977.

POSTER, Mark. Critical Theory of the Family. New York: The Seabury Press, 1978.

POSTER, Mark. Existential Marxism in Postwar France. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975.

RABAUX, J. Histoire des féminismes français. Paris: Stock, 1978.

REGIS, E. et A. HESNARD. La Psychanalyse des névroses et des psychoses. Paris: Alcan, 1914.

REY, Pierre-Louis. La Femme. De la belle Hélène au Mouvement de Libération des femmes. Paris: Bordas, 1972.

RICH, Adrienne. Of Woman Born. Motherhood as Experience and Institution. N.Y.: W.W. Norton & Co., 1976. "Bantam", 1977.

RICH, Adrienne. On Lies, Secrets, and Silence. Selected Prose 1966-1978. N.Y.: W.W. Norton & Co., 1979.

RIESMAN, David. in collaboration with R. DENNEY and H. GLAZER. The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950.

ROBERTS, Joan I. (ed.). Beyond Intellectual Sexism; A new Woman, a new Reality. New York: McKay, 1976.

ROY, J.E. L'Avortement, fléau national. Causes, conséquences, remèdes. Paris: Jouve, 1943.

RULE, Jane. Lesbian Images. London: Peter Davies, 1975.

SARTRE, Jean-Paul. Baudelaire. Paris: Gallimard, Coll. "Idées", 1947.

SARTRE, Jean-Paul. Critique de la raison dialectique, preceded by Questions de méthode. Paris: Gallimard, 1960.

SARTRE, Jean-Paul. L'Être et le néant. Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique. Paris: Gallimard, 1943. Coll. "Tel", 1977.

SARTRE, Jean-Paul. "Présentation des Temps modernes". Les Temps Modernes, n° I (1er octobre 1945), pp. 1-21. Reprinted in Situations, II.

SARTRE, Jean-Paul. Questions de méthode. (1960).  
Paris: Gallimard, coll. "Idées", 1967.

SARTRE, Jean-Paul. Saint Genet, comédien et martyr.  
Paris: Gallimard, 1952.

SARTRE, Jean-Paul. Situations, II. Paris: Gallimard, 1948.  
(The volume includes: "Présentation des Temps Modernes",  
"La Nationalisation de la littérature" and "Qu'est-ce que  
la littérature?").

SARTRE, Jean-Paul. Situations, IV. Paris: Gallimard, 1964).  
(Contains fifteen texts, including: "Des rats et des hommes"  
(sur André Gorz), "Paul Nizan", "Le séquestré de Venise"  
(sur le Tintoret).).

SARTRE, Jean-Paul. Situations, VII. Paris: Gallimard,  
1965. (Contains eight texts, including "Le Fantôme de  
Staline").

SARTRE, Jean-Paul. Situations, IX. Paris: Gallimard, 1972.  
(Contains fifteen texts, including: "Sartre par Sartre",  
"L'Homme au magnétophone" and "Dialogue psychanalytique").

SARTRE, Jean-Paul. Situations, X. Paris: Gallimard, 1976.  
(Contains seven texts, including: "Simone de Beauvoir  
interroge Jean-Paul Sartre" and "Autoportrait à soixante-  
dix ans").

SEVE, Lucien. Marxisme et théorie de la personnalité.  
Paris: Editions sociales, 1974.

SPECTORSKY, Auguste C. The Exurbanites. Philadelphia:  
Lippincott, 1955.

STERN, Karl. The Flight from Woman. New York: Farrar,  
Straus and Giroux, 1965.

SULLEROT, Evelyne (ed.). Le Fait féminin. Paris: Fayard,  
1978. (Ouvrage collectif sous la direction d'Evelyne Sullerot,  
avec la collaboration d'Odette Thibault.)

VAULABELLE, Achille Tenaille de. Histoire des deux  
Restaurations. 1813-1830. (1844). Paris: Perrotin, 1969

WHYTE, William H. The Organization Man. Middlesex:  
Penguin, 1956.

WOLFF, Charlotte. Love between Women. London: George  
Duckworth & Co., 1971.

WOOLF, Virginia. A Room of One's Own. London: The  
Hogarth Press, 1929.

WRIGHT MILLS, C. The Power Elite. New York: Oxford University Press, 1956.

WRIGHT MILLS, C. The Sociological Imagination. New York: Oxford University Press, 1959.