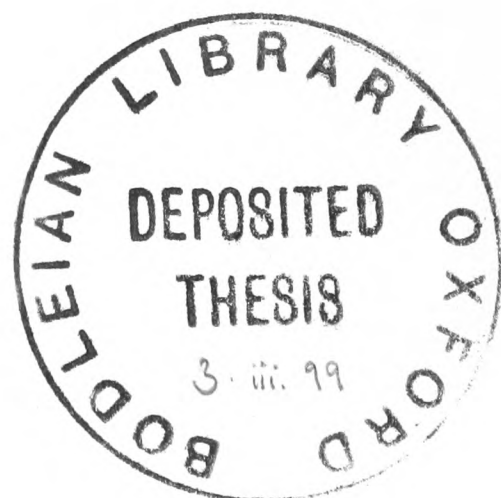


**SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR'S FICTION :
A PSYCHOANALYTIC REREADING**

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Simone de Beauvoir's fiction is still a largely unexplored field. This thesis offers new readings of her whole fictional corpus, using as critical lenses Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis in an ironically polemical move : vehemently anti-Freudian at the beginning of her career, Beauvoir denied the validity of his theories. Revealingly, however, her fiction tells a different tale. It is this untold Beauvoirean story I set out to tell in my study, which unfolds on three levels of critical interpretation.

Firstly, using her own autobiographical admissions I examine her resolute resistance to psychoanalysis and offer possible reasons for her initial violent disavowal of its concepts. Secondly, I trace her explicit engagement with psychoanalysis as a clinical discipline through a chronological examination of her fiction, and, finally, I employ psychoanalytic literary theory as a magnifying optic onto her entire fictional output, thus offering new interpretations of her most underread texts.

My conclusions are as follows : Beauvoir's resistance to psychoanalysis in fact stemmed from her own experience; by denying its value, she could also deny her own vulnerability, since the deep psychological damage caused by her unhappy childhood was still present in the strata of her own unconscious. Secondly, the thematic development of her fiction parallels the gradual acceptance of psychoanalysis as a valid clinical discipline following her self-analysis throughout her autobiographical creations - in her final two works, childhood and madness are laced together in a potent thematic explosion of her own articulated neuroses. And finally, the obsessive textual patternings betray her own repressed fears : throughout every fictional text, Oedipal triangles, fragmented identity and psychological breakdown play against each other against the backdrop of the symbiotic lure of idealised love. I thus hope to prove the relevance psychoanalysis has with regard to Beauvoir, despite her professed resistance to it.

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ABSTRACT

Simone de Beauvoir's specificity and singularity as a novelist remains relatively unrecognised, for her fiction is still a largely unexplored field. This thesis aims to provide new readings of Beauvoir's whole fictional output, which comprises five novels and two short story collections, spanning the years 1935-1968.

There exist three levels of psychoanalytic interpretation in the study. Firstly, my approach uses Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis as a critical literary lens onto Beauvoir's fictional texts themselves. Secondly, it examines Simone de Beauvoir's own personal engagement with clinical psychoanalysis, tracing the development of her thought through her texts as I approach them chronologically. And, finally, it analyses the consistency of the patternings traced by the obsessive Beauvoirean themes which recur insistently throughout her works. These three planes of interpretation lace together into a combined forcefield, and, as I hope to demonstrate, vindicate psychoanalysis as a potent decoding strategy for Simone de Beauvoir's

fictional works, for her own textual unconscious and for her revealing denial of Freudian theory.

Psychoanalysis in its clinical application has come under increasing scrutiny. As a method of investigation it is constantly developing its theories in response to challenging calls for justification. Beauvoir's own view of clinical psychoanalysis in fact changed over the course of her life. At first she held the view that Freud (who, like Beauvoir herself, wrote in a highly specific political climate and was, for his epoch, ground-breaking) was fundamentally misogynistic and reductive. Anti-essentialist in her existential sympathies, she attempted to deconstruct much of Freudian theory in her best-known work Le Deuxième Sexe. Although she was more tolerant of the later theorist Lacan, consulting him in person about psychoanalysis while writing Le Deuxième Sexe, she was largely dismissive of psychoanalysis as a discipline at the beginning of her novelistic career.

In the first chapter of the thesis, I discuss not only this ambivalent early relationship with psychoanalysis, but also hypothesise as to why Beauvoir's initial vociferous rejections of its discoveries were so intense. As I hope to show, it was perhaps precisely because of her own painful infantile experiences involving her rejection by her father that she refused to validate Freud's theories of the import of childhood on the adult. By denying his tenets, it could be speculated that she therefore believed herself free from pain; through a disavowal of the unconscious she could disown unacknowledged damage. After years of intense introspection into her childhood self while writing her autobiographies, however, her attitude

changed dramatically : having publicly acknowledged the validity of Freudian infantile theory, she granted psychoanalysis a far more explicit focus in her later novels. As I demonstrate in the final chapters, not only is childhood a more open theme in these works, but the voice of the madwoman is much louder. Beauvoir's neuroses, therefore, are finally articulated.

In her earlier fiction, however, there exists a disjuncture between her rejection of Freud's theories and her literary practice, for her novels are littered with endless permutations of Freudian Oedipal triangles and incestuous undercurrents; neurosis and madness are constant themes. Unconscious desires and sexuality - with which Beauvoir herself had a particularly ambivalent relationship - infiltrate the texts over and over again. My thesis thus demonstrates the relevance which psychoanalytic criticism has with regard to her early work, despite her own professed resistance to it at this stage of her life. By importing the psychoanalytic problematic into Beauvoir's fictional texts, readings come to light which may not have been immediately apparent.

The two psychoanalytic approaches, Freudian and Lacanian, shed different lights on her many texts, and reading through both theoretical lenses is an important way of examining Beauvoir's attempts at fictionalising the psychological, and her examinations of the experience of subjectivity and the relationship between the self and others. As a hermeneutic of suspicion psychoanalysis exposes possible unconscious levels of meaning and motivation, peeling off layers which disguise the characters in the mantle they wish to assume before their peers, and laying bare relationships which at first

glance may appear to be innocently devoid of deeper, more ambivalent emotions.

In this thesis I employ traditional Freudian literary theory, analysing Beauvoir's fictional characters as he would have analysed neurotics (while remaining aware of their ultimate status as textual epiphenomena in fictional works and their insubstantiality as empirical objects). I also turn to Lacanian theory in an attempt to focus on the textual gaps which offer themselves to the reader; in so doing I hope to avoid rigid hermeneutic structures. There are many ways to apply psychoanalysis, instead of focusing solely on Oedipal triangles and Lacanian mirrors. In each chapter I therefore introduce those psychoanalytic models which, to my mind, are the most congruent for the particular fictional work under the critical lens. Throughout the thesis, since I use both Freudian and Lacanian theory, I also highlight the similarities and differences between the two theorists - among these Freud's emphasis on the ego as a coherent agency, versus Lacan's concentration on the split subject. In this way I also aim to demonstrate the vast potential of Beauvoir's works for the critical excavation of meaning.

In the first chapter on her fiction, I employ Freudian theory to examine the fictional characters of Marcelle Drouffe and Anne Vignon. Using Freud's theories of masochism I firstly examine Marcelle's exposure to religious doctrine and her resulting fantasies of sexual submission. These urges later manifest themselves in a disturbingly masochistic emotional submission to a husband she negatively idealises. I then turn to Freud's concept of the superego, represented by Beauvoir as a repressive, unbearable weight in the

shape of Madame Vignon's excessive emotional demands on her daughter. The conflict of the superego in the form of internalised religious and moral ideals overcomes Anne's fragile ego : she eventually succumbs to acute depressive melancholia and dies. Through their narratives, Beauvoir thus hints at her implicit engagement with the conditioning effects of childhood, by stressing the negative impact of their infantile experience of the religious absolute, and also introduces the haunting note of madness which will echo repeatedly throughout her later published works.

In the third chapter, I use both Freudian and Lacanian literary theory, viewing L'Invitée through the Freudian kaleidoscope of shifting Oedipal triangles and also seeing the text in terms of the Lacanian triad of the Imaginary, the Real and the Symbolic. Freudian concepts of psychic conflict following sexual competition are therefore interwoven with Lacanian theories of the appropriation of meaning. Psychological breakdown is the centre of the text, both thematically and structurally, and the final murder represents both Françoise's desire for the final word and the reappropriation of her own self, since her identity has been shattered by the Oedipal conflict between herself and Xavière. Having constructed her sense of self upon the foundations of a symbiotic union with a man who appears emotionally remote, the Beauvoirean motif of idealised love is also at the heart of the text, bringing another resonant note into the thematic symphony which will be played throughout her fiction. Finally, although Françoise's childhood is in fact removed from the text by the erasure of Beauvoir's first two chapters, Beauvoir still buries a childhood memory deeply into the published work, thus

pointing to her own unconscious acknowledgement of its import, while simultaneously repressing it.

Her next work, Le Sang des autres, brings childhood more explicitly into focus. Although the chapters concerning Hélène Bertrand's childhood were once more - revealingly - removed by Beauvoir, there are many references in the text to infantile memory and development. As I argue in chapter four, Jean Blomart's neurosis stems from his early exposure to a traumatic event, his apparent unresolved Oedipus complex serves as a powerful emotional textual motor, and his struggles against a particularly castigating internalised superego create the textual drama. Again, Beauvoir's themes of obsessive love, identity and breakdown form the thematic web in which he is caught. However, because of its redemptive conclusion, Jean's eventual emotional progression beyond his Oedipal conflict, and his move into a more positive future following the replaying and acceptance of past trauma, means that the text can also be read as an analogy of the successful psychoanalytic procedure itself.

There are also many parallels between the analytic procedure and the construction of narrative itself by the author/reader. As Peter Brooks has cogently argued, literary meaning takes place in a continuous transferential space, "in the movement between text and reader."¹ The analyst, like the literary critic, must become an interpreter of semantic evidence, reading the text of the patient's behaviour and discourse, drawing inferences, seeing behind the words as well as reading them. In the central chapter of this

¹ Peter Brooks, Psychoanalysis and Storytelling, Oxford: Blackwell, 1994, p. 72

thesis, which treats Tous Les Hommes sont mortels, I therefore draw parallels between psychoanalysis and literary construction. Since this novel is in many ways the most marginal of Beauvoir's fictional works, representing Beauvoir's brief departure into the realms of myth and magical realism, it escapes both the boundaries of realist fiction and the psychoanalytic optic, since neither protagonist can be neatly diagnosed. The text therefore lends itself far more readily to a Lacanian approach, although I still use Freud's theories of narcissism in an attempt to analyse Régine. I also turn to Peter Brooks' theories of narrative since Beauvoir's anti-hero Fosca can in fact be viewed as a representative of ever-deferred signification. There is no gratifying psychoanalytic closure in this novel, as there perhaps is in Le Sang des autres; however, as I show, the work still offers itself up to a rich psychoanalytic treatment of its own irreducibility.

Les Mandarins represents a significant shift in terms of Beauvoir's own engagement with psychoanalysis. By placing the discipline extremely explicitly as a central theme, she not only signals her ongoing preoccupation with its theories, but also hints at a far more conscious engagement with her own resistance to them. However, she is still swift to point to Freud's shortcomings : by using as her mouthpiece a trained psychoanalyst, Beauvoir voices her concerns regarding the anaesthetising and sterilising effects of the analytic procedure. And yet, bearing in mind the emotional energy she expends in deconstructing Freudian theory in this text, as readers we could well ask why in fact Beauvoir is at such specific pains to point to psychoanalysis' invalid conclusions. For, once again in her fiction, the return

of her own emotional repressed is firmly in evidence : her central protagonists both undergo paralysingly acute emotional breakdowns following their separations from romantic symbioses, and the void of solitude yawns beneath the figure of the analyst who cannot heal herself. Although in Les Mandarins Beauvoir stresses the failure of Freudian psychoanalysis (although it in fact offers Paule Mareuil a way out of her despair), classical psychoanalytic literary theory can still be applied productively to Beauvoir's favourite novel. I analyse Paule's descent into a delusional psychosis, and also apply Lacan's theories to her misuse of language. For both Paule and Anne Dubreuilh, language is revealingly represented as a sticky web of miscommunication in the novel, as it is in Beauvoir's next text, Les Belles Images.

