

The Legacy of Simone de Beauvoir

Edited by
Emily R. Grosholz

NOTICE: THIS MATERIAL MAY BE
PROTECTED BY COPYRIGHT LAW
(TITLE 17 U.S. CODE)

CLARENDON PRESS · OXFORD

2004

Duke University Libraries



D02559000L

Meaning What We Say: The 'Politics of Theory' and the Responsibility of Intellectuals

Toril Moi

'The desire for a theory that guarantees political radicalism and, ideally, political effectiveness, has been strong in recent years', Jonathan Culler writes.¹ As a feminist literary critic and theorist I know what he means, for I belong precisely to the group of intellectuals for whom the question of the 'politics of theory' has been a cause of concern for a long time. Radical theorists often ask themselves whether the writing they do, which tends to be specialized and fairly abstract, really makes a political difference. Whenever I think about this I feel comforted by the thought that *some* intellectual works, at least, have had tremendous impact. *The Second Sex*, above all, is the very incarnation of committed writing. Here is a book of philosophy, a highly intellectual analysis of women's situation, that actually did change thousands of women's lives, and in so doing contributed to changing the values of whole societies.²

Yet the existence of incontrovertible examples (*Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Das Kapital* are others) has hardly helped to settle discussions about the 'politics of theory'. In present-day debates it is as if Sartre and Beauvoir, once considered paradigmatic examples of committed intellectuals, have been entirely forgotten. In this essay I shall show that they still have thought-provoking contributions to make to our understanding of the relationship between politics and intellectual

¹ Jonathan Culler, 'Literary Theory', in *Introduction to Scholarship in Modern Languages and Literatures*, ed. Joseph Gibaldi, 2nd edn. (New York: MLA, 1992), 201-35, at 218.

² For some examples of lives changed by *The Second Sex* see Toril Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 179-81.

work. This essay, then, is not so much about *The Second Sex* as it is about some of the thoughts and attitudes that made Beauvoir want to write that book. In order to clear the way for a reconsideration of French existentialism, I shall start by taking a closer look at the phrase the 'politics of theory'.

DEMANDING THE ABSOLUTE

The perennial interest in the question of the 'politics of theory' among intellectuals on the left stems from anxiety about being intellectuals in the first place. Radicals wish to make the world better and more just. Yet we have chosen to work with words, ideas, and culture. For this we get paid so that we can lead comfortable middle-class lives. In a world full of suffering and injustice there is something unfair about this. The most attractive existential solution to the sense of guilt that this situation breeds is to find a way to justify intellectual work politically. No wonder that many succumb to the temptation and set out to prove either that theory in its broadest generality or that some particular theory is intrinsically political. If we can believe that theory (some theory) simply is political, then doing theory would carry its own political and existential justification at all times. What a relief for guilt-ridden theorists!

Unfortunately, this is not a very convincing strategy. We would be more politically effective, and happier too, if we could manage to wean ourselves from this fantasy. First of all, the question of the 'politics of theory' is far too general. There are all kinds of theories, used by all kinds of people in all kinds of contexts. A theory of truth and discourse does not have the same relationship to politics as a theory of capitalism or women's oppression. The question about the 'politics of theory' has in fact mostly been raised by post-structuralists, whose theories have to do with language, discourse, and subjectivity. (So the 'politics of theory' really means the 'politics of post-structuralism'?)

In the same way, the word politics means different things at different times, in different situations. In the 1930s a political play was likely to be about class, or fascism. Now a political play may be about AIDS or race or gender or sexuality. To the question 'Is theory political?' all one can reply is 'It depends'.³

³ Cora Diamond puts the phrase 'it depends' to good philosophical use in 'Knowing Tornadoes and Other Things', *New Literary History*, 22 (1991), 156-60.

In short, to ask about the 'politics of theory' is to impose a demand for absoluteness on a human activity that will yield no such thing. To such a question, any answer we could give would either be metaphysical or meaningless, or both. Stanley Cavell writes:

We impose a demand for absoluteness... upon a concept, and then, finding that our ordinary use of this concept does not meet our demand, we accommodate this discrepancy as nearly as possible. Take these familiar patterns: we do not really see material objects, but only see them indirectly; we cannot be certain of any empirical proposition, but only practically certain; we cannot really know what another person is feeling, but only infer it.⁴

Cavell's examples are all taken from classical cases of philosophical skepticism, but the symptom he alerts us to (the demand for absoluteness) is rife in contemporary literary theory too: Whenever something turns out not to be absolute, in our disappointment we turn around and declare that it is nothing at all. So if we can't have absolute, ultimate truth, for example, then we declare that 'truth' (or 'certainty') does not exist at all.

As we have seen, Jonathan Culler's diagnosis is that contemporary theorists are looking for a 'theory that guarantees political radicalism'. The very idea of a 'guarantee' requires further investigation, alongside the notions of 'theory' and 'politics'. What picture of the relationship between politics and theory must one have to make it look as if a 'guarantee' of radical effects (or should this be radical intentions?) can be had? Is this not another version of Cavell's 'demand for absoluteness'?

To ask about the 'politics of theory' is not the only way to think about the political value of intellectual work. Nor is the demand for absoluteness confined to contemporary literary theorists. To show what I mean, I shall now turn to two statements by Sartre and Beauvoir.

SARTRE'S MELODRAMA

'Faced with a dying child, *Nausea* does not tip the scales', Sartre said in 1964, the year in which he published *The Words*.⁵ At roughly the same

⁴ Stanley Cavell, 'Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy', in *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 73-96, at 77.

⁵ 'En face d'un enfant qui meurt, *La Nausée* ne fait pas le poids.' Sartre made this statement in an interview with Jacqueline Platier entitled 'Jean-Paul Sartre s'explique sur *Les Mots*', published in *Le Monde* 18 April 1964. My quotation comes from the reprint in Michel Contat and Michel Rybalka, *Les Écrits de Sartre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), 398.

time, in 1963, Simone de Beauvoir wrote: 'I am an intellectual, I take words and the truth to be of value.'⁶ There are two different attitudes towards politics and words at work in these statements. I now want to show why I think of Sartre's image as *metaphysical* and *melodramatic*, in contrast to what I shall call Beauvoir's *ordinary* view of intellectual commitment. (My choice of words is meant to indicate my debt to Stanley Cavell, and through him, to Wittgenstein.)

At the time, many took Sartre's statement to mean that he thought there was no justification for literature in a starving world. It is unclear whether Sartre himself thought this, or whether he just meant to raise the question of the political effects of writing by saying something provocative. I shall ascribe the common, extreme interpretation to 'Sartre', but it may well be that what I am describing is not Sartre, but those who take his statement in this way, then and now.

In 1964 Sartre was 59, he was slowly going blind, and he suffered from alarming levels of hypertension. He was also a world-famous intellectual, tirelessly campaigning for radical causes. Given his specific circumstances, the most politically effective thing he could do was to continue to write, which is exactly what he did. Yet the image of the dying child is immensely more powerful than any pragmatic considerations. However justified he may have been in his choices, that image makes Sartre's intellectual life appear insufficient, even callous. The image tells us that regardless of what he does as an intellectual Sartre is painfully aware that it is not always enough.