Beauvoir's penultimate fictional work was written following a period of intense introspection for its author. Following her four autobiographical volumes, it is perhaps understandable that her next novel revolves around childhood, identity and language. In my seventh chapter I apply Lacanian literary theory to Les Belles Images in an examination of Laurence's confusing layers of linguistic identification. Although she appears to be trapped between the Symbolic structures of a society she despises, and the Imaginary realm of her own advertising medium, she eventually manages to vocalise her intense fears for her daughter's future in a textual conclusion which, although sudden, points to a positive resolution for her own neuroses, and hope for her daughter's future experience. The central thematic role of childhood conditioning granted by Beauvoir in this later text also points to her

altered stance regarding psychoanalysis : through Laurence's protests she admits more explicitly than ever that infantile experience forms the woman.

This claim is carried over into Beauvoir's final fictional work, La Femme rompue, in which the madwoman herself is given her own pages to voice her account. Murielle, in 'Monologue' expresses her despair at a childhood memory : again, the pain of being passed over for a favoured sibling is expressed by Beauvoir in a textual revisitation of her own personal experience. Other obsessional Beauvoirean themes are also in evidence : the separation from the idealised man, the horrors of solitude and the wavering sense of self in the face of complete emotional breakdown. Finally, in 'La Femme rompue' the psychoanalytic procedure itself again granted its own thematic space - although, unlike Anne Dubreuilh, the figure of the analyst is portrayed as lucid and balanced, helping to bring Beauvoir's final text to another bittersweet psychoanalytic resolution.

In terms of an overall resolution of this thesis, I conclude that Beauvoir's unconscious repressed fears of Oedipal desire, infantile abandonment, symbiotic love and the fragility of identity before breakdown are threaded through each of her works in an eternal textual return of her own repressed. Her acknowledgement of psychoanalysis as a valid discipline can also be traced in a chronological reading of her fiction : implicit/unconscious denial in her early texts gives way to an emerging/preconscious acknowledgment in Les Mandarins and an eventual explicit/conscious acceptance in her final works.

Finally, the main body of this thesis also aims to provide an innovative reading of texts which have not yet received the critical attention they deserve. By concentrating on her works' psychological depths, psychoanalysis also reveals Simone de Beauvoir as a superior writer of fiction, adept at drawing the complex psychological relationships between her characters, and offers clues as to why her texts have remained so popular with the reading public. This novelistic art in many ways has been eclipsed by her other mantles of leading twentieth-century philosopher, founding feminist and one half of a formidable creative partnership. Critics have constantly mapped her considerable fictional output back onto her philosophical systems or ethical ideas. By transcending Beauvoir's own favourite conceptual framework, psychoanalysis in many ways perhaps reveals more about her fiction than would a safer theory, one which remains within the charmed circle of her existential ethics.

My thesis thus aims to recast Beauvoir herself as a writer who is capable of producing works which are not inveterate *romans à thèse*, under the shadow of Sartre's own fiction and philosophy. She is a consummate manipulator of narrative form and complex psychological raw material, manoeuvring them with a fluidity and conviction which, undeservedly, has remained unrecognised. Beauvoir's fictional writing has much to tell us about relationships, about the psychological dance of love and loss, about autobiographical thinking and about the gendered subject. It is challenging academic territory, much of which as yet has no place on the chartered map of twentieth-century literary history.

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*La distance n'est pas très grande
entre une solitude tenace et la folie.*

Simone de Beauvoir
Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée

INTRODUCTION

Upon first analysis, the critical goal of this study appears to be a perverse one : namely, to use a sceptic on psychoanalytic matters to demonstrate a psychoanalytic truth, through her own resistances. Beginning her career as a vehement anti-Freudian, Simone de Beauvoir initially rejected his theories, attempting to deconstruct them in Le Deuxième Sexe and refusing to attribute any value to the central psychoanalytic concept of the unconscious. With my perverse goal in mind, this thesis aims to explore three issues concurrently, keeping them in movement throughout the eight chapters which follow with the intention of meshing them into a potent matrix of critical interpretation. In parallel with the way Freud himself describes his own aims during the psychoanalytic procedure, as readers of Beauvoir's fiction in this study

we seek not merely to describe and to classify phenomena, but to understand them as signs of an interplay of forces in the mind, as a manifestation of purposeful intentions working concurrently or in mutual opposition. We are concerned with a *dynamic view* of mental phenomena.¹

Firstly, therefore, this study aims to produce a new set of psychoanalytic readings of Simone de Beauvoir's fiction through Freudian and Lacanian literary lenses. By applying the differing psychoanalytic frameworks of these theorists, I also hope to bring out the buried unconscious resonances in Beauvoir's texts, thus accomplishing in tandem my second aim : since

representation may throw light on psychopathology, I wish to sketch the obsessive thematic patternings which haunt her fictional works.

Psychoanalysis focuses primarily on the hazy, hidden expression of the forbidden through language, since the hidden messages of desire veil themselves and seek outlets which are confusingly, cunningly obscure, thus requiring a particular interpretative approach. According to Freud, presenting the truth to our own minds would lead to self-disgust, just as presenting a day-dream to others would incite their repulsion at being exposed to our fantasies. Beauvoir's fiction, however, is frequently an unalloyed, direct representation of personal experience, offering few buffers between the personal intensity of her text and the sensibilities of the reader. It is precisely because of this fact that a specifically psychoanalytic reading of Beauvoir's fiction uncovers, rather than veils, her private obsessions. As will become clear from the discussions which follow, Simone de Beauvoir herself is subject to the vicissitudes of her own fears and desires, burying them again and again in her fiction until the echoes of her thematic refrains betray the latent presence of her projected experience.

Finally, I trace the narrative of Beauvoir's own multiple engagements with psychoanalysis at different levels, pointing to the development over the course of her writing career from an implicit to an explicit acknowledgement of its theories. Revealingly, there is a considerable amount of self-conscious, conspicuous psychoanalytic material in Beauvoir's fiction. Her later works, particularly, both treat psychoanalysis as a discipline and can in turn be

¹ Sigmund Freud, 'Parapraxes', The Penguin Freud Library, vol. 1, Introductory Lectures on

treated psychoanalytically, but even in her earlier texts the thematic textual ripples of wavering or fractured identity and resulting psychological breakdown betray the undercurrents of Beauvoir's concerns with its theories. As I hope to show, writing her autobiographies and examining her self open the floodgates of the personal for Beauvoir; through her textual reliving of her past, she appears to have revived the old conflicts which led to their textual repression, moving towards more open, explicit texts. According to Freud, this movement in fact parallels the dynamic of a successful analysis :

by searching for the repression [...], by uncovering the resistances, by pointing out what is repressed, we really succeed in accomplishing our task - that is, in overcoming the resistances, lifting the repression and transforming the unconscious material into conscious.²

And yet in Beauvoir's pre-autobiographical writings we can also see the same core of obsessive motifs and her early implicit engagement with psychoanalytic concepts, albeit in a far more muffled refrain of her own repressed. Simone de Beauvoir, as will be clear from the chapters which follow, can be read extremely productively in psychoanalytic terms at any stage of her fictional writing career.

Drawing the boundaries between Beauvoir and her texts is not easy : although my primary focus in this thesis remains the characters in the novels themselves, by examining them I am also attempting to discover something about Beauvoir herself, and about her specific attitudes to Freudian theory. In preparation for our encounter with her fiction, I thus believe it is important to ground her refusal of psychoanalysis with an analysis both of her own

Psychoanalysis, London: Penguin, 1991, pp. 39-108, pp. 94-5.

misrepresentations of its tenets, and the Oedipal resonances in her autobiographies, works which after all are also textual artefacts. Therefore, in the first chapter, I will discuss Beauvoir's view of psychoanalysis before proceeding to move on to psychoanalytic readings of her fictional texts themselves. Significantly, as I demonstrate, Beauvoir's own experience offers a particular parabolic value for my later psychoanalytic readings of her fiction : in this first chapter I thus offer a miniaturised version of certain elements of the psychoanalytic problematic, into which I will venture more deeply in the chapters on her fictional works. In so doing, I believe that any discoveries made regarding her textual content and thematic patternings will be given a richer texture, and add to the portrait of Simone de Beauvoir which filters down through her fiction.

Firstly, however, in this introduction I shall outline briefly those psychoanalytic theories which are appropriate for textual analysis, and set out how I intend to apply them to Beauvoir's fiction by defining exactly who - or what - is under analysis in the main body of this study. I will also defend Freudian psychoanalysis as a critical approach, bearing in mind that in its clinical application it has come under increasing public scrutiny, and remembering that its evidential status is still repeatedly questioned. As a body of literary theory it is also a minefield of accusations of reductionism, criticised for both its insistence on human constants and its naïve attempts at reductive closure and formal cure in the current postmodern climate of the fragmented form, split subject and mercurial meaning. Even within its own

² Sigmund Freud, 'Transference', *ibid*, pp. 482-500, p. 489.

field of enquiry, psychoanalytic literary theory is a contentious battlefield of riven opinions and internal dissent.

It is in the specific light of such criticisms, however, that I wish to step forward into this encounter with Beauvoir's fiction. Like any theory, while being capable of a multiplicity of meanings and applications, I recognise that it also has certain limitations. It is important to remain aware of those many emotional and textual gaps which psychoanalysis can never plug. Revealingly, as I argue in chapters five and seven, Beauvoir's most marginal works, Tous Les Hommes sont mortels and Les Belles Images, do not lend themselves easily to the Freudian optic. We see therefore that two of her texts reveal the limits of a facet of the chosen critical approach, while others justify it. Of course, even with these justifying texts psychoanalysis can never paint the whole psychological picture. I therefore admit that my own particular way of reading Beauvoir's novels is not reductively infallible, remaining aware that this is a study produced specifically in the limiting context of a psychoanalytic problematic : there will be much in Beauvoir's texts which psychoanalysis cannot contain. Despite the underlying geometry a psychoanalytic reading of her fiction will hopefully reveal, her canon is composed of effervescent, multifarious works of fiction which will always escape theory.

However, as I also hope to demonstrate, psychoanalysis as a tool of literary theory does offer a particularly fruitful approach to reading Simone de Beauvoir's fiction, since it turns on a dynamic of translation and transformation, offering a mode of interlocution between systems in the

human mind, between self and other, between self and the social order, and even between our very selves. The analyst/analysand encounter is a dramatic scenario, releasing sudden, explosive emotion. Even if it is generally acknowledged that psychoanalysis as a medical tool has its drawbacks, as a critical methodology it remains distanced from the clinical application and still provides valuable insights for textual analysis.

In further defence of psychoanalysis as a valid approach in the current context, I also believe that it does not aim to reduce, but to introduce another range of debatable meanings. Freud's great contribution was to take every utterance seriously, instead of dismissing many of them as delusional. Teasing out the details and listening more carefully means that any text will unfold both more rapidly and more richly. By revealing many psychological states to be ambivalent, and capable of unconscious meanings, psychoanalysis thus becomes a potent agent of plurality, not a reductionist bludgeon with which to hammer all vitality out of the texts until they are flattened into a manageable but utterly lifeless page of words. It can only result in a richer work, and a richer world.

Psychoanalysis is a particularly valuable tool for the textual critic specifically because it analyses the form and content of linguistic discourse. Any text can be experienced as a web of emotion presented in a tissue of words, and as Freud himself asks rhetorically in the first of his introductory lectures, what is more important in the realm of psychoanalysis than language?³ Years later, Jacques Lacan echoes Freud, asking

³ Sigmund Freud, 'Introduction', *ibid*, pp. 39-49, pp. 41-2.

comment même un psychanalyste d'aujourd'hui ne s'y sentirait-il pas venu, à toucher à la parole, quand son expérience en reçoit son instrument, son cadre, son matériel et jusqu'au bruit de fond de ses incertitudes?⁴

As both Freud and Lacan acknowledge, the reason why psychoanalysis can discuss literature is because its primary tool, the discourse of the analysand, is linguistic. Psychoanalysis is the talking cure. It could be said that whereas Freud's emphasis is very much on this possibility of diagnosis and cure (his literary approach pulls characters out of the text and onto the couch in an attempt to discover their psychological motivations), Lacan's is on the linguistic element in a semiotic rereading of Freudian theory. Identity and language are at the heart of their differing psychoanalytic procedures and, as I demonstrate in the main body of this study, these two concepts in fact form the thematic core of all the fictional texts under analysis. For example, Quand prime le spirituel examines the construction of identity and psychological breakdown, L'Invitée centres around self-discovery and an ensuing quest for an established sense of psychological and sexual identity which is temporarily threatened by an alien consciousness. In 'La Femme rompue' we see how Monique uses language to construct a desired (although ultimately false and fragmented) identity.