The phrase 'not always enough' reveals what the problem is. Of course writing is not always enough. How could it be? What human activity is 'always enough'? Enough for what? In the vague, unspecific, and generalized turn of phrase 'not always enough', metaphysics—Cavell's 'demand for absoluteness'—rears its head. For if we are faced with a dying child, we tend to her. We feed her, care for her, hold her, provide as much medicine and comfort as we possibly can. In such a case tending to the child is simply what we do. Only a cold-blooded murderer would turn her back and return to her desk.

But if this is right then Sartre's image tells us nothing about the political and ethical value of intellectual work. We all know that novels and theory don't feed the hungry or heal the sick. To whom was he

⁶ Simone de Beauvoir, *Force of Circumstance*, trans. Richard Howard (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), 378. 'Je suis une intellectuelle, j'accorde du prix aux mots et à la vérité', Simone de Beauvoir, *La Force des choses* (Paris: Gallimard (Coll. Folio), 1963), ii, 120.

speaking? Who would feel illuminated by the thought that *Nausea* will not save a dying child? The answer is clear: only someone who once fervently hoped that it would. Sartre's youthful faith in salvation through literature, which happens to be a major preoccupation of *The Words*, instantly comes to mind. But the same attitude can be found in those present-day intellectuals who have excessive faith in the power of theory to put everything politically right, as if every kind of oppression would vanish if only we could elaborate the right theory of subjectivity, or discourse, or truth.

In Sartre's example of the dying child there is an immensely seductive fantasy of being able to produce writing powerful enough to save a dying child. There is no middle ground here: either writing does it all, or it does nothing. I don't mean to overlook the fact that Sartre's statement has the form of a negation, that his claim is that *Nausea can't* do anything for a dying child. In my view, the very form of the statement carries out psychic work; its task is to *negate* the fantasy of the omnipotence of writing, a fantasy Sartre himself so masterfully explored in *The Words*. 'Negation is a way of taking cognizance of what is repressed . . . A negative judgment is the intellectual substitute for repression', Freud writes.⁷ By saying that his writing is *not* justified, Sartre keeps the dream of justification by literature alive, but the affect has shifted, from exuberant jubilation at the omnipotence of writing to abject disappointment and guilt at the failure of writing.

The very intensity of the image reinforces and expresses the contrasting affects contained in the negated fantasy. Juxtaposing a dying child and an ageing male intellectual, Sartre pits wronged innocence against guilt and decay. Pressing the question of intellectual responsibility to the extreme, he trades in the stark absolutes, the all-or-nothing logic, of melodrama.⁸ In this way he invites us to believe that politics is the only possible *raison d'être* of writing, and that if writing doesn't save a dying child it is of no use at all.

⁷ Sigmund Freud, 'Negation' (1923), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, xix (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953–74), 233–9 at 235–6.

⁸ In his influential study *The Melodramatic Imagination* Peter Brooks writes: 'The connotations of the word [melodrama] include: the indulgence of strong emotionalism; moral polarization and schematization; extreme states of being, situations, actions; overt villainy, persecution of the good' (Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 11).

Among intellectuals today the tell-tale symptoms of Sartre's anxiety-inducing fantasy are excessive feelings of anguish and guilt about the political failure or impotence of intellectuals. The inevitable flip side of this is excessive optimism about the power of theory. Once we lose faith in that, we are ripe for Sartre's melodrama. Unless we can find an alternative to see-sawing between these equally intense and affect-laden positions, we will become embittered and lose all faith in the value of intellectual work. The irony is that the more intensity we invest in our quest for political justification, the more we court ultimate political disaffection.

BEAUVOIR AND THE ORDINARY

How do we get off the see-saw? Beauvoir's 'I take words and the truth to be of value' rings truer to me than Sartre's melodrama of the intellectual and the dying child. It is significant, for example, that she simply says 'of value', and not 'of absolute value', or 'always of political value'. To my ears, Beauvoir invites us to consider what value words and the truth have in a given situation, no more, but also no less. Beauvoir's approach enables us to discuss the relationship between theory and politics in ordinary, everyday terms, and not in the empty terms of metaphysics.

For her, then, the question of where, when, and how the intellectual should commit herself becomes a concrete, individual, and practical (as opposed to an abstract, general, and metaphysical) one: Can I justify doing what I do? How good am I at it? Do I have the talents and skill required to do something else? Could I acquire them? Is the cause I believe in better served by a mediocre guerrilla fighter or a first-rate writer? Let us say that I really want to know what intellectuals can do to save dying children. I read in the paper that: 'The United Nations calculates that the world population's basic needs for food, drinking water, education and medical care could be covered by a levy of less than 4% on the accumulated wealth of the 225 largest fortunes [in the world].'⁹ It would seem that the people who can do the most to help dying children are not intellectuals, but the owners of those 225 fortunes.

⁹ Ignacio Ramonet, 'Politics of Hunger', trans. Barry Smerin, *Le Monde diplomatique*, November 1998, 1 (supplement to *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, week ending 22 November 1998).

As intellectuals we can spread this knowledge. But we also need to acknowledge that unless we are a certain kind of economist or doctor our daily work is not going to be concretely concerned with the prevention of famine and death. Intellectuals working in the humanities shouldn't simply ask what intellectuals in general can do, but what we can do that people from other disciplines can't do better.

The advantage of Beauvoir's approach is that it enables us to acknowledge the distress that fuels Sartre's stark image, without having to give up the thought that words and writing have political significance. The only alternative to political guilt and anguish is not com-pleasant acquiescence in the death of children. It is part of intellectual life constantly to ask what the political, ethical, and existential value of one's work is. My point is that there doesn't have to be one answer to that, let alone one answer to be given once and for all. Moreover, there is no need to raise those questions in melodramatic terms.

The question of justification nevertheless remains. Are we justified in speaking about theory? Or about anything at all? (Can we defend writing novels, essays, travel books, poetry?) Even if we don't think that children are dying because we are writing, we may feel vaguely guilty about giving ourselves the right to speak and write when so many millions cannot. Isn't there an unbearable arrogance here? Since we are no better and no worse than anyone else, what justifies our 'arrogation of voice' (as Stanley Cavell calls it)?¹⁰

I'll be blunt: the answer is *nothing*. Our speaking—even the most passionate political call to arms—is never justified by anything but our own wish to speak: 'Who beside myself could give me the authority to speak for us?', Cavell writes.¹¹ To ask for *general* justification is to ask for a metaphysical ground beneath our feet. There is something arrogant and something unjust about writing anything at all. How can I write when millions of others cannot? How can I justify my arrogation of voice? How can anyone? If we do decide to write, it is pointless to consume ourselves in guilt about the 'exclusionary' effects of writing per se. The question, therefore, is not how to justify writing anything

¹⁰ The term 'arrogation of voice' stresses the unfounded moment of arrogation contained in any theoretical or philosophical speech act, as well as the arrogance of the act of claiming for oneself the right to appeal to the judgment of others (see Stanley Cavell, *A Pitch of Philosophy: Autobiographical Exercises* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), 1–51; see also Toril Moi, *What Is a Woman? And Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 233–5, 249–50).