In what way, therefore, will I treat the Beauvoirean text? How is it the ideal patient for the psychoanalytic literary theorist? Almost without exception, Beauvoir's fictional characters, as I argue, suffer disturbingly intense psychological breakdowns. In the following chapters I will treat these fictional

⁴ Jacques Lacan, Écrits, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966, 'L'instance de la lettre dans l'inconscient ou la raison depuis Freud', pp. 493-528, p. 494.

protagonists as patients to be analysed, laying them on the Freudian literary couch, while of course being aware that they are only shimmering fictional constructions, epiphenomena pieced together from textual indications. It is after all only by close study of Simone de Beauvoir's words on the page that we can view her literary characters as patients : with no direct access to their minds, their creator's words allow us to build hypotheses as to their motivations.

However, with Beauvoir's seven different texts, there are also several different ways of reading. I will therefore also use Lacan's theories, some of which I discuss below, and turn to other theorists, such as Jessica Benjamin and Peter Brooks, who with their reinterpretations of key elements of sexuality or narratology offer useful possible guidelines for reinterpretations of the Beauvoir texts themselves. By introducing new theoretical perspectives for each new stage, I thus hope to avoid the mechanical findings of the rigorous application of one single psychoanalytic model, while respecting the specificity of the particular music of the works. As Beauvoir's texts are multi-dimensional, she will hopefully emerge a richer novelist.

Freud constantly peppers his narratives of psychoanalysis with statements concerning general mental processes. Discussing the text in these terms he widens the narrative for us; it is his own particular way of reading the text. At the beginning of his essay on Gradiva he writes that even if his analysis teaches nothing new about the nature of dreams, "it may perhaps enable us

[...] to gain some small insight into the nature of creative writing.”⁵ In the following chapters I will therefore attempt to tackle Beauvoir’s fictional texts as psychoanalytic case studies, applying traditional Freudian theory and a final diagnosis of their psychopathology.

Lacan’s emphasis on the lack of any fixed, latent meaning or identity is a departure from the traditional diagnostic psychoanalytic approach to literature, however. Whereas Freud would have discovered the contents of Poe’s purloined letter, for example, Lacan purposely disregards this element. He prefers to analyse the signifier over the subject, his theory being one of textuality rather than personality. As he states in his seminar on Poe’s tale, the message after all belongs not to the subject, but “à la dimension du langage.”⁶ The letter escapes detection, and avoids discovery by the reader; it is pure absence. Lacan’s theory of language is based on the concept that words are not solely the property of those who use them : to paraphrase ‘La Femme rompue’, someone else - or one’s own unconscious - can *assassiner* and *renier* our own discourse. As Lacan states, “*l’inconscient, c’est le discours de l’Autre.*”⁷ This has a specific implication for the reading and writing process, as the text also circulates like the letter.

The term ‘implication’ is significant, for as Shoshana Felman writes, Lacan employs “an implication, as opposed to application, of psychoanalytic

⁵ Sigmund Freud, ‘Delusions and Dreams in Jensen’s *Gradiva*’, The Penguin Freud Library, vol. 14, *Art and Literature*, London: Penguin, 1991, pp. 29-118, p. 35.

⁶ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966, ‘Le Séminaire sur ‘La Lettre volée’’, pp. 11-61, p. 19.

⁷ *ibid*, p. 16.

theory.”⁸ Freud’s method is one of specific application, in which, as already stated, he would treat Beauvoir’s fictional protagonists as case histories. Lacan, on the other hand, opens up the text itself. In the introductory note to his translation of Lacan’s seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter’, Jeffrey Mehlman states that the role of analysis for Lacan is “not to solve but to open up a new kind of textual problem.”⁹ While Freud would discover Murielle’s childhood trauma, Lacan would examine her discourse. While Freud would diagnose Françoise as having an unresolved Oedipus complex, Lacan would claim she was victim to the Imaginary. While Freud would describe Xavière as narcissistic, Lacan would elaborate his theory of the elusive signifier. Whereas Freud can be characterised as a perceptive Sherlock Holmes searching for latent, fixed meaning, forever discovering the final piece of a complex puzzle, Lacan is concerned purely with the way in which those pieces fit together. In his view meaning is forever ahead of us and the final piece of the puzzle, if it is ever found, already will have changed its shape.

Let us move on to piecing together Beauvoir’s textual puzzles, both ‘implying’ and applying analyses of their Lacanian shifting shape and their Freudian constant content to Beauvoir’s narrative pictures. Before this textual examination, however, I wish first to analyse Beauvoir’s own resistances to psychoanalysis and speculate as to what they may reveal about Simone de Beauvoir the woman. As Adam Phillips writes, “psychoanalysis cannot [...] get outside the conventions of its genre. It has to go to autobiographies [to

⁸ Shoshana Felman, Jacques Lacan and the Adventure of Insight, Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: Harvard University Press, 1987, p. 48.

⁹ Jacques Lacan, ‘Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter’, Yale French Studies, 48, 39-72, p. 38.

find] ways of plotting lives.”¹⁰ In the next chapter, therefore, I will attempt through her autobiographical corpus to trace her refusal of psychoanalysis back to her painful past, and thus make the first move towards a psychoanalytic plotting of Simone de Beauvoir.

¹⁰ Adam Phillips, 'The Telling of Selves : Notes on Psychoanalysis and Autobiography', in On Flirtation, London: Faber and Faber, 1994, pp. 65-75, p. 71.

CHAPTER ONE

SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR AND PSYCHOANALYSIS : EXISTENTIAL HUBRIS

When approaching any body of work from a psychoanalytic literary perspective, the choice of focus - author or work - is not immediately self-evident. Simone de Beauvoir can be read equally productively both as a biographical subject and as a corpus of texts, but my primary aim in this thesis is the analysis of resonant psychological patterns in her fiction : I will concentrate on the work over the woman. What I hope to show in the chapters which follow is the way in which Oedipal triangles, struggles for self-definition, paralysing emotional breakdowns and repressed desire for union with the father or with the idealised love object recur constantly throughout her seven fictional works in a thematic return of the repressed.

As I wish to demonstrate in this current chapter however, denial, projection and the repression of Beauvoir's own sexual and emotional desires also glint insistently throughout both her theoretical work Le Deuxième Sexe and her memoirs, leading us to speculate as to the personal meanings behind the insistence of their return and the intensity of their presence in her fiction. These theories remain, of course, only speculative hypotheses; I have no desire to reduce the psychologically complex three-dimensional historical figure of Simone de Beauvoir to a flattened textual protagonist.¹ However, I

¹ Beauvoir herself complains of this treatment by her readers in Tout Compte fait, pp. 180-1. While such complaints are certainly justified, I feel that her preoccupations surface so insistently in her fiction that they reveal her own deep-seated fears; as already stated, her motifs are distinctly psychoanalytic. It is my belief that when analysing her textual characters

believe that such an approach serves to broaden the plurality of meaning in Beauvoir without reducing her fictional potency, as well as underlining the relevance of psychoanalysis with regard to her work.

It could be argued that if much of emotional life can hardly be described, its particularly painful moments are only successfully expressed through artistic production. Far from being *romans à thèse*, philosophical abstraction is frequently overtaken by psychological sensation in Simone de Beauvoir's novels. Her own unconscious is deeply ingrained in her works : having repressed much of her own emotion, she pours it into her texts in a catharsis of desperation. Anne of Quand prime le spirituel, Françoise of L'Invitée, Hélène of Le Sang des autres, Régine of Tous Les Hommes sont mortels, Anne of Les Mandarins, Laurence of Les Belles Images, Monique of La Femme rompue : every one of these women is lost in a desperate desire for union with the father figure who is their idealised man. Only Hélène succeeds within the pages of her own story, and she pays for such earthly happiness with her life. In all cases, the ideals of love are traps for these women who, like Beauvoir, have staked everything they possess on its emotional game.

What, we could ask at this point, does the insistence of this theme reveal about Beauvoir herself? For, as Marie Bonaparte writes in her study on Poe :

Works of art or literature profoundly reveal their creator's psychology and, as Freud has shown, their construction resembles that of our dreams. The same mechanisms which, in dreams and nightmares, govern the manner in which our strongest, though most carefully concealed desires are

we are also analysing Beauvoir, but without essentialising her. We can treat her protagonists as reflecting facets of their author, without reducing her to a figure of paranoia or depression.

elaborated, desires which often are the most repugnant to consciousness, also govern the elaborations of a work of art.²

Beauvoir's works betray her "carefully concealed desires" in a thematic web, where the desire for control in the face of emotional breakdown often enmeshes her female characters in a tangle of repression. Speculation as to where this desire for control stems from may provide the Beauvoir reader with vital clues regarding the matrix of contradictions which is Simone de Beauvoir herself.

This chapter will specifically examine facets of Beauvoir as she filters through her autobiographies, which provide considerable depth of insight into her childhood, adolescence and ensuing character. Bearing in mind the current psychoanalytic perspective, I will also examine in tandem her specific theoretical positions with regard to psychoanalysis itself, and show how there is a specific evolution in her thought, beginning with an examination of her flawed critique of Freud in Le Deuxième Sexe and moving on to her open admiration of his theories in her autobiographies. As other critics have also recognised,³ Beauvoir initially avoids all recognition of her own *vie intérieure*, retreating into a state of denial regarding the validity of psychoanalytic theory. As with Monique of La Femme rompue, who admits the repressed truth on rereading her diary, it is only following the intense introspection which leads to her autobiographical output that Beauvoir acknowledges the validity of Freud's discoveries, and their relevance to her own experience. Indeed, in Tout Compte fait, she goes so far as to eulogise him as "un des hommes de

² Marie Bonaparte, The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe, London: Imago, 1949, p. 209.

ce siècle que j'admire le plus chaleureusement.”⁴ If this is indeed the case then it could perhaps be claimed that the current psychoanalytic approach to her fiction, far from leaving her spinning in her grave, may even have met with a certain amount of restrained approval on her part.

Yet, revealingly, Simone de Beauvoir's relationship with psychoanalysis was at first one of profound ambivalence. Fascinated and yet repelled by Freud, in her chapter on psychoanalysis in Le Deuxième Sexe she vociferously rejects his deterministic theories of the unconscious, repression and projection, placing her absolute faith in free will as an existentialist. According to existential tenets, man and woman are responsible for their own actions in a godless universe, and although precisely *en situation*, have the power to choose their own destinies. Freud, according to Beauvoir, does not recognise this.⁵ Psychoanalysis, she claims in Le Deuxième Sexe, removes all such choice from the patient's sphere of existence :

Il y a chez tous les psychanalystes un refus systématique de l'idée de *choix* et de la notion de valeur qui en est corrélatrice; c'est là ce qui constitue la faiblesse intrinsèque du système.⁶

However, this view is in fact unfair to Freud, for as he himself clearly states in 'The Ego and The Id', "analysis does not set out to make pathological reactions impossible, but to give the patient's ego *freedom* to decide one way

³ See, for example, Carol Ascher, Simone de Beauvoir : A Life of Freedom, pp. 119, *Moi*, p. 218 and Okely, p 100-101.

⁴ Simone de Beauvoir, Tout Compte fait, p. 167.

⁵ Beauvoir does, however, also provide a comprehensive analysis of the materialist aspects of woman's *situation* in her study of the secondary role of women in society.

⁶ Simone de Beauvoir, Le Deuxième Sexe, Paris: Gallimard, 1949, p. 86. All quotations are taken from this edition.

or another.”⁷ Both existentialism and psychoanalysis place high value on lucidity, the price of which is frequently the acknowledgement of a hidden, uncomfortable and painful truth;⁸ moving forward and acting on that truth rather than repressing it further is the goal of both successful analysis and existential praxis. Psychoanalysis does not aim at reducing choice, but at unleashing the patient's potential to free themselves from past patterns by a deeper understanding of their own unconscious motivations.

Although Beauvoir grudgingly acknowledges the positive discoveries of psychoanalysis in Le Deuxième Sexe, she rejects this emphasis on the interiority of experience, stating that existence involves a relationship with the world, not a relationship with the self :

Intériorisant l'inconscient et toute la vie psychique, le langage même de la psychanalyse suggère que le drame de l'individu se déroule en lui : les mots de complexe, tendances, etc. l'impliquent. Mais une vie est une relation au monde; c'est en se choisissant à travers le monde que l'individu se définit. [...] Sans rejeter en bloc les apports de la psychanalyse dont certains aperçus sont féconds, nous refuserons donc sa méthode [pp. 91-2].

However, Beauvoir does not acknowledge here that life is also primarily a relationship with the self, as one's seat in that world. Furthermore, any analysis of exterior perception takes place in the interior : it is within where reactions to life's drama unfold, it is within where existential decisions are made. Indeed, throughout her fiction, Beauvoir portrays heroines who are

⁷ Sigmund Freud, 'The Ego and The Id' (1923), in On Metapsychology, Penguin Freud Library 11, London: Penguin, 1991, pp. 341-407, p. 391.

⁸ Perhaps in Beauvoir's view at this stage of her life the 'truth' revealed in the psychoanalytic exchange is in fact imposed by the analyst, rather than freely chosen and assumed by the patient in existential authenticity. However, bearing in mind Freud's comment regarding the patient's freedom to choose pathology or 'normality', it could be argued that it still rests with the patient to accept or reject the analyst's interpretation.

drawn into their own psychic, as opposed to external realities : Françoise, Hélène and Paule all prefer to some extent to live in the comforting protection of their *vies intérieures*. Even while she professes her resistance to such a concept in Le Deuxième Sexe, Beauvoir's fiction tells a different story.⁹

Although Freud himself never claimed that his theories were meant to be philosophically grounded, in fact stating specifically that psychoanalysis was "incapable of creating a *Weltanschauung* of its own"¹⁰, Beauvoir goes on to attack him for excusing his lack of philosophical backbone while still formulating sweeping metaphysical speculations :

Freud a refusé n'étant pas philosophe de justifier philosophiquement son système; ses disciples prétendent que par là il élude toute attaque d'ordre métaphysique. Cependant, il y a derrière toutes ses affirmations des postulats métaphysiques : utiliser son langage, c'est adopter une philosophie [p 79].

However, Beauvoir fails to recognise here that Freud was in fact eager to create a completely new discipline, blending science with psychology and his love of literature in a seesaw rhetoric. Applying the rigorous logic of philosophical systems was not his main priority; Beauvoir, steeped in the Western philosophical tradition, seems unable to appreciate any theory which does not knot its concepts around this framework,¹¹ and insists on engaging

⁹ Le Deuxième Sexe was published in 1949, following publication of L'Invitée (1943), Le Sang des autres (1945) and Tous Les Hommes sont mortels (1946). Quand prime le spirituel was completed by Beauvoir in 1937. All these works portray heroines deeply lost in their own internal worlds at some stage in the text.

¹⁰ Freud, 'The Question of a *Weltanschauung*' (1932), in New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, The Penguin Freud Library 2, London: Penguin, 1991, pp. 193-219, p. 219.

¹¹ It is interesting to note here that during Beauvoir's studies of Bergson at the Sorbonne, she finds his voice too philosophically abstract, too theoretical, stating specifically that her ambition is to write a "roman de la vie intérieure". We see therefore that Beauvoir's stance with regard to psychoanalysis' stress on interiority in fact changes. She writes as follows :

Dans les théories de Bergson sur "le moi social et le moi profond" je reconnus avec enthousiasme ma propre expérience. [...] je songai à écrire; je

with him on such a level. In Psychoanalysis and Feminism¹², Juliet Mitchell also discusses Beauvoir's philosophical engagement with Freud, pointing out that

Beauvoir would have found it easier if Freud had had an explicit philosophy with which her alternative proposition could contend[;] in the absence of one she reads it back from the nature of his observations : she gives him a value system which she confesses to have found hard to discover in his work. Thus the terminology of psychoanalysis becomes philosophy-loaded. The child that *identifies* with a parent is *alienating itself* in a foreign image instead of spontaneously manifesting its own existence. [...] In other words, concerned to assert a philosophy, de Beauvoir has had to find the source of her rejection of psychoanalysis in its implications alone.¹³

Thus it would seem that Beauvoir is herself guilty of overdetermination : she attributes a whole value system of her own devising to Freud, while at the same time criticising him for his lack of recognition of that very value system, as we shall examine below with her critique of Freud's concept of penis envy.

Beauvoir's critique of Freudian psychoanalysis is also based on his superficial analysis of women's sexuality : according to her he bases his theories purely on his concepts of masculine libido. Women are thus apparently denied a theory of their own, remaining tacked onto Freud's reductive theories of male sexuality :

Freud ne s'est pas beaucoup soucié du destin de la femme; il est clair qu'il en a calqué la description sur celle du destin

préfèrais la littérature à la philosophie, je n'aurais pas du tout été satisfaite si l'on m'avait prédit que je deviendrais une espèce de Bergson; je ne voulais pas parler avec cette voix abstraite qui, lorsque je l'entendais, ne me touchait pas. Ce que je rêvais d'écrire, c'était un "roman de la vie intérieure"; je voulais communiquer mon expérience.

Simone de Beauvoir, Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée, Paris: Gallimard, 1958, pp. 287-8. (All quotations are taken from this edition.) There is thus a strong valorisation here of the interiority of emotional experience.

¹² For a more extensive reading of Beauvoir's misinterpretations of Freud, see Mitchell's Psychoanalysis and Feminism, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975, pp. 305-318.

¹³ Mitchell, *ibid*, pp. 310-311.

masculin dont il s'est borné à modifier quelques traits. [...] il admet que la sexualité de la femme est aussi évoluée que celle de l'homme, mais il ne l'étudie guère en elle-même. Il écrit : "La libido est de façon constante et régulière d'essence mâle, qu'elle apparaisse chez l'homme ou chez la femme" [pp. 79-80].

Freud a d'abord décrit de manière tout à fait symétrique l'histoire de la fillette; ensuite il a donné à la forme féminine du complexe infantile le nom de complexe d'Electre; mais il est clair qu'il la définit moins en lui-même qu'à partir de sa figure masculine [p. 81].

However, Beauvoir produces a series of serious misreadings of Freud's theories of female sexuality here. Freud in fact rejected the concept of the Electra complex precisely because he recognised that the little girl's sexual development could not be equated with that of the boy. As Mitchell has perceptively recognised,

Ironically, what has happened to de Beauvoir's version of Freud's little girl growing up is that the distinctions between the sexes have become *more* rigid and the whole process more rigidly determined than one can ever find it in Freud's original writings. [...] she ignores the permeation throughout Freud's work of the notion of bisexuality : the presence in both sexes of the inclinations of the opposite sex. The dividing line between men and women is absolute in her schema in a way that it never is in Freud's.¹⁴

Beauvoir therefore seems strangely intent on overlooking those particular psychoanalytic concepts which would have stressed the compatibilities of her thought with Freud's own viewpoint.

Following her erroneous attribution of the Electra complex to Freud, a term which was in fact coined by Freud's disciple and later adversary Carl Gustav Jung,¹⁵ Beauvoir then proceeds to make the same mistake with the term

¹⁴ Mitchell, Psychoanalysis and Feminism, p. 312.

¹⁵ See Laplanche and Pontalis, The Language of Psychoanalysis, London: Karnac Books, 1988, p. 152.

'collective unconscious', another Jungian term actively avoided by Freud. She credits - or discredits - this term with much of the determinism for which she is so critical of psychoanalysis, thus, as Mitchell puts it, taking as 'the focal point of [her] philosophical attack'¹⁶ on Freud a serious misunderstanding of his theories. Beauvoir writes :

C'est [la] notion de choix que repousse le plus violemment le psychanalyste au nom du déterminisme et de "l'inconscient collectif"; cet inconscient fournirait à l'homme des images toutes faites et un symbolisme universel; c'est lui qui expliquerait les analogies des rêves, des actes manqués, des délires, des allégories et des destinées humaines; parler de liberté ce serait se refuser la possibilité d'expliquer ces troublantes concordances [pp. 88-89].

This concept of the collective unconscious was in fact the reason for Jung's split from Freud, and led to Jung's creation of a new school of analytic thought. It is unsurprising that Beauvoir railed against its reductiveness, since the term 'collective unconscious' refers specifically to "the tendency to organize experience in innately predetermined patterns."¹⁷ However, bearing in mind that she conflates this term with the notion of "un mystérieux inconscient [p. 89]" which she attributes to Freud (Freud in fact struggled all his life to elucidate, not mystify further, the unconscious), Beauvoir appears to blend Jungian metaphysics, Freudian psychoanalysis and even, elsewhere, Adlerian theory into a philosophy of her own making.

Freud was not in fact as reductive in his view of women as Beauvoir claims; towards the end of his life he would acknowledge the dark continent of femininity as escaping acknowledged perspectives, thus foreshadowing the

¹⁶ Mitchell, Psychoanalysis and Feminism, p. 317.

concept of feminine *différence* - a feminist theory which is ironically exalted by some of his most vociferous detractors, among them Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous. Admittedly, however, Freud's most controversial essay on women, 'Femininity', frequently reads as both reductive and sexist, centring as it does on his phallogentric concept of penis envy :

The castration complex of girls is [...] started by the sight of the genitals of the other sex. They at once notice the difference and, it must be admitted, its significance too. They feel seriously wronged, often declare that they want to 'have something like it too', and fall a victim to 'envy of the penis', which will leave ineradicable traces on their development and the formation of their character and will not be surmounted in even the most favourable cases without a severe expenditure of psychical energy.¹⁸

Successfully deconstructing this notion of penis envy in both volumes of Le Deuxième Sexe, Beauvoir argues convincingly that with such generalisations Freud is providing the little girl with a value system she may not yet have developed :

la convoitise de la fillette, lorsqu'elle apparaît, résulte d'une valorisation préalable de la virilité : Freud la prend pour accordée quand il faudrait en rendre compte [pp. 82-3].

And yet, although it is undeniable that both Freud and Lacan¹⁹ place undue emphasis on the phallus, this charge could also be made against Beauvoir

¹⁷ Charles Rycroft, A Critical Dictionary of Psychoanalysis, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995, p. 10.

¹⁸ Sigmund Freud, 'Femininity' (1932), in New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, Penguin Freud Library 2, London: Penguin, 1991, pp. 145-169, pp. 158-8.

¹⁹ I barely refer to Jacques Lacan in this chapter as Beauvoir's attitude towards Lacan was far more tolerant than her initial attitude towards Freud. She refers to meeting Lacan several times in her memoirs, and consulted him while writing Le Deuxième Sexe. See Elisabeth Roudinesco's La Bataille de cent ans : Histoire de la psychanalyse en France 2 : 1925-1985, Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1986, p. 517. Beauvoir's protégée Bianca Lamblin was herself analysed by Lacan, who told her that she had unconsciously cast Sartre and Beauvoir as her parents. Her subsequent sexual relationship with both of them led to a complete emotional breakdown. See Lamblin's Mémoires d'une jeune fille dérangée, Paris: Balland, 1993, pp. 204-5.

herself. In Le Deuxième Sexe she valorises the penis in much the same way as does Freud in 'Femininity'. I quote Beauvoir's passage at length below because I feel this to be a key contradiction in her deconstruction of psychoanalysis :

la transcendance spécifique s'incarne en [le pénis] de manière saisissable et il est source de fierté; parce que le phallus est séparé, l'homme peut intégrer à son individualité la vie qui le déborde. On conçoit alors que la longueur du pénis, la puissance du jet urinaire, de l'érection, de l'éjaculation deviennent pour lui la mesure de sa valeur propre. Ainsi il est constant que le phallus incarne charnellement la transcendance [...]. Privée de cet *alter ego* la petite fille ne s'aliène pas dans une chose saisissable, ne se récupère pas : par là, elle est conduite à se faire tout entière objet, à se poser comme l'Autre. [L'absence] du pénis l'empêche de se rendre présente à elle-même en tant que sexe; il en résultera maintes conséquences [pp. 90-91].

Beauvoir therefore echoes Freud in the very breath she uses to invalidate his theories. Although rejecting the concept of a fixed female nature in Le Deuxième Sexe, a work which centres around the denial of the power of any reductive biological determinism. she proceeds to essentialise instead maleness as project and transcendence. For Beauvoir the phallus symbolises the linear, active, existential project; in the same way the act of urination represents projection, movement, independence. The little girl, by contrast, is condemned by her lack of a penis to both immanence and alienation.²⁰

²⁰ Judith Butler and Toril Moi have also claimed that Beauvoir's frequently unconditional idealisation of masculinity is in many ways a submission to phallocentric ideology. See Butler's 'Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's Second Sex', Yale French Studies 72 (1986): 35-49, and Moi's chapter 'Ambiguous Women : Alienation and the Body in The Second Sex', in Simone de Beauvoir : The Making of an Intellectual Woman.