¹¹ Cavell, *Pitch*, 9.

at all, but rather what one aims to do with one's writing. (I shall return to this.)

I can spend my life feeling guilty about having more opportunities to express myself than millions of other women, or I can try to write in ways that embody my own commitments. Beauvoir says that to write is to appeal to the freedom of the other.¹² If we follow the implications of that, we will realize that ultimately we can't control the political effects of our own writing. Of course, we will try to be as persuasive as possible, to make our case as well as we can, but readers are still free to meet our appeals with anything from enthusiasm to indifference, contempt, and silence. To appeal to the freedom of others is to risk their rebuff. If we want to be politically committed, all we can do is to say what we have to say, and take responsibility for our words. In short, we have to mean what we say.

MEANING WHAT WE SAY: INTENTIONS AND RESPONSIBILITY

So, readers might object, the answer to the question of the 'politics of theory' is that we have to mean what we say? What's so political about that? Does what we aim to do with our writing really matter? Is this not just a return to the dreaded 'intentional fallacy', the belief that the author's intentions are the key to the meaning of the text. And is there not here a belief that 'meaning' is something else than the words that express it?

In *What Is Literature?* Sartre¹³ asks the committed writer two crucial questions: 'What aspect of the world do you want to disclose? What

¹² 'Language is an appeal to the freedom of the other, because the sign only becomes sign when it is grasped by a consciousness', Beauvoir writes in *Pyrrhus et Cinéas*. 'I can only appeal to the other's freedom, not constrain it', she also writes (Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus et Cinéas* (Paris: Gallimard, 1944), 104, 112, my translations). For further discussion of the idea of the appeal to the other see Moi, *What Is a Woman?* 226-37. These pages also contain some discussion of the idea of arrogation of voice.

¹³ Although I shall speak of Sartre's *What Is Literature?*, because the book has his name on the cover, it is probably more accurate to say that the concept of committed literature was jointly developed by Beauvoir and Sartre in the 1940s. At the time, they appeared to share what I have called the 'ordinary' view of commitment, a view to which Beauvoir (probably unlike Sartre) remained faithful for the rest of her life. The roots of the concept go back to Beauvoir's understanding of writing and speech as generous appeals to the other's freedom, which she first developed in *Pyrrhus et Cinéas* in 1944. (For a pioneering investigation of the concept of the 'appeal' in Sartre and Beauvoir see Eva Gothlin, 'Simone

change do you want to bring into the world by this disclosure?' (p. 37).¹⁴ Clearly Sartre takes the writer's intentions to be relevant to the question of her political commitment. The very mention of the word intentions, however, makes literary critics recoil. They take the word to commit the speaker to the belief that intentions are, as it were, spiritual entities, and as such the thin edge of the wedge of two commonly despised literary theories, namely the expressivist theory of meaning and the traditional communication model.¹⁵ The disputable picture of meaning and writing that contemporary critics want to avoid is this: The writer's intentions correspond to a vision, or 'message', in her head, which she then proceeds to clothe in the appropriate words. The reader faithfully decodes the writer's message, so as to reproduce in her own head the writer's original vision. Bad writing interferes with the decoding, good writing ensures a seamless process of communication.

Sartre may or may not have shared this view. (His understanding of the relationship between intentions and words is opaque to me, and I won't even try to discuss it here.¹⁶) But Sartre does not raise the

de Beauvoir's Notions of Appeal, Desire, and Ambiguity and their Relationship to Jean-Paul Sartre's Notions of Appeal and Desire', *Hypatia*, 14/4 (1999), 83-95.) In October 1945 both Beauvoir and Sartre signed the editorial manifesto of *Les Temps modernes*, which contains the first published reference to 'committed literature'. (The manifesto has been translated as Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Introducing *Les Temps modernes*', in *What Is Literature? and Other Essays*, ed. Steven Ungar, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 249-67.) In the spring of 1947 Beauvoir gave a number of lectures in the United States in which she spoke of the commitment and responsibility of writers in ways that appear to have been very similar to those put forward in Sartre's texts on the subject (see Claude Francis and Femande Gontier, *Les Écrits de Simone de Beauvoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), 143-50). Finally, the concept of committed writing was further developed by Sartre in *What Is Literature?*, written in 1947 and published in 1948. His text actually incorporates most of the *Temps modernes* manifesto. If we want to know what committed literature looks like, *The Second Sex*, written in the period between 1946 and 1949, is the fullest and best example of the kind, unless one believes that 'committed literature' has to mean fiction or drama. Sartre's examples are mostly novels, but the questions he asks of the writer seem perfectly suited to writers of essays as well. I can't see why commitment should be limited to specific genres.

¹⁴ All references to Sartre, *'What Is Literature?' and Other Essays*, ed. Ungar will be given in the text, preceded by the abbreviation *WL*.

¹⁵ Adorno too implies this when he writes: 'For Sartre, the atheist... the conceptual meaning of the literary work remains the precondition for commitment' (Theodor W. Adorno, 'Commitment', in *Notes on Literature*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Sherry Weber Nicholson, ii (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 76-93, at 78).

¹⁶ In *What Is Literature?* Sartre sometimes sounds as if he is committed to the idea that we think without words: '[I]t is a matter of knowing whether [words] correctly indicate a

question of intentions simply because he has outmoded or mistaken ideas about meaning and words. Even if he does have such ideas, and even if we strongly disagree with him on those issues, it should be possible to see that the question of intentions remains crucially important to a theory of intellectual commitment, simply because it is impossible to assess *responsibility* without referring to intentions. There is a difference between invoking the author's intentions as the only true *meaning* of the work, and invoking them as a source of her *responsibility* for the work.

This resonates with Stanley Cavell's Wittgenstein-inspired understanding of meaning. For him—and these brief remarks do no justice to the rich, concrete detail of his argument—our meanings are always there, in the words we speak. If we want to find out what a sentence means, we need to ask 'what we should say when', not postulate the existence of accompanying mental acts. Moreover, because speech and writing are *acts*, we are as responsible for our meanings as we are for anything else we do:

[T]he 'pragmatic implications' of our utterances are (or if we are feeling perverse, or tempted to speak carelessly, or chafing under an effort of honesty, let us say *must be*) *meant* . . . they are an essential part of what we mean when we say something, of what it is to mean something. And what we mean (intend) to say, like what we mean (intend) to do, is something we are responsible for.¹⁷

Of course, we may not always realize what we are saying (this sort of thing keeps psychoanalysts, philosophers, and literary critics in work), but this is another matter entirely. If or when it dawns on us that we have said something we don't want to mean, we usually *do* something (we apologize, admit our mistake, do what it takes to change the situation). This is precisely what Cavell means when he speaks of 'owning our words', or 'taking responsibility for what we say'. If we fail to do this, words such as irresponsibility, evasion, avoidance, shiftness, inauthenticity, and bad faith will usually not be absent from the conversation.

certain thing or a certain notion. Thus, it often happens that we find ourselves possessing a certain idea that someone has taught us by means of words without being able to recall a single one of the words which have transmitted it to us' (WIL 35). But on the same page he also writes: 'We are within language as within our body', which conjures up far more interesting perspectives. To unravel Sartre's theory of language would be an arduous task.

¹⁷ Stanley Cavell, 'Must We Mean What We Say?', in *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 32.

At this point, Anne Stevenson's fine response (see Ch. 8 below) made me realize that I need to explain more carefully what I mean by saying that we are responsible for our words. I agree with her that it is difficult to say what one means. Everyone who writes knows how many drafts and how much sweat it takes to convey just the right things in just the right way. Of course Beauvoir chose her subject, her style, her readers, her words, and of course she labored intensely over her drafts. Everyone who writes has intentions and aims, and they matter deeply. My point, however, is that we need to distinguish between intentions as the source of *responsibility* and intentions as the source of *meaning*.

Intentions matter for the question of responsibility. The author's intentions, however, are not the source of the meaning of her words. To deny this is simply to deny that there can be a private language. The language we all speak gives meaning to our words. Every speaker of the language participates in the production of meaning. As long as it has speakers, a language will continue to evolve and change. No speaker invents her own meanings: if she did, we would not understand her. This is precisely *why* it takes so much hard work to get to the point where we actually can say what we mean.

But once we have said something we must mean it, that is to say take responsibility for it, 'own our words'. Thus we are responsible for unintended as well as intended meanings. In everyday life we often show that we know this. Say some ambiguous sentence about the dress, hairstyle or sex life of one of my friends escapes me. My friend blushes furiously, starts to cry, and I feel acutely embarrassed. I suddenly realize that I didn't mean to say *that*, that it came out all wrong, that of course it would be misunderstood.

Freud would surely tell me that my slip of the tongue reveals some truth about my relationship to my friend, or to hair, dress, or sex. I don't disagree with that. But what I'm interested in here is what I *do* once the unfortunate comment has escaped. Usually I apologize, make excuses, or perhaps try to explain that I didn't mean it, or at least not in *that* way. These reactions all acknowledge that the words mean what they meant, that they gave rise to my friend's tears, and that I am responsible for this. (Paradoxically, then, to say 'I didn't mean it', is precisely to acknowledge that my words mean exactly what I say I didn't mean to say.)

To make excuses, to explain, to apologize are ways of taking responsibility for our words. It is also a way of honoring Freud's insight that

ambiguous utterances are ours, that, however difficult it may be, we need to own them, not simply disavow them. (In Freud's case this means 'working them through', analyzing them until we realize that we really are capable of saying, thinking, meaning what we said.) What we usually don't do in such situations is to say: 'Since I really didn't intend to say anything bad about you, my words just can't mean what you take them to mean. So I have done nothing wrong, I am not responsible. You have no reason to cry.' I realize that I have said something I don't mean when I realize that I don't want to own *those* words. And to acknowledge this (to apologize, regret, etc.) is to own those words. We are responsible for the situation that arises from our words, whether we like it or not. We must mean what we say.

Sartre and Beauvoir's theory of committed literature (*littérature engagée*) makes some very similar connections between speaking, meaning, and responsibility, no doubt because the French existentialists too start from the idea that to speak is to act. 'The committed writer knows that words are action', Sartre writes in *What Is Literature?* (p. 36). It is striking to see just how close Sartre comes to formulating a speech-act theory of language in this much maligned book:

Prose in essence is utilitarian. I would readily define the prose-writer as a man who *makes use* of words. M. Jourdan made prose so that he could ask for his slippers, and Hitler, so that he could declare war on Poland. The writer is a *speaker*; he designates, demonstrates, orders, refuses, interpolates, begs, insults, persuades, insinuates. (WIL 34)

Here Sartre sounds almost like J. L. Austin; the idea of the 'performative' or 'illocutionary' aspects of speech acts appears to be just around the corner. But Sartre never turned his theory of prose into a theory of language, surely because of his unfortunate decision to start his essay by drawing a fundamental distinction between poetry and prose, in which prose becomes action and poetry a kind of iconic object-language.

Sartre's principal aim in *What Is Literature?* is to draw attention to the writer's social and political responsibility. Given his own historical situation this is not surprising. The essay was published less than three years after the 1945 execution of Robert Brasillach, the writer and editor of the fascist newspaper *Je suis partout*. In her compelling essay on the trial, entitled 'Eye for Eye', Simone de Beauvoir reveals that although she detested Brasillach and everything he represented, she

too was fascinated by the spectacle of a writer whose life was at stake because of his writings.¹⁸

As we have seen, intentions are crucial for a discussion of responsibility, if not meaning. Drawing on Cavell, we can say that although the author's intentions may be largely irrelevant when it comes to deciding what a text means (the meaning of our words is not a private matter), they do not remain irrelevant when it comes to the question of the author's responsibility for her text. In a court of law the difference between murder and manslaughter is a matter of intentions. If I can convince the judge that I did not intend to steal the stopwatch, but simply forgot to pay for it because my head was full of thoughts about writing and commitment, she may let me off the charge of shoplifting.

The difference between a crime and liability in tort also turns on intentions. If I intended to burn your house down, I am a criminal. But if I burnt your house down because my own kitchen caught fire when I was trying to make potato chips in my uniquely inept way, I have certainly been negligent, but I have probably committed no crime. The result of my act is not here in dispute: whatever I intended, the fact is that your house is now a smouldering heap of embers. When it comes to deciding what *degree of responsibility* I bear for this state of affairs, however, my intentions have to be taken into account.

To ask what you intend to do with your book, then, is to ask about the degree of responsibility that you are prepared to take for it. This responsibility is always personal; it is a matter of *your* words. Moreover, as Sartre points out, *silence* is also an act for which you are responsible:

Silence itself is defined in relationship to words, as the pause in music receives its meaning from the group of notes round it. This silence is a moment of language; being silent is not being dumb; it is to refuse to speak, and therefore to keep on speaking. Thus, if a writer has chosen to remain silent on any aspect whatever of the world, or, according to an expression which says just what it means, to *pass over* it in silence, one has the right to ask him . . . 'Why have you spoken of this rather than that, and—since you speak in order to bring about change—why do you want to change this rather than that?' (WIL 38–9)

¹⁸ See Mary McCarthy's translation of Simone de Beauvoir's 'Oeil pour oeil' (*Les Temps modernes*, 1 (1946), 813–30) as 'Eye for Eye', in *Politics*, 4/4 (1947), 134–40. My understanding of the Brasillach trial has been greatly enhanced by my colleague Alice Kaplan's outstanding study *The Collaborator: The Trial and Execution of Robert Brasillach* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

For Sartre and Beauvoir, then, political commitment is a matter of personal and individual engagement. (In this context there can be no question of declaring the death of the author.) To say that political commitment and political responsibility are personal, however, is not to postulate the existence of some radically unfettered inner self. Rather it means that our political choices are not separable from the kind of persons we are. What makes us the persons we are is a vast complex of influences. To put it in existentialist terms: the social and historical situation I am in, as well as my personal situation in all its complexity—in short, my lived experience—determines the kind of commitments I will be able to make. But this is no full-blown determinism, for lived experience arises from what we continually make of what the world makes of us. It is the full range of situated experiences of a given person, her subjectivity.¹⁹ The personal, then, is not just those experiences conventionally labelled private or sexual, or those that can be related to a social 'identity'.