While he may have placed undue stress on the importance of the phallus, it is however important to note that Freud was swift to recognise women's social restrictions, and also to defend women :

women in general are said to suffer from 'physiological feeble-mindedness' - that is, from a lesser intelligence than men. The fact itself is disputable and its interpretation doubtful.²¹

Freud is also to be credited with highlighting the restrictive nature of the social conditions which lead women to hysteria as either a form of expression or as a result of repression. Here he echoes Beauvoir in his description of a culture which continually casts woman as Other :

The work of civilization has become increasingly the business of [man]. His constant association with men, and his dependence on his relations with them, even estrange him from his duties as a husband and father. Thus the woman finds herself forced into the background by the claims of civilization and she adopts a hostile attitude towards it.²²

As Nancy Chodorow has noted in her essay 'Freud on Women', Freud's portrait of Vienna at the turn of the century is in any case not a recommendation of a phallogentric society, but an analysis of one. Far from being misogynistic, he is

most interested in the inner psychic worlds, self-constructions, and conflicts of women. [He] expresses firm opinions about the social situations of women and sexuality. [...] He is firm in his strong defense of the morality and upstanding qualities and capabilities of the women whom contemporary neurologists and psychiatrists considered degenerate, morally and mentally contaminated, and inferior as a result of their heredity. [...] Freud mounts a powerful critique of the societally, culturally, and familially induced constraint on women's (and men's) sexuality and of the trap that marriage is for many women.²³

²¹ Sigmund Freud, 'The Future of an Illusion' (1927), in Civilization, Society and Religion, Penguin Freud Library 12, London: Penguin, 1991, pp. 179-241, p. 231.

²² Sigmund Freud, 'Civilization and its Discontents' (1929), *ibid*, pp. 243-340, p. 293.

²³ Nancy Chodorow, 'Freud on Women', in The Cambridge Companion to Freud, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 224-248, p. 235.

Beauvoir and Freud, therefore, are not wholly incompatible. Furthermore, while Beauvoir can be seen to be similar to Freud in her stress on the phallus, Freud's stress on the plastic nature of sexuality, his description of the sexual 'norm' as representing only the socially favoured path, and his emphasis on culture and civilisation as repressive entities for women all echo Beauvoir's own preoccupations in Le Deuxième Sexe, and hint at their later theoretical reconciliation. In 1949, however, Beauvoir is still loath to recognise this.

Why, we could ask as readers, is Beauvoir apparently so keen to deconstruct Freud, particularly his theories of sexuality and the unconscious? Might there also be some unconscious motivation on Beauvoir's part which energises her attack? Could it be, perhaps, that her reaction has as much to do with her own experience, which she is eager to forget, as with Freud's insistence on biological determinism? It is particularly striking that in telling the tale of the Freudian child in Le Deuxième Sexe, Beauvoir in fact is preempting the tale of her own memoirs,²⁴ the first volume of which would appear nine years later. Beauvoir's interpretation of this Freudian infantile theory reads as follows :

Son drame se ramène au conflit entre ses tendances "viriloïdes" et "féminines"; [...] infantilement elle s'identifie au père; puis elle éprouve un sentiment d'infériorité à l'égard de l'homme et elle est mise dans l'alternative ou bien de maintenir son autonomie, de se viriliser - ce qui sur le fond d'un complexe d'infériorité provoque une tension qui risque d'entraîner des névroses; ou bien de trouver dans la soumission amoureuse un heureux

²⁴ Le Deuxième Sexe is in many ways as autobiographical as Beauvoir's memoirs; the text is as full of unconscious projections of her own fears as is her fiction - for example, in her account of the mother-child relationship in the second volume of Le Deuxième Sexe. As Okely states, "when we examine her autobiography [we can] see the link between her own experience and some of her generalised statements about the girl and the woman." See Okely, p. 72.

accomplissement d'elle-même, solution qui lui est facilitée par l'amour qu'elle portait au père souverain; c'est lui qu'elle recherche dans l'amant ou dans le mari, et l'amour sexuel s'accompagne chez elle du désir d'être dominée [p. 85].

As I hope to show in the current chapter, Beauvoir's own interpretation of her life story in many ways mirrors the psychoanalyst's fairy tale, a tale she is swift to decry as reductively deterministic, stating with heavy irony that it is "doué d'un dynamisme propre; [...] chaque femme le subit [*ibid*]." The subject of the irony, however, may not be psychoanalysis, for the passage may well have a significance unperceived, or perhaps repressed, by Simone de Beauvoir herself.

It is easy to speculate as to why Beauvoir did not initially wish to acknowledge either the unresolved Oedipal conflict of her own childhood, or the resulting damage to her own ego. Devaluation and contempt are frequent defensive manoeuvres : by denying the validity of psychoanalysis, and the truth behind the psychoanalytic fairytale, she could thus defuse the potency of her own past experience. Her reason was desperate to triumph over emotion and sexuality in response to her life challenges and choices. She was swift to deconstruct Freud's reliance on biological determinism, since Beauvoir apparently never wished to be seen as a body - perhaps as a result of her undeniably complex relationship with her own sexuality, due to her puritanical upbringing and the insensitivity of her father regarding her physical insecurities. It is my belief that this relationship with her father is the key to much of Beauvoir's psychical conflict, and the root of her lifelong longing for union with a man who was emotionally if not intellectually unattainable. In a sense Beauvoir was masochistically reassured by her morganatic marriage

with Sartre; if he hurt her with his string of contingent loves, it reinforced her childhood sense of identity, and replayed the rejection by her father, an episode to which she returns obsessively in her memoirs.

Freud developed his theory of the repetition compulsion on seeing that his patients never learned from their mistakes. On reading the first volume of her memoirs, which appeared in 1958, and seeing its blatant Oedipal thematic patterning, however, it is understandable - and perhaps inevitable - that Beauvoir gradually changed her perspective on the value of psychoanalysis following such an epiphany of self-revelation. Let us therefore now turn to Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée, which in Beauvoir's own words paints a Freudian case study of her childhood.

In the first years of existence the tiny Simone de Beauvoir is portrayed as embroiled in a close and loving symbiosis with Françoise, her mother.²⁵ This relationship, which swiftly degenerated into manipulation and ambivalence, is a recurring theme in Beauvoir's memoirs. Throughout her autobiographies her relationship with Madame de Beauvoir is couched in - later negative - terms of enormous emotional intensity. As the primary love-object, however, Beauvoir's mother at first has no rivals for the child's affections. The Oedipal triangle has not yet been formed, and the child's horror at thoughts of separation from the mother is clearly outlined by Beauvoir in the following passage :

parfois [...] je prenais peur. [...] Je regardais le fauteuil de maman et je pensais : "Je ne pourrai plus m'asseoir sur ses

²⁵ For an explicitly feminist analysis of Beauvoir's suffocatingly intense relationship with her mother, see also Alex Hughes' article 'Murdering the Mother : Simone de Beauvoir's Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée', French Studies, 1994, vol. 48, no. 2, pp. 174-83.

genoux.” Soudain l’avenir existait; il me changerait en une autre qui dirait moi et ne serait plus moi. J’ai pressenti tous les sevrages, les reniements, les abandons et la succession de mes morts [pp. 12-13].

Leaving her mother would involve becoming other, for Beauvoir is only herself as part of a partnership which, she now realises with despair, must inevitably end. This ending is the first of her many emotional deaths, or separations from unities. These separations will be fictionalised over and over again by Beauvoir in what could also be interpreted as an eternal return of her repressed desire for the maternal body.

This separation from the primary symbiosis, it could be speculated, is not only dreaded by Beauvoir herself. Françoise de Beauvoir regarded her elder daughter as an extension of her self, drawing parallels between her own experience and that of her daughter²⁶ : she was delighted, for example, to witness Beauvoir’s later relationship with her cousin Jacques which echoed Françoise’s own relationship with his father, projecting her own romantic aspirations onto her daughter (both relationships in fact foundered). As would also happen with Beauvoir, Françoise’s father had abandoned her for her prettier sister Lili : it is no surprise, then, that she felt a connection with her first-born, perhaps unconsciously revenging herself on Lili by favouring Simone over Hélène :

elle m’associait à sa vie plus étroitement que ma cadette : elle aussi, c’était une aînée et tout le monde disait que je lui ressemblais beaucoup : j’avais l’impression qu’elle m’appartenait d’une manière privilégiée [*ibid*].

²⁶ For an account of her mother’s childhood, see Mémoires d’une jeune fille rangée, pp. 52-55 and also Une mort très douce, Beauvoir’s posthumous tribute to her mother.

The intensity of the physical bond between mother and child is sketched by Beauvoir below, where she paints her mother in oblique terms of sexual coquetry :

Ma mère, [...] lointaine et [...] capricieuse, m'inspirait des sentiments amoureux : je m'installais sur ses genoux, dans la douceur parfumée de ses bras, je couvrais des 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. 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 [pp. 10-11].

Françoise de Beauvoir is sketched in this passage almost as an idealised mistress : she is "lointaine", "capricieuse", an alluring, perfumed figure who inspires in her daughter "des sentiments amoureux". She remembers kissing her mother's skin in a fantasy of fusion; when she appears to her by her bed at night, she recalls the sensuality of her apparel and the glitter of its enticing glamour. There seem, therefore, to be deeply sexualised undercurrents in the passage; Beauvoir's critique of Freud in Le Deuxième Sexe nine years earlier for his theories of infantile sexuality is already defused in a psychoanalytic reading of the very first passages of her autobiography.

However, there are already hints at the later ambivalence which would seep into this complicitous union, for far from providing Simone with a solid foundation of unconditional love, the capricious figure of Françoise de Beauvoir would frequently turn on her daughter. Her dark moods change the security of Beauvoir's surroundings to stormy shadows, and her psychological ground to splintering eggshells : "quand elle était fâchée [...] je redoutais cet

éclair orageux [...]; j'avais besoin de son sourire [*ibid*]." Elsewhere in the Mémoires, Beauvoir remembers how

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 [p. 56].

Here, the coquettish mistress has become other than charmingly capricious, and what appears to be endangered is Beauvoir's own sense of self. Without her mother's approval, she writes, she has no real right to exist.

At a further stage, Beauvoir speaks of her mother in overtly psychoanalytic terms, again hinting at the conditional nature of Françoise's love for her. Simone is the idealised daughter only when she provides her mother with an existential reflection of her own spiritual ideal, thus echoing Madame Vignon's treatment of her own daughter in Quand prime le spirituel. Imitating her mother, like any tiny child at play, Beauvoir shares Françoise's emotional pilgrimages to church : "ces pieuses complicités resserrèrent mon intimité avec maman; elle prit nettement dans ma vie la première place [p. 43]." Such intimacy, however, is founded on a shared sense of duty, bound up with filial duty and religious morality :

Ainsi vivions-nous, elle et moi, dans une sorte de symbiose, et [...] je fus modelée par elle. Elle m'inculqua le sens du devoir, ainsi que des consignes d'oubli de soi et d'austérité. [...] j'ai 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. Je ne revendiquais rien et j'osais peu de choses [pp. 57-8].

Françoise de Beauvoir thus functions as her daughter's Freudian superego, controlling her desires and also acting as the Lacanian *Père* in the introduction of her daughter to the Symbolic order of social structures : "j'ai

appris [...] à dire et à faire exactement ce qui devait être dit et fait.” Beyond instilling into her daughter the accepted linguistic and societal obligations, however, she is also suddenly represented in the Mémoires as the psychological wedge between the child and her second choice of love object. When Georges de Beauvoir eventually breaks into their symbiosis, Simone swiftly transfers her passion to a father who seems to his impressionable daughter to be in every respect superior.

Significantly, when Beauvoir recounts a particularly public defiance of her mother’s power, she links it to her sexual jealousy of Françoise and her own passion for her father. No longer two halves of the primary mother/child symbiosis, they are now nakedly Oedipal rivals :

Son éducation, son milieu [avaient convaincu ma mère] que pour une femme la maternité est le plus beau des rôles : elle ne pouvait le jouer que si je tenais le mien, mais je refusais [...] la veille de notre communion [...], on nous exhortait à aller nous jeter aux pieds de nos mamans en leur demandant pardon de nos fautes; non seulement je ne l’avais pas fait mais quand son tour fut venu, j’en dissuadai ma soeur. [...] Je lui en voulais de me maintenir dans la dépendance et d’affirmer sur moi des droits. En outre j’étais jalouse de la place qu’elle occupait dans le coeur de mon père car ma passion pour lui n’avait fait que grandir [pp. 147-8].