Attention to the personal does not entail denial of the historical or the social. We do not have to picture the individual as an isolated monad in order to speak of personal commitment and responsibility. I do not need to deny, for example, that what I find intellectually interesting to the point of wanting to write about it is to a large extent determined by the values and protocols of the intellectual field of which I am both a product and an agent. Nor do I have to deny that in the big scheme of things my own subjectivity may be but a moment in the working of some larger dialectics. But the fact that I am a product of my social and historical position does not absolve me from having to make up my own mind about political and existential questions. My position in history deeply affects the question of my personal responsibility, but it does not abolish it.

How responsible am I for my sexism if I live in a place and a time where everyone assumes that women are less valuable, have a lesser share in humanity, than men? Aristotle might be a good example. He thought women were naturally inferior to men and often categorized them with slaves. In the introduction to *The Second Sex* Beauvoir quotes Aristotle's claim that women are inherently defective (see SS

¹⁹ See the title essay of Moi, *What Is a Woman?*, for further discussion of these terms ('lived experience', 'subjectivity', 'making something of what the world makes of us', etc.).

1989, xxii; DS 1986, i. 15).²⁰ It seems wrong to say he is not at all responsible for his ideas about women, yet it also seems wrong to say that egalitarian ways of thinking were readily available to him. The question here is not the meaning of Aristotle's words, but the degree of responsibility he bears for them. If some famous philosopher in 2003 spoke of women (and ignored women) in the way Aristotle did, he would surely provoke an outrage. Today there could be no mitigating circumstances for a philosopher who chose to speak in this way.

The question of responsibility, in other words, takes us straight to the question of *situation*. (Tort lawyers have always known this.) We aren't responsible to eternity, or to some abstract entity, we are responsible to those human beings with whom we share a world: 'Whether he wants to or not, and even if he has his eyes on eternal laurels, the writer is speaking to his contemporaries and brothers of his class and race', Sartre writes (WIL 70). (Speaking of responsibility, I note the 'he' and the 'brothers' in this sentence, but this was France in the 1940s. Even Beauvoir did it: the last word of *The Second Sex* is 'brotherhood'.) The question for the committed writer, then, cannot just be: 'What do you want to change?' It also has to be: 'Who are you writing for?'

WHO ARE YOU WRITING FOR?

When it comes to judging what kind of (political) act our writing constitutes, then, the question of whom we imagine that we are writing *for* becomes as important as the question of what we are writing *about*. For Sartre these two questions are in fact inextricably linked.²¹ '[A]ll works of the mind contain within themselves the image of the reader for whom they are intended', Sartre writes (WIL 73). To choose a subject is to choose one's readers; and to choose one's readers is to choose one's subject.

The writer is responsible for her writing, yet her text is nothing without a reader. The writer can only appeal to the reader's freedom,

²⁰ For the classical feminist treatment of Aristotle see Susan Moller Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 73–98.

²¹ Some writers carefully work to eradicate the image of the reader in their texts (Nathalie Sarraute comes to mind). This says as much about the world the writer takes herself to be addressing as any other form of writing. Ann Jefferson's marvellous book on Sarraute truly sheds new light on her relationship to identity (see Ann Jefferson, *Nathalie Sarraute, Fiction and Theory: Questions of Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000)).

to her decision to read or not to read the text. The reader is necessary to the writer; the writer cannot write without explicitly or implicitly imagining a reader with whom she shares a world (I shall return to the idea of 'sharing a world'). This world, Sartre writes, is the concrete terrain where commitment plays itself out:

[E]ach book proposes a concrete liberation on the basis of a particular alienation. Hence, in each one there is an implicit recourse to institutions, customs, certain forms of oppression and conflict . . . to hopes, to fears, to habits of sensibility, imagination, and even perception, and, finally, to customs and values which have been handed down, to a whole world which the author and the reader have in common. It is this familiar world which the writer animates and penetrates with his freedom. It is on the basis of this world that the reader must bring about his concrete liberation; it is alienation, situation, and history. It is this world which I must change or preserve for myself and others. (WIL 72)

Sartre is here placing a very existentialist emphasis on the everyday world that readers and writers have in common, just as Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* pays close and concrete attention to women's common and ordinary experiences.

I shall go on to show that it is easy to see for whom Beauvoir wrote *The Second Sex*. But why am I not using myself as an example here? For I claim that responsibility is always personal, and several readers of drafts of this essay have therefore asked me about myself. They have also asked me to be more specific. Why can't I say clearly what kind of responsibility I take for my own writing? In what way are my own texts committed? I agreed. The problem was that however much I tried to develop these questions, I failed. All I came up with was vague and nebulous prose. Now I think I finally know why. First of all, my fundamental claim is that the author's text is the key to the author's intentions. (To find out for whom Beauvoir wrote *The Second Sex* I read *The Second Sex* and not her memoirs.) I have no special access to the meaning of my own words that other people don't have. (This explains why authors are rarely the best critics of their own writing.)

But what about responsibility? In my drafts I was trying to say something about my own responsibility in the general and the abstract, just because I felt it ought to be said. The result was dismal. The reason why turns out to be theoretically significant, for it points to a limitation in Sartre's theory. For the question of the degree of responsibility one bears for one's texts is not, in fact, a

general and abstract question. Sartre is right to say that an author must always and at all times be ready to explain himself. But he forgets that the question of political responsibility is just as situated, just as specific, as the question of who one is writing for. One is not always responsible to all for everything, regardless of what Sartre and Beauvoir say.²² Or, in other words: One doesn't demand an explanation unless a problem has arisen. It is therefore not a coincidence that all my examples have to do with shoplifting, arson, and murder.

On this point Cavell and Wittgenstein think very differently from Sartre. For them, the question of meaning—the need to ask questions about the meaning of our words—only arises when something has gone wrong. 'The sign-post is in order—if, under normal circumstances, it fulfils its purpose', Wittgenstein writes in *Philosophical Investigations*.²³ To demand a general explanation for how meaning can be possible at all is to reintroduce the demand for the absolute. But the same is true for the question of responsibility. If nobody has asked me 'How could you write this?' I can't tell what it is I am supposed to be responsible for. If I then try to say something about my own responsibility, the result will inevitably be vague and general. It is like trying to defend oneself without knowing what the accusations are.

When it comes to *The Second Sex*, however, there is one accusation I would like to address. Many feminists have accused Beauvoir of being ethnocentric, of only being interested in white Europeans. I want to go further and say that she is only interested in a certain group of French men and women. But this, in my view, is precisely the reason why *The Second Sex* has had so much to say to women and men all over the world.

²² The epigraph to Beauvoir's second novel, *Le Sang des autres* (*The Blood of Others*) is 'Everyone is responsible for everything to everyone' (Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Sang des autres* (Paris: Gallimard (Coll. Folio), 1945); Simone de Beauvoir, *The Blood of Others*, trans. Yvonne Moyse and Roger Senhouse (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964/86)). The novel is about the occupation of France, and deals, among other things, with the fate of the French Jews. In this horrendous situation the epigraph must have felt right. But as a general maxim it is metaphysical and absolutist.

²³ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen/Philosophical Investigations*, 2nd bilingual edn. (New York: Macmillan, 1958), §87. This is the point where Wittgenstein and Cavell differ most profoundly from post-structuralist thinkers such as Jacques Derrida. For Derrida the letter may always not arrive. His theory of language is geared to emergencies and failures, whether or not they have actually arisen. Wittgenstein on the other hand starts from a sense of wonder at the fact that we so frequently do understand each other. For a subtle and thorough investigation of the relationship between Derrida and Wittgenstein see Martin Stone, 'Wittgenstein on Deconstruction', in Alice Crary and Rupert Read (eds.), *The New Wittgenstein* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 83–117.

In *The Second Sex* Beauvoir takes no pains to reach readers outside France. Her text is peppered with sardonic references to local luminaries such as Claude Mauriac and allusions to contemporary newspaper and magazine stories. In the introduction she refers, for instance, to a defunct and ephemeral magazine called *Franchise*, a September 1948 issue of *Le Figaro Littéraire*, and the most recent issue of *Hédo-Latin* (a local student rag). Beauvoir's creativity was nourished by and directed towards a community of readers with whom she had just shared the gruelling experience of the German occupation.

At the time, however, the French were deeply divided by the occupation and the post-war purges, and *The Second Sex* makes it abundantly clear that the readers Beauvoir imagines to be sharing her everyday experiences are not all of the French, just the ones more or less on the left, the people often referred to at the time as 'men and women of goodwill'. Thus *The Second Sex* is explicitly not addressed to members of the 'conservative bourgeoisie', since they 'still see in the emancipation of women a menace to their morality and their interests' (SS 1984, p. xxx; DS 1986, i. 25). Beauvoir's explicit criticism of Julien Benda, Claude Mauriac, and Henri de Montherlant, for example, demonstrates that she is not writing for people who rate these writers highly; that is to say, people the existentialists would qualify as the 'reactionary forces' of the bourgeoisie.²⁴

Although the example of *The Second Sex* shows that in order to write well we need to be able to imagine readers who share a situation with us, it also demonstrates that this is no guarantee of a friendly reception. In France *The Second Sex* was savaged by the critics. Beauvoir's sexuality and morals were publicly denounced. The book was placed on the Index by the Vatican. The French reception contrasted sharply with the far more balanced and positive American reception of the book in 1953.²⁵ Yet *The Second Sex* is explicitly not addressing American women. Beauvoir's frequent references to the habits and opinions of American women are directed to the French, for whom a trip to the United States was still a rare adventure in 1949. American readers of the French text would have discovered that Dorothy Parker is made out to exemplify their own misguided nominalism:

²⁴ For references to these writers in the introduction see SS 1989, xxii, xxx, xxx-xxxi, xxviii; DS 1986, i. 15; i. 23; i. 26.

²⁵ For the French reception see chapters 3 and 7 of Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*; for the American reception see Jo-Ann Pilsardi, 'The Changing Critical Fortunes of *The Second Sex*', *History and Theory*, 32/1 (1993), 51-73.

American women, in particular, are prepared to think that there is no longer any place for woman as such; if a backward individual still takes herself for a woman, her friends advise her to be psychoanalyzed and thus get rid of this obsession. In regard to a work, *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex*, which, incidentally, is highly irritating, Dorothy Parker has written: 'I cannot be just to books which treat of woman as woman... My idea is that all of us, men as well as women, should be regarded as human beings.' (SS 1989, xx; DS 1986, i. 12, translation amended)²⁶

Moreover, Beauvoir continues, American women aren't even properly philosophical in their nominalism; it is no more than an expression of their own discomfort with the fact of being women: 'The clenched attitude of defiance of American women proves that they are haunted by a sense of their femininity' (SS 1989, xx; DS 1986, i. 13, translation amended).²⁷ None of this prevented *The Second Sex* from becoming far more politically influential in the United States than in France. Beauvoir, it would seem, reached women in other countries *through* her French readers, not in spite of them.²⁸ Precisely because she managed to make her French readers' way of being in the world, their specific situation, unusually evident, her French readers can recognize themselves in her words. At the same time, however, the clarity and force with which she describes the French situation (which is also her own) allows other people to *respond* to her text, to examine their own situation in the light of hers. The gesture of *The Second Sex* is: 'This is what I see. Can you see it too?'²⁹ The better the description of what Beauvoir sees, the easier it is for readers to agree or disagree with her.

The Second Sex, then, is intensely French in its address and frame of reference. The enormous international influence of Beauvoir's essay demonstrates that what makes a text important to readers of different nationalities, races, and classes cannot be reduced to the question of

²⁶ Beauvoir writes 'Les Américaines en particulier', but the published American translation has 'Many American women'. Elsewhere I have shown that it is by no means certain that Dorothy Parker said anything at all about *Modern Woman* (see Moi, *What Is a Woman?* 181-4).

²⁷ 'L'attitude de défi dans laquelle se crispent les Américaines'. The published American translation tones down Beauvoir's text: 'The attitude of defiance of many American women', Parshley translates.

²⁸ Sartre writes about Richard Wright that he never explicitly intended to reach European readers: 'He is addressing himself to the cultivated negroes of the North and the white Americans of goodwill (intellectuals, democrats of the left, radicals, C.I.O. workers). It is not that he is not aiming through them at all men but it is *through them* that he is thus aiming' (WIL 79).

²⁹ This is a version of Stanley Cavell's compelling account of the attitude of the ordinary-language philosopher: 'The philosopher appealing to everyday language turns to the reader

whether their own race or nationality is represented in it. What matters is whether the text shows the reader some aspect of the world that he or she can *respond to*. To respond to a text the reader does not have to identify with it or recognize herself in it, or feel represented by it; she needs to feel stirred, moved, challenged by its appeal. In *The Second Sex* Beauvoir shows us what the world looks like to her: as a place in which women are oppressed in particular ways, by particular methods. Women and men all over the world have responded to that vision.

In short, *The Second Sex* teaches us that political effects are not necessarily a matter of representation. Sartre's point is that we never write for *everyone*; rather, we write for (or against) readers we can concretely imagine. Through them—but only through them—we reach others. Toni Morrison has often said that she writes with black American readers in mind. Through them, however, she reaches her other readers, including the white men and women of the Swedish Academy.

THE RISK OF WRITING

Simone de Beauvoir did not set out to write an important feminist book. On the contrary, she had never thought much about feminism, or about being a woman, until one day in June 1946 when she decided to write her memoirs. At this point, for the first time in her life, the question of what it had meant to her to be a woman occurred to her:

I realized that the first question to come up was: What has it meant to me to be a woman? At first I thought I could dispose of that pretty quickly. I had never had any feeling of inferiority, no one had ever said to me: 'You think that way because you are a woman,' my femaleness had never been irksome to me in any way. 'For me,' I said to Sartre, 'you might almost say it just hasn't counted.' 'All the same, you weren't brought up in the same way as a boy would have been; you should look into it further.' I looked, and it was a revelation: this world was a masculine world, my childhood had been nourished by myths forged by men, and I hadn't reacted to them in at all the same way I should have done if I had been a boy. I was so interested in this discovery that I abandoned my project for a personal confession in order to give all my attention to finding out about the condition of woman in its broadest

not to convince him without proof but to get him to prove something, test something, against himself. He is saying: Look and find out whether you can see what I see, wish to say what I wish to say' (Cavell, 'Aesthetic Problems', 95–6).

terms. I went to the Bibliothèque Nationale to do some reading, and what I studied were the myths of femininity.³⁰

The Second Sex was written at a time when there was no women's movement in France.³¹ When Simone de Beauvoir took the risk of writing about women from the point of view of her own experience as a woman in a patriarchal society she could not possibly have known what the outcome of her act would be. In particular, she could not have known how political, and how historically significant, *The Second Sex* was to become for readers in the 1960s and 1970s.