This passage is revealing in that we see Beauvoir’s clear interpretation of her union with her mother as a fraudulent veneer; the symbiosis is revealed as a psychological sham of maternal manipulation and daughterly duty : “elle ne pouvait [jouer son rôle] que si je tenais le mien.” Publicly, Beauvoir refuses to be such an accessory to her mother’s self-definition. Later in life, Beauvoir would resist the mantle of maternity, as she here resists the demands of duty her mother instils in her, connecting them both with the female side of life she

repudiates and choosing instead intellectual pursuits and independence in an attempt to win over her father. Her stance of denial, therefore, is not merely a refusal to play a part; it is also a weapon to wield in the battle for the father. Her mask tossed aside, war can now commence.

Beauvoir's passion for her father is expressed in hyperbolic terms in the Mémoires.²⁷ Significantly, Georges de Beauvoir is cast again and again as the soul of intellectual erudition :

Personne dans mon entourage n'était aussi drôle, aussi intéressant, aussi brillant que lui; personne n'avait lu autant de livres, ne savait par coeur autant de vers, ne discutait avec autant de feu [p. 36].

Against her mother's exaltation of all things religious, Beauvoir's father thus introduces her to the world which she would later dominate : a world of the intellect and the arts, where he shines in the eyes of his daughter : "je m'émerveillai de sa culture, de son intelligence, de son infaillible bon sens [p. 51]." Significantly, her idealised vision of a future partner is based on a similar cultural mastery; Beauvoir dreams of her husband as possessing all the qualities of her father - namely intelligence, culture, and, most importantly, an indispensable gift for emotional domination :

j'éprouverais pour lui une admiration passionnée. En ce domaine [...] j'avais soif de nécessité. Il faudrait que l'élu s'imposât à moi, [...] par une sorte d'évidence; sinon je me demanderais : pourquoi lui et pas un autre? Ce doute était incompatible avec le véritable amour. J'aimerais, le jour où un homme me subjuguerait par son intelligence, sa culture, son autorité [p. 201].

²⁷ For another psychoanalytic approach to Beauvoir's relationship with her father, see Francis Jeanson, Simone de Beauvoir ou l'entreprise de vivre, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966, pp. 97-108.

Why should Beauvoir place such emphasis here on the appreciation of culture in her fantasy of the perfect partner? Significantly, she provides the answer to this question herself in specifically Freudian terms : “l’idée que je me faisais de notre couple”, she goes on to write, “fut indirectement influencée par les sentiments que j’avais portés à mon père [p. 202].”

The first defining moment when Beauvoir feels that she has a deep emotional connection with her father is facilitated specifically by their mutual appreciation of culture : Georges de Beauvoir, himself a frustrated actor, takes his daughter alone to the theatre. The play, however, makes considerably less impact on the child than the fact that she thus seems to be locked into a private romantic universe with her father :

ce qui me transporta, ce fut bien moins la représentation que mon tête-à-tête avec mon père; assister, seule avec lui, à un spectacle qu’il avait choisi pour moi, cela créait entre nous une telle complicité que, pendant quelques heures, j’eus l’impression grisante qu’il n’appartenait qu’à moi. [p. 98].

The theatre has therefore replaced the church as the scene of symbiosis with Beauvoir’s favoured parent. Having so publicly rejected her mother’s religious associations, Beauvoir appears to have been through the battle of conflicting influences as “la jeune fille sollicitée de s’identifier au père et à la mère, partagée entre des tendances ‘viriloïdes’ et ‘féminines’”, a concept she revealingly had rejected nine years earlier in Le Deuxième Sexe.²⁸ This alliance, however, is also only temporary. Having defected from her mother’s side of the feminine, Beauvoir is now massively damaged by what she views as her father’s betrayal of her trust in his rejection of her emotional

²⁸ Simone de Beauvoir, Le Deuxième Sexe, vol.1, p. 95.

investment. By obviously abandoning Simone in favour of the younger, prettier Hélène, Georges exacerbates her burgeoning sense of insecurity and inferiority with regard to her own body.

From her earliest memories, Beauvoir portrays her upbringing as extremely sexually repressed. The body is hidden, unmentioned and unmentionable :

Je n'avais jamais vu d'adultes qu'hermétiquement vêtus; [...] on m'avait appris à ne pas regarder mon corps, à changer de linge sans me découvrir. Dans mon univers, la chair n'avait pas droit à l'existence [p. 81].

je liais alors l'indécence aux basses fonctions du corps; j'ai appris ensuite qu'il participait tout entier à leur grossièreté : il fallait le cacher; laisser voir ses dessous ou sa peau [...] c'était une incongruité [p. 113].

There is therefore little surprise that as an adolescent Simone de Beauvoir views the onset of menstruation with shock and unease. In a world where there is no place for the flesh, and where bodily functions are glossed over by bourgeois euphemisms and voluminous clothing, she feels mixed emotions on learning that she is now “une grande fille [pp. 140-1].” Her pride at her blossoming maturity is mixed with feelings of guilt, and her horror at the soiled underclothes she has had to reveal to her mother, expecting recrimination.

Significantly, this guilt is then emotionally compounded by her father's insensitive jokes :

il fit en plaisantant une allusion à mon état : je me consumai de honte. 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 [p. 141].

Far from being a badge of feminine pride, her period is viewed by Beauvoir as “sa tare secrète.” It is unsurprising at this stage that she wishes to be

considered “un pur esprit” by her father instead of “un organisme”, since not only is their relationship based on a mutual appreciation of the intellect, but her other adolescent growing pains are also treated insensitively by Georges de Beauvoir. Immediately after her evocation of this important scene when she is painfully made flesh in her father’s eyes, Beauvoir recalls her shame at her transient adolescent awkwardness, and, again, her devastation at her father’s evident revulsion :

J'enlaidis, mon nez rougeoya; il me poussa sur le visage et sur la nuque des boutons que je taquinais avec nervosité. [...] Gênée par mon corps, je développai des phobies : je ne supportais pas, par exemple, de boire dans un verre où j'avais déjà bu. J'eus des tics : je n'arrêtais pas de hausser les épaules, de faire tourner mon nez. “Ne gratte pas tes boutons, ne tourne pas ton nez”, me répétait mon père. [...] sans ménagement, il faisait sur mon teint, mon acné, ma balourdise, des remarques qui exaspéraient mon malaise et mes manies [*ibid*].

A further and final key to Beauvoir’s horror of physicality and the concomitant desire to erase herself appears in the next paragraph, when Beauvoir relates how her younger sister plays “la Belle de la Nuit”, “en robe de tulle bleue, semée d’étoiles, ses beaux cheveux répandus sur son dos [*ibid*]”. Poupette is painted as an ideal of femininity; Beauvoir, by contrast, is “au supplice” : feeling ridiculous in her Spanish costume, she is aware of “tous les regards fixés sur moi [p. 142],” the hostile looks of judgement which compare the gauche adolescent to her prettier sister. It is highly significant that these three passages, linking her father’s reactions to her menstruation, his callousness regarding her teenage gawkins and the anguish she feels while on stage, should be compounded by Beauvoir into an intense page and a half of her memoirs. They are all connected, forming a strong possible

explanation of her rejection of the female body as outlined in Le Deuxième Sexe. The theatre in this scene is no longer a place for symbiotic union with the father : on stage herself, at her most insecure physically, Beauvoir feels alienated from her self and rejected. From now on, instead of giving herself definition through her body, she feels shapeless and indefinite : “je n’apercevais nulle trace de ma subjectivité. Je m’étais voulue sans bornes : j’étais informe comme l’infini [p. 157].” Her body thus having let her down, Beauvoir turns to her intellect in the hope of retaining her father’s affections.

According to his daughter, Georges de Beauvoir always believed that the world owed him a living merely by virtue of the aristocratic *de* in his name. As a result, he shirked work, and the resulting penury irked him massively. Throughout the Mémoires he is portrayed as gradually sliding into a morass of self-hatred and vituperative despair, which he later projected onto his daughters, Simone in particular. In the face of her mother’s increasing manipulation and repression (she reads her letters, and is continually intrusive), Beauvoir stakes all on her father, pushing herself to her intellectual limits both in order to impress him and to carve a niche of her own in his cultural universe. That she is also obliged to do so for financial reasons, however, means that her father views her outstanding scholastic achievements and the stimulating promise of a working life ahead as his personal humiliation, not gratifying proof of his daughter’s erudition : “dans [mon] laborieux avenir il lisait sa propre déchéance [p. 244].” Beauvoir therefore sustains further emotional damage, compounding the insecurity caused by her father’s previous physical rejection of her by his reaction to her

intellectual efforts. Incapable of venting her frustration on him, she turns it instead upon herself :

Je ne me rendais évidemment pas compte de la contradiction qui divisait mon père : mais je réalisai vite celle de ma propre situation. Je me conformais très exactement à ses volontés : et il en paraissait fâché; il m'avait vouée à l'étude, et me reprochait d'avoir tout le temps le nez dans mes livres. On aurait cru, à voir sa morosité, que je m'étais engagée contre son gré dans cette voie qu'il avait en vérité choisie pour moi. Je me demandais de quoi j'étais coupable; je me sentais mal à l'aise dans ma peau et j'avais de la rancune au coeur [pp. 248-9].

Beauvoir's vitiated relationship with her parents thus causes deep psychological damage. She is unable to challenge and escape them, as an adolescent being at a particularly emotionally vulnerable stage of her development. Uncertain of herself, and unable to find her niche, she describes the effects of her psychological pain in intensely poignant terms :

mon père me trouvait laide et m'en faisait grief, ma mère se méfiait de l'obscur changement qu'elle devinait en moi. [...] au lieu de me protéger comme naguère, leur regard me mettait en danger. [...] je me sentis doublement contestée; je n'habitais plus un lieu privilégié, et ma perfection s'était ébréchée; j'étais incertaine de moi-même, et vulnérable. Mes rapports avec les autres devaient s'en trouver modifiés [p. 155].

Throughout Beauvoir's first autobiographical work, a nostalgic longing for the idyll of her lost childhood and the untainted relationship with her parents filters through the proud words of independence and the need for solitude. Even when she has left home, all relations with her parents having long since soured beyond reconciliation, regret is still plain. Speaking of her evenings spent with her cousin Jacques' family, and her thoughts of marrying him, she weaves into the words the sense of longing exile she feels from her past, and her parents :

Tout en détestant les routines bourgeoises, *je gardais la nostalgie des soirées dans le bureau noir et rouge, au temps où je n'imaginai pas pouvoir jamais quitter mes parents*. La maison Laiguillon [était] déjà pour moi un foyer; je lirais, à côté de Jacques, et je penserais "nous deux" comme *autrefois je murmurais "nous quatre"*; sa mère, sa soeur m'entoureraient de leur tendresse, *mes parents se radouciraient : je redeviendrais celle que tout le monde aimait, je reprendrais ma place dans cette société hors de laquelle je n'envisageais que l'exil* [p. 290, my emphasis].

The psychological template for Beauvoir's reactions to later emotional situations seems to have been forged from the desire for the blanket of security given by her parents, before she lost her father to her younger sister, and before her mother sought control over her daughter in revenge for her own abandonment.

Nearly a decade after her explicit rejection of Freudian tenets in Le Deuxième Sexe, Beauvoir is therefore implicitly admitting that her childhood experience has in fact conditioned her development - particularly that of her intellect and interests. Her father, hedonistic and pagan, pushes her towards atheistic intellectual and aesthetic pursuits; her mother, disciplined and deeply religious, inculcates in her elder daughter a rigorous sense of duty and a moral code against which she later rebels. Simone de Beauvoir thus paints her picture as an emotionally vulnerable young woman, torn between two strong opposing currents of thought, represented by the male and the female influences in her life. By siding with the male in every way possible, who later lets her down, it is unsurprising that her later relations with her own female sexuality should be so ambiguous, and it could be speculated that she later

blames her own body for her father's insensitive rebuffs.²⁹ Describing herself as shapeless, indefinite, unsure of her identity and desperate for love, when she meets Sartre it is perhaps inevitable that she views him as her possibility of redemption.

“Etre aimée, être admirée, être nécessaire, être quelqu'un [p. 320]” : these are the goals Beauvoir sets up for herself, as described in her personal diary. Love justifies all in her universe : it heads the list of her projects and leads towards self-definition. Sartre's appearance in her life means that her love can be transferred to him; finally the emotional exile she has felt since the loss of her parents is over :

une grande chance venait de m'être donnée : en face de cet avenir, brusquement je n'étais plus seule. [...] Sartre répondait exactement au vœu de mes quinze ans : il était le double en qui je retrouvais, portées à l'incandescence, toutes mes manies. Avec lui, je pourrais toujours tout partager [pp. 481-2].