Change is produced, Sartre says, when the writer's reflections on her experience inspire others to think about their own situation in new ways: to write is to appeal to the other's freedom. But to be a politically committed writer is not necessarily to be a politically significant writer. Only writers who occupy a situation of some historical significance can hope to be able to make an important difference in the world. This happened to be the case of Simone de Beauvoir. Her own situation as an independent intellectual woman was paradigmatic of changes already under way in women's situation all over the western world. Although it may not have been apparent in the late 1940s, the generation of women born in the 1940s and 1950s would leave home, seek an education, set out to claim independence, sexual freedom, and serious careers. 'The free woman is only just being born', Beauvoir wrote in 1949 (SS 1989, 715; DS 1986, ii, 641). Whether she knew it or not, her reflections on her situation as a woman captured the spirit of a century.

The same is unlikely to be true for most of us. However committed we are, we can't be sure that we will have anything of historical significance to say. There is nothing much we can do about this. We shall have to accept that we cannot predict the political effects of our writing. On this point we must simply use our best judgment, take our chances, and write about what really matters to us. That is to say, we need to take our writing seriously, to stake ourselves in it. The difficulty of doing this is the difficulty of meaning what we say.

So where does this leave us, you ask? Can I still write theory with a clear political conscience? Well, I just said that that's for you to figure out. I

³⁰ Beauvoir, *Force of Circumstance*, 103, translation amended. For the French text see Beauvoir, *La Force des choses*, i, 136.

³¹ In *Women's Rights and Women's Lives in France 1944–1968* (London: Routledge, 1994) Claire Duchene gives a thorough overview of women's situation and women's organizations in France in this period.

could not advise you any further without knowing who you are and what your situation is. What I do know is that any attempt to lay down theoretical requirements for what politically correct writing *must* look like is bound to be hopelessly dogmatic. Ask yourself instead what you want to change and who you are writing for. Then ask yourself whether what you have to say is worth saying. If you think it is, write about it as well as you can. This will not protect you against criticism, nor will it guarantee the importance of your intervention. On the other hand, it does maximize your freedom. Even so, you may never say anything of world-shattering importance. That is the risk you take when you choose to write. But when others violently disagree, when they accuse you of any number of political and personal sins, you will know how to own your words.

This theory of committed writing starts with Beauvoir's idea that writing is an appeal to the other's freedom. Thus writing becomes an invitation to dialogue. The committed writer's gesture is: 'This is what I see. Can you see it too?'³² If the reader can't see it she may, if you are lucky, take the time to explain what *she* sees. Then your appeal is answered. Of course we want everyone to see what we see. But when they can't the disagreements and conflicts that arise can be deeply enlightening in their own right. To adapt a phrase of J. L. Austin: 'A disagreement . . . is not to be shied off, but to be pounced upon: for the explanation of it can hardly fail to be illuminating.'³³

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This essay started life as a draft towards a projected third chapter in my book *What Is A Woman?*, but I decided against using it. Then it became a brief paper on 'The Politics of Theory', presented at a panel called 'Cynical Theory Revisited' at the MLA conference in Chicago, December 1999. An excerpt from the beginning appeared as part of the 'Afterword' in *Toril Moi, Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, 2nd edn. (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 180–5. The whole essay was published in Norwegian as 'Å mene det vi sier: Om de intellektuelle ansvar', *Samtiden*, 1 (2003), 60–75. I have made some further, slight revisions to the English text published here. I want to thank Anne Garréta, Emily Grosholz, Anne Stevenson, Live Cathrine Slang and Knut Olav Åmås for inspiring comments on various drafts.

³² This particular gesture was first analyzed by Stanley Cavell in 'Aesthetic Problems'. See also my discussion of Beauvoir's view of writing as dialogue and appeal in *Moi, What Is a Woman?*, 226–50.

³³ J. L. Austin, 'A Plea for Excuses', in *Philosophical Papers*, 3rd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 175–204, at 184.

Saying What We Mean

Anne Stevenson

Disciples of J. L. Austin may well be disappointed by this response to Toril Moi's 'Meaning What We Say: The "Politics of Theory"' and the 'Responsibility of Intellectuals', for there is no way in which I can 'pounce upon' an illuminating disagreement with its salient points. I agree with Moi that intellectuals would do well to abandon their search for a general theory of literature that guarantees political radicalism (or even specific political results). Her arguments against demanding an absolute 'politics of theory' (whatever that may mean) and for supplanting such an intangible generality with a willingness to engage with particular, down-to-earth situations seem to me irrefutable and wonderful. I applaud Moi's emphasis on what, after Stanley Cavell, she identifies as Beauvoir's commitment to 'ordinary' language in her pursuit of 'truth and value'. All I can do is approach the question of 'Meaning What We Say' at a tangent, as it were. At one point in her essay, Moi refers to Sartre's 'unfortunate decision' to draw a distinction between poetry and prose by excluding from poetry the 'performative' or active elements of language (see p. 150 above). Like Moi, I take issue with this view, but I would also suggest that the question of how language relates to conscience and political commitment is part of a larger issue having to do with how words equip us both to express and to disguise (from ourselves and others) the ways in which we think.

Toril Moi opens her argument by citing Beauvoir's 'I take words and the truth to be of value', as a useful starting point if we want to justify literature's age-old link with non-utilitarian purposes. Comparing Beauvoir's modest, 'ordinary' view of intellectual commitment with Sartre's 'metaphysical and melodramatic' remark, 'Faced with a dying child, *Nausea* does not tip the scales', Moi dismisses Sartre's all-or-nothing view as a seductive fantasy. 'Of course', she writes, 'writing is not always enough. How could it be? What human activity is "always

Select Bibliography

Primary Works by Simone de Beauvoir, with English Translations

- Le Deuxième Sexe*, 2 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1949).
Le Deuxième Sexe, 2 vols. (Paris: Gallimard (Coll. Folio), 1986).
The Second Sex, trans. H. M. Parshley (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952; repr. New York: Bantam Books, 1961; New York: Vintage Books, 1974; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984; with introd. by Deidre Bair, New York: Vintage Books, 1989; with introd. by Margaret Crosland, New York and London: Alfred A. Knopf (Everyman's Library), 1993).