Furthermore, by sharing everything with Sartre, Beauvoir has discovered not only the replacement father figure she constructed for herself in the fantasy of adolescence, but also a repository for her own unconscious. As with Françoise Miquel and Pierre Labrousse of L'Invitée, Beauvoir tells Sartre everything in their pact of transparency, and is thus delivered from all confrontation with her own private demons. As the analyst of her deepest fears, Sartre soothingly wipes her emotional slate clean :

je n'avais plus à m'inquiéter de moi : un regard, certes bienveillant, mais plus impartial que le mien, me renvoyait de chacun de mes mouvements une image que je tenais pour objective; ce contrôle me défendait contre les peurs, les faux espoirs, les vains scrupules, les fantasmagories, les menus délires qui se nouent si facilement dans la solitude. Peu

²⁹ See also Okely, pp. 29-37.

m'importait que celle-ci n'existât plus pour moi : au contraire, j'étais toute à la joie de lui avoir échappé [p. 32].

Throughout her life with Sartre, however, Beauvoir's unconscious does return to haunt her. As *Moi* has underlined,³⁰ her writing is scattered with notes of despair : Beauvoir is desperately vulnerable when apart from Sartre, and her demons come back to play. His contingent loves prove difficult to deal with, and the seething of her own sexuality draws her into a battle for control. Unable to cope with the Pandora's box of her own psyche, she pours it instead into her writings. There are many whispers throughout the rest of her memoirs of the incessant murmurings of Beauvoir's unconscious : extensive analysis of these would, however, carry this study beyond the horizons of Beauvoir's fiction which is the focus of this thesis. I wish however to discuss briefly Beauvoir's recurring dream of abandonment by Sartre as she relates it fourteen years after Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée in her last volume of memoirs, Tout Compte fait. In this dream she invariably falls to the floor in a catatonic state of despair :

De tout temps Sartre a été pour moi la nuit tantôt le compagnon qu'il est dans ma vie et tantôt un homme au coeur de pierre que mes reproches ou mes prières, mes larmes, mes évanouissements laissent indifférent; l'évanouissement m'est évidemment suggéré par ma position étendue; et c'est, dans ce cas-là aussi, avec quelque distance que je souffre de l'attitude de Sartre; elle a quelque chose d'implacable et d'irréel, comme si je développais une hypothèse : à supposer qu'il ne tienne pas compte de moi, comment réagirais-je? Jusqu'où les choses pourraient-elles aller? [p. 129]

While Freud himself was swift to point out that dreams' manifest content frequently belies their latent message, Beauvoir's unconscious interpretation

of the public flawless couple, where two become one, is revealing to say the least. For, as she herself states in the same section of Tout Compte fait, sleep is “cet univers de fantasmes et d'enfance où les désirs sont assouvis, les craintes avouées, toute répression ignorée [p. 113].” In the stony-faced Sartre, indifferent to reproaches and tears, Beauvoir may well have found her reincarnation of Georges de Beauvoir.

This repression of her past, therefore, is not merely to be found among the pages of Le Deuxième Sexe. Her fears repeatedly rear their heads in her autobiographies, and in her fiction. However, while refusing to acknowledge any cracks in the Sartre-Beauvoir couple, and while attempting to escape the callings of her own unconscious, paradoxically Beauvoir is also extraordinarily lucid about the motivations behind her former repudiation of psychoanalytic theory. It is to this direct engagement with psychoanalysis in her autobiographies that I finally now wish to turn, and to her gradual recognition and acknowledgement of Freud's validity as a theorist.

Throughout her memoirs Beauvoir appears fascinated by the personality and by the lure of madness. She constantly researches the topics, attending psychiatric lectures and demonstrations while at the Sorbonne, also submitting a dissertation on the personality; during later travels abroad with Sartre she visits asylums in Russia and psychological institutes in Holland. She comes into direct contact with the madness of love with Louise Perron and the actress Camille, and is deeply affected by Sartre's chronic hallucinatory psychosis following his experiments with mescaline. There is,

³⁰ See Moi's chapter 'The Scandal of Loneliness and Separation', in Simone de Beauvoir : The

therefore, strong evidence of her interest in psychology, psychiatry and psychoanalysis. And, everywhere, she mentions Freud.

Following the creation and publication of Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée in 1958, Beauvoir finally admits two years later, in La Force de l'âge, that both Sartre's and her own resistance to psychoanalysis is - ironically - explained by psychoanalytic tenets, as is my claim in this chapter :

C'était notre condition de jeunes intellectuels petit-bourgeois qui nous incitait à nous croire inconditionnés. [...] La psychanalyse nous aurait proposé des réponses, si nous l'avions consultée. [...]. Le pansexualisme de Freud nous semblait tenir du délire, il heurtait notre puritanisme. Surtout, 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 : personne ne nous indiquait de possibles conciliations et nous n'étions pas capable d'en découvrir. Nous restâmes figés dans notre attitude rationaliste et volontariste; chez un individu lucide, pensions-nous, la liberté triomphe des traumatismes, des complexes, des souvenirs, des influences. Affectivement dégagés de notre enfance, nous ignorâmes longtemps que cette indifférence s'expliquait par notre enfance même [pp. 28-9, my emphasis].³¹

However, although Beauvoir is therefore ready to admit her own insecurities, she is still reluctant to expose them to analysis, still in flight from her own unconscious. For, as she writes in the preface to her next volume of her memoirs, La Force des choses , when all is said and done she is unwilling to face what may be revealed to her :

je n'éprouve nulle résistance à tirer au clair ma vie et moi-même; du moins dans la mesure où je me situe dans mon propre univers : peut-être mon image projetée dans un monde

Making of an Intellectual Woman, pp. 217-252.

³¹ Beauvoir's insistent initial rejection of Freud may also have been another symptom of her obsessive need for symbiosis with Sartre. As she states in Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée (quoted above), "il était le double [avec qui] je pourrais tout partager [p. 482]". Had Sartre been more sympathetic to Freud earlier in his career (he was always fascinated by psychoanalysis), it could be speculated that Beauvoir herself may well have written a very different version of Le Deuxième Sexe.

autre - celui des psychanalystes par exemple - pourrait-elle me déconcerter ou me gêner [p. 10].

Her own account of her past, therefore, is safer than that of the psychoanalyst; her unconscious can be controlled to a certain extent by her own explorations.

Yet Beauvoir's account of her childhood in Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée was obviously revealing enough to disconcert her previously-held theories on Freud, for in her subsequent autobiographies she openly acknowledges that the past is an anchor for identity. As Anthony Storr has noted, autobiographical creation has distinct parallels with self-analysis in that the writer is deeply changed by the searing, searching process of self-revelation :

Over the centuries, autobiography changed from being a narrative of the soul's relation with God to an enterprise far more like that of psychoanalysis. In recounting the circumstances of his life from childhood onward, the autobiographer sought to define the influences which had shaped his character, to portray the relationships which had most affected him, to reveal the motives which had impelled him. In other words, the autobiographer became a writer who was attempting to make a coherent narrative out of his life, and, in the process of doing so, hoping perhaps to discover its meaning.³²

During the creation of her first volume of memoirs in 1958, Simone de Beauvoir saw a self she perhaps had hoped was buried, and which led her to a realisation both of Freud's perspicacity, and her own denial of this. However, to return now to our main focus of her fiction, it is in fact the burying of this self which interests us. For although she publicly recognises

³² Anthony Storr, Solitude, London: HarperCollins, 1994, pp. 80-81.

Freud's theories as valid in her autobiographies, putting this recognition into fictional practice is after all another matter.

Self-deception is a recurrent theme in Beauvoir's fictional works, since many of her protagonists evade the truth of their situation - among them Paule of Les Mandarins and Monique of La Femme rompue. Yet, it could be argued, Simone de Beauvoir also evaded the truth of her own psychical conflicts. Through much of her life, as I have stated, she deceived herself by running from her own unconscious, an unconscious which, as part of her self, she could never elude. Beauvoir's initial reaction to psychoanalysis was thus similar to that of Oedipus' defiance of the oracle : believing in free will, every step in fact led him closer to a fate waiting at the crossroads. Beauvoir, too, in existential hubris, initially tried to transcend her own unconscious by believing it would never affect her future. The path she took, however, led her back to her Oedipal triangles, her idealised love and her search for a solid sense of self, themes she would bury in her fiction.

Unlike Oedipus, however, in a sense she was rescued by running. Simone de Beauvoir was deeply unhappy at many points in her life. This sadness had to surface somewhere, and in this respect, perhaps, her fiction saved her from despair. In La Force de l'âge, Beauvoir writes of her awareness of the unconscious, and of its power which, although admittedly limited, catalyses revelatory outbursts of hidden meaning :

il existe en tout être un "infracassable noyau de nuit" : quelque chose qui ne réussit qu'à percer ni les routines sociales ni les lieux communs du langage mais qui parfois éclate, scandaleusement. Dans ces explosions, toujours une vérité se révèle [p. 150].

Even while recognising her unconscious, Simone de Beauvoir cannot control it, for throughout her fiction it bubbles through her smooth textual surfaces, as I hope will be evident from the discussions which follow. We now move, therefore, from Beauvoir's autobiographies into her world of fictional representation. In this different world, the problematic, troubled but fertile relation between Beauvoir and Freud, although unstable, volatile, full of overdetermination and paradox, may again provide us with a rich seam of meaning for the purposes of literary analysis. Let us thus now turn to her first work of fiction, Quand prime le spirituel, and begin our examination of both Simone de Beauvoir's literary engagement with psychoanalysis and the buried resonances of her textual unconscious.

CHAPTER TWO

QUAND PRIME LE SPIRITUEL

Quand prime le spirituel, the collection of five interlinked stories which according to Simone de Beauvoir “éclaire la genèse de mon oeuvre”¹ was the first manuscript she ever submitted for publication. In 1937 she approached two different publishers, Gallimard and Grasset, both of whom rejected the work. Over forty years later however, in 1979, Gallimard sought her permission to print it, and these five stories finally found their reading public. Beauvoir’s main aim in her first fictional text was to expose the spiritualism - the naïve belief in an absolute, religious or otherwise - in which her five protagonists, Marcelle, Chantal, Lisa, Anne and Marguerite, are all trapped to varying degrees.

As with her first published work L’Invitée, and indeed all her fiction, Beauvoir invests much of herself in her text, constructing her tales around deep personal preoccupations. Her textual unconscious is therefore clearly at work in Quand prime le spirituel, since one central theme is the child/parent relationship, a relationship which is a battlefield for the instinctual wranglings of desire/id and duty/superego. Beauvoir also treats the disillusion involved in the separation from romantic and sexual symbiosis, which - as I argue in the current study - is an obsessional motif of her fiction. At this stage of her writing career, however, such psychoanalytic themes are implicit rather than

¹ Simone de Beauvoir, Quand prime le spirituel, (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), p. vii of the preface. All quotations are taken from this edition.

explicit, since they are buried in the text under the name of spiritualism.

Beauvoir explicitly states in the preface that she was

en révolte contre le spiritualisme qui m'avait longtemps opprimée. [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. J'ai beaucoup joué sur la mauvaise foi qui m'en paraissait à la difficile tentative de faire entendre les voix - et les silences - du mensonge [p. vii].

From our psychoanalytic perspective, it could be claimed that such detection of lies - both voiced and silent - is also the aim of the psychoanalyst, who attempts through slips and symptoms to uncover the patient's latent motivations beneath their manifest claims. In Quand prime le spirituel self-deception covers the protagonists' motivations in an insidious cloak of self-righteous self-justification.

Beauvoir's five heroines in one way or another are enmeshed in the webs of their own desire for dissimulation : Marcelle is trapped in her wish for lofty spiritual images, in a futile attempt to hide from her own sexuality; Lisa is lost in fantasy in an attempt to escape from her surroundings; Chantal, buried alive in the provinces, creates in her diary a picturesque romance riddled with insecurities and self-deception. Anne, torn between her passionate desire for Pascal and her wish to be a dutiful daughter, is a pawn in others' spiritual battles, unable to face up to her own manipulation. Only Marguerite - the literary representative of Beauvoir herself as an adolescent - escapes from the emotional battlefield of spiritualism and corporeal desires through her own lucidity and courage :

il m'a fallu près de deux ans pour vraiment comprendre tout ce qu'il y avait de lâcheté et d'hypocrisie dans [des] rêves merveilleux et pathétiques et pour rompre avec eux. [J'ai] voulu

montrer seulement comment j'ai été amenée à essayer de regarder les choses en face, sans accepter d'oracles, de valeurs toutes faites; il a fallu tout réinventer moi-même [pp. 248-9].