In chronological order:

- L'Invitée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943).
She Came to Stay, trans. Yvonne Moysse and Roger Senhouse (New York: World, 1954; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986; New York: Norton, 1999).
Pyrrhus et Cinéas (Paris: Gallimard, 1944).
Le Sang des autres (Paris: Gallimard (Coll. Folio), 1945).
The Blood of Others, trans. Yvonne Moysse and Roger Senhouse (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964/86).
Les Bouches inutiles (Paris: Gallimard (Coll. Le Manteau d'Arlequin), 1945).
Who Shall Die?, trans. Claude Francis and Fernande Gonthier (Florissant, Mo.: River Press, 1983).
Tous les hommes sont mortels (Paris: Gallimard (Coll. Folio), 1946).
All Men are Mortal, trans. Leonard M. Friedman (Cleveland, Ohio: World, 1955), rev. trans. Euan Cameron and Leonard M. Friedman (London: Virago Press, 1995).
Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté (Paris: Gallimard, 1947).
The Ethics of Ambiguity, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Citadel Press, 1948/1970/2000).
L'Existentialisme et la sagesse des nations (Paris: Les Éditions Nagel, 1948).
L'Amérique au jour le jour (Paris: Morthien, 1948).

- America Day by Day*, trans. Carol Cosman (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1999).
Les Mandarins (Paris: Gallimard (Coll. Folio), 1954).
The Mandarins, trans. Leonard M. Friedman (Cleveland, Ohio: World, 1956; repr. London: Fontana 1986; New York: Norton, 1991).
Privileges (Paris: Gallimard, 1955). (Also published in the Coll. *Idées* under the title *Faut-il brûler Sade?*)
La Longue Marche (Paris: Gallimard, 1957).
The Long March, trans. Austryn Wainhouse (Cleveland, Ohio: World, 1958).
Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée (Paris: Gallimard, 1958).
Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter, trans. James Kirkup (Cleveland, Ohio: World, 1959; repr. Harmondsworth and New York: Penguin, 1963; New York: Harper and Row, 1959/74).
La Force de l'âge (Paris: Gallimard, 1960).
The Prime of Life, trans. Peter Green (Cleveland, Ohio: World, 1962; repr. New York and Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965/88; with introd. by Toril Moi, New York: Paragon House, 1992).
La Force des choses (Paris: Gallimard (Coll. Folio), 1963).
The Force of Circumstance, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Putnam, 1965; repr. with introd. by Toril Moi, New York: Paragon House, 1992).
Une Mort très douce (Paris: Gallimard (Coll. Folio), 1964).
A Very Easy Death, trans. Patrick O'Brian (New York: Warner Books, 1964/73; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983; New York: Pantheon Books, 1985).
Les Belles images (Paris: Gallimard (Coll. Folio), 1966).
Les Belles Images, trans. Patrick O'Brian (New York: Putnam, 1968; repr. New York: HarperCollins and London: Fontana, 1985).
La Femme rompue (Paris: Gallimard (Coll. Folio), 1968).
The Woman Destroyed, trans. Patrick O'Brian (New York: Putnam, 1969; repr. London: Fontana, 1987).
La Vieillesse (Paris: Gallimard (Coll. Folio), 1970).
The Coming of Age, trans. Patrick O'Brian (New York: Putnam, 1972; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986; New York: Norton, 1996).
Tout compte fait (Paris: Gallimard (Coll. Folio), 1972).
All Said and Done, trans. Patrick O'Brian (New York: Putnam, 1974; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987 and Marlowe, 1994).
Quand prime le spirituel (Paris: Gallimard, 1979).
When Things of the Spirit Come First, trans. Patrick O'Brian (New York: Random House, 1984; London: Fontana, 1986).
La Cérémonie des adieux (Paris: Gallimard (Coll. Folio), 1981).

- Adieux: Farewell to Sartre*, trans. Patrick O'Brian (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984; repr. New York: Knopf, 1985; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986).
- Lettres à Sartre*, 2 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1990).
- Journal de Guerre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990).
- Letters to Sartre*, trans. Quentin Hoare, Pref. Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir (New York: Arcade, 1991).
- Lettres à Nelson Algren* (Paris: Gallimard (Coll. Folio), 1999).
- A Transatlantic Love Affair: Letters to Nelson Algren*, trans. Kate Leblanc (New York: New Press, 1998).
- Books in English on Simone de Beauvoir*
- ARR, KRISTANA, *The Bonds of Freedom: Simone de Beauvoir's Existentialist Ethics* (Chicago, Ill: Open Court, 2001).
- BAIR, DEIRDRE, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Biography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990).
- BAUER, NANCY, *Simone de Beauvoir, Philosophy, and Feminism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).
- BERGOFFEN, DEBRA B., *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Gendered Phenomenologies, Erotic Generosities* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997).
- CARD, CLAUDIA, (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
- CROSLAND, MARGARET, *Simone de Beauvoir: The Woman and her Work* (London: William Heinemann, 1993).
- EVANS, MARY, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Feminist Mandarin* (New York: Tavisstock, 1985).
- EVANS, RUTH, (ed.), *Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex: New Interdisciplinary Essays* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).
- FALLAIZE, ELIZABETH, *The Novels of Simone de Beauvoir* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988).
- FULBROOK, KATE, and FULBROOK, EDWARD, *Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre: The Remaking of a Twentieth-Century Legend* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).
- HOLVECK, ELEANORE, *Simone de Beauvoir's Philosophy of Lived Experience: Literature and Metaphysics* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002).
- KRUKS, SONIA, *Situation and Human Existence: Freedom, Subjectivity, and Society* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990).
- LE DOEUFF, MICHÈLE, *Hipparchia's Choice: An Essay Concerning Women, Philosophy, etc.* trans. Trista Selous (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).
- LEIGHTON, JEAN, *Simone de Beauvoir on Woman* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1975).
- LUNDGREN-GOTHLIN, EVA, *Sex and Existence: Simone de Beauvoir's Second Sex*, trans. Linda Schenck (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan, 1996).
- MOI, TORIL, *Feminist Theory and Simone de Beauvoir* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).
- *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).
- *What is a Woman? And Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).
- O'BRIEN, WENDY, and EMBREE, LESTER (eds.), *The Existentialist Phenomenology of Simone de Beauvoir* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers (Contributions to Phenomenology, 43), 2001).
- OKELY, JUDITH, *Simone de Beauvoir* (New York: Pantheon, 1986).
- PILARDI, JO-ANN, *Simone de Beauvoir Writing the Self: Philosophy Becomes Autobiography* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 1999).
- SCHWARZER, ALICE, *After The Second Sex: Conversations with Simone de Beauvoir* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984).
- SIMONS, MARGARET A. (ed.), *Feminist Interpretations of Simone de Beauvoir* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995).
- *Beauvoir and The Second Sex: Feminism, Race, and the Origins of Existentialism* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999).
- (ed.), *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2003).
- SULLIVAN, SHANNON (ed.), *The Work of Simone de Beauvoir*, special issue of *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 13/1. (1999).
- TIDD, URSULA, *Simone de Beauvoir, Gender, and Testimony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
- *Simone de Beauvoir* (New York: Routledge, 2004).
- VINTGES, KAREN, *Philosophy as Passion: The Thinking of Simone de Beauvoir*, trans. Anne Lavelle (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1996).