Although there is much material in these tales which could be analysed productively from the current perspective², I have selected 'Marcelle' and 'Anne' as two stories which - as I hope to show in this chapter - offer themselves to Freudian literary theory in differing but equally fertile ways. Significantly, Beauvoir inserts clues from the childhoods of her heroines into both their narratives. Despite the fact that she claimed resistance to the tenets of Freudian psychoanalysis at this early stage in her literary career, she does imply that both Marcelle and Anne are very much affected and limited by their conditioning, perhaps thus displaying through her fiction her unconscious recognition of Freud, and foreshadowing both her acceptance of him and the explicit focus on childhood in her penultimate fictional work, Les Belles Images. Beauvoir's particular focus is Marcelle's and Anne's exposure

² It is in fact precisely due to her lucidity and her ability to "regarder les choses en face, sans accepter d'oracles, de valeurs toutes faites" that I will not be treating Marguerite in this chapter. Not only is a comprehensive analysis of all five protagonists unfortunately beyond the scope of the present study, but as perhaps the most positive of all Beauvoir's fictional heroines, Marguerite is too aware of her own situation to hide for long from her own desires. Furthermore, as Elizabeth Fallaize has noted, her story "is no journey of self-discovery, but a formally composed account with a single flow of narrative time, [...] in which the first lines anticipate the last." (see Fallaize, The Novels of Simone de Beauvoir, London: Routledge, 1988, p. 153). Marguerite has therefore already analysed her own motivations, presenting her readers with a clearly formulated account and leaving us with little textual detective work to perform.

Neither will I analyse Beauvoir's depictions of Chantal and Lisa in this chapter, for different reasons. Firstly, it could be claimed that Chantal is trapped in the Lacanian Imaginary order of idealised perfection and control, transfixed by images which later reveal themselves merely to be warped projections of her own desires. In the current chapter I will be using mainly Freudian psychoanalytic theory, turning to Lacan's three orders of the Real, the Imaginary and the Symbolic in later chapters, applying them to Beauvoir's later texts. Secondly, Chantal reveals her *mauvaise foi* mainly in diary form, in which Beauvoir uses "du langage pour dissimuler la vérité [*ibid*]." As Beauvoir herself notes in her preface to Quand prime le spirituel, this is a narrative technique she also employs in her last work, La Femme rompue, and which will be the subject of my final chapter.

to overpowering religious doctrine which establishes the value of the absolute in their lives and results in a vicious superego which is the result of internalised unrealistic moral ideals.

In this chapter I will firstly analyse Beauvoir's literary creation Marcelle Drouffe, for whom - as with Françoise, Hélène, Paule, Anne and Monique - romantic ideals prove fatally irresistible. Her strong sexuality is unrecognised by her, and bound up instead into the disturbingly masochistic religious/sexual phantasies of her adolescence, in which weak women are punished by strong and violent men. Her erotic identification is thus combined with an intense aggressive tension and a desire for expiatory suffering, which later in life takes the form of a deep moral masochism. Marcelle's eventual sexual and emotional submission to Denis Charval is based on a deep childhood idealisation of a repressed sexual absolute, for which she refuses all condemning responsibility. When Denis abandons her, this submission is ironically intensified, since she can now become the martyr of her childhood fantasies. Marcelle therefore needs Denis as a vital conduit for her passion - a fact he notes and exploits - and the latter phase of their failed marriage is the framework for an ambivalent relationship in which, paradoxically, she is safe in her sadness. She thus remains trapped in the illusions which bind her, both at ease with and dependent upon her suffering.

Anne Vignon, a representation of Beauvoir's childhood friend Elisabeth (Zaza in her memoirs), is a tragic literary illustration of the Freudian hypothesis that moral and social ideals which only inhibit, forbid and suppress will result in intolerable conflict when imposed on a fragile ego. Such intense

conflict frequently leads to neurosis and psychosomatic illness, and in Quand prime le spirituel the demands of the superego eventually prove too much for Anne. Her relationship with Madame Vignon - as so often happens in Beauvoir's depictions of the mother/daughter dynamic - is portrayed as an intensely viciated one, based on an overpowering and selfish maternal love which is anything but unconditional. Torn between the desire to appease both her mother and her religion on the one hand, and the vital throbbings of the id on the other, Anne dies of a brain tumour which could be a fatal psychosomatic manifestation of an intense obsessional neurosis triggered by this conflict. Finally, even in death, Anne is ironically still a tragic pawn in the game of self-justification for Madame Vignon : the things of the spirit have won. The final tone of both 'Marcelle' and 'Anne' is therefore a bleak one, and it is clear that Beauvoir intended the narratives to be a warning against both the destructive effects of religious indoctrination, and the danger of idealist absolutes, as well as an implicit recognition on her part of the importance of childhood conditioning.

Let us now begin our analysis, however, with Marcelle Drouffe. As already stated, Beauvoir gives the childhood background of her character fairly explicitly, stating that "dès l'âge de dix mois, elle avait donné les signes d'une extraordinaire sensibilité [p. 3]." Deeply indulged by her parents, she turns to tears for excitement :

Ses parents la choyaient, et elle était si sage qu'ils ne la grondaient jamais; mais elle connut de bonne heure le goût des larmes. Au soir tombant, elle se glissait sous le bureau de son père ou derrière les lourds rideaux du salon, et elle se laissait envahir par la tristesse et par la nuit. [...] des gouttes roulaient

le long de ses joues et elle sentait son corps chavirer dans un vide délicieux [*ibid*].³

From a Freudian perspective we could surmise that as a tiny child Marcelle already appears to be exhibiting depressive and masochistic tendencies, enjoying “des larmes”, “la tristesse” and “un vide délicieux.” Histrionically imagining herself to be abandoned by her parents - “elle imaginait que ses parents étaient morts, qu’elle était seule au monde [*ibid*]”; in another fantasy she is sacrificed to religion : “elle offrait en sanglotant le sacrifice de sa vie à un jeune Dieu blond [*ibid*].” Religious tenets thus play a vital rôle in Marcelle’s life from her earliest years, offering her many opportunities for tears and transportations; “Elle aimait surtout pleurer dans les églises,” Beauvoir tells us, hinting at the suspiciously selective nature of Marcelle’s apparently spontaneous emotions, and the latent *mauvaise foi* which already appears to lie behind her veneer of spirituality. It could be speculated that while she is stiflingly protected by her parents and shies away from her own age group (“elle ne se montrait sauvage que dans la compagnie des enfants de son âge [p. 5]”), religion provides the infant Marcelle with another justifying protective framework in which she feels blessed, chosen and - most importantly - radiantly singular.

At the onset of puberty, however, her first sexual impulses are also affected by this religious ideological framework, and a distinct pattern later emerges in

³ In the first volume of Beauvoir’s own memoirs, she also relates how as a child she would slip under her father’s desk :

je me blottissais dans la niche creusée sous le bureau, je m’enroulais dans les ténèbres; il faisait sombre, il faisait chaud [...]. Ainsi se passa ma toute petite enfance. Je regardais, je palpais, j’apprenais le monde, à l’abri [p. 10].

The text therefore allows the reader to see the insistence of Beauvoir’s projections of her own infantile experience.

which her fantasies of masochistic submission to a God-like man entangle sexual sensation with religious rapture. Marcelle confirms her identity in the form of a reductive feminine ideal, clothed in the glory of absolute surrender, absolute adoration and absolute humility. Ironically, it could be speculated that what Marcelle is both projecting into and hiding behind these saintly fantasies is nothing other than her own strong sexuality :

elle s'enchantait inlassablement de cette histoire : une femme maltraitée par un maître superbe [...]. Marcelle s'identifiait à cette héroïne qu'elle imaginait parfois innocente et méconnue, mais le plus souvent coupable d'une lourde faute, car elle aimait frissonner de repentir aux pieds d'un homme beau, pur et terrible. Il avait droit de vie et de mort sur elle et elle lui disait "Seigneur"; il la faisait mettre nue devant lui et, pour monter son cheval [...], il se servait de son corps comme d'un marchepied. Elle prolongeait avec volupté ce moment où la tête courbée, le coeur empli d'adoration, d'une humilité passionnée, elle sentait un dur éperon écorcher son dos d'esclave [p. 6].⁴

This passage is extremely disturbing in its stress on masochistic quasi-sexual experience : Marcelle identifies with naked, abused women who revel in their guilt, and must suffer to absolve themselves. The heroine of her fantasy has no control over her future : the hero of the tale "avait droit de vie et de mort

⁴ It is interesting to note a further parallel between this passage and a passage from Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée, where she discusses her own childhood religious fervour :

m'inspirant de Grisélidis et de Geneviève de Brabant, j'entrais dans la peau d'une épouse persécutée; ma soeur, entraînée à incarner les Barbe-Bleue, me chassait cruellement de son palais, je me perdais dans les forêts sauvages jusqu'au jour où mon innocence éclatait. Parfois, modifiant ce livret, je me rêvais coupable d'une faute mystérieuse, et je frémissais de repentir aux pieds d'un homme beau, pur, et terrible. [...] Je fus extraordinairement émue par le sort de ce roi captif qu'un tyran oriental utilisait comme marchepied quand il montait à cheval; il m'arrivait de me substituer tremblante, demi-nue, à l'esclave dont un dur éperon écorchait l'échine.

Plus ou moins clairement en effet, la nudité intervenait dans ces incantations. La tunique déchirée de sainte Blandine révélait la blancheur de ses flancs; sa seule chevelure voilait Geneviève de Brabant.

See Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée, (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), pp. 6-7. Although Beauvoir states that Marguerite represents her in Quand prime le spirituel, it is clear from the above

sur elle”, causing her intense pain which she receives with “une humilité passionnée.”

Why should this need for a domineering and sadistic father figure be so intense in Marcelle? Bearing in mind that Beauvoir includes a significant number of details regarding Marcelle’s childhood in her narrative,⁵ it could be argued that her disappointing relationship with her father leads to her search for a substitute. It is significant, for example, that Marcelle’s vow to be “la compagne d’un homme de génie [p. 8]” directly follows both a passage detailing her father’s indifference towards her and a particularly insensitive comment from him after a disastrous party, both factors leading her to fear that no one will ever love her :

Elle avait espéré qu’en grandissant elle deviendrait pour son père une confidente et une amie; mais autant qu’à elle, M. Drouffe s’intéressait à Pascal [...] et à la petite Marguerite. Il plaisantait même souvent sa fille aînée sur sa timidité et sur ses grandes mains dont elle ne savait que faire. Marcelle fut douloureusement déçue. “Qui donc saura m’aimer?” murmurait-elle souvent avec détresse. Un soir, au retour d’une matinée où personne ne l’avait fait danser, comme son père lui reprochait son air maussade, Marcelle éclata en sanglots et courut s’enfermer dans sa chambre. [...] elle avait éperdument pitié d’elle-même. [...] C’est alors que soudain elle eut la merveilleuse révélation de son destin. “Je serai la compagne d’un homme de génie”, murmura-t-elle avec extase [pp. 7-8].

Echoing Beauvoir’s own experience, who - as we have seen in the previous chapter - suffered from the insensitivities of the father she adored - Marcelle thus idealises the man who will constantly elude her, later replacing

passage that many facets of herself were also transmitted to the other, less positive characters.

⁵ I disagree with Keefe here, who claims in *Simone de Beauvoir : A Study of her Writings* (London: Harrap, 1983) that Marcelle’s childhood is rather sketchily drawn. Bearing in mind that ‘Marcelle’ is a relatively short story, to my mind Beauvoir seems to strike a good balance between the depiction of her childhood and later life. See Keefe, p. 141.

him with Denis Charval, who also brings her disappointment. Jessica Benjamin, in The Bonds of Love, offers a useful possible guideline for the purposes of this thesis with her feminist reinterpretation of certain key elements of Freudian theory, which I will employ more fully in my analysis of Le Sang des autres. Benjamin claims that many girls who suffer under intense social restrictions (as does Marcelle⁶) cannot help but nurture an intense adoration for omnipotent men :

they express their admiration in relationships of overt or unconscious submission [and] grow to idealize the man who has what they can never possess - power and desire.⁷

Benjamin goes on to claim that in her view the combination of a father who is idolised and a mother who is overly sympathetic and reluctant to let her daughter separate from her - as is Marcelle's mother ("Madame Drouffe await pour Marcelle une dévotion passionnée [p. 7]," writes Beauvoir) - leads the child to establish a masochistic relationship with an idealised heroic figure :

[the daughter] hopes in a masochistic relationship to overcome her clinging helplessness and separation anxiety even as she simultaneously expresses and gives way to it. Such a person is likely to seek a 'heroic' sadist to submit to [...]. This ideal love solves the problems posed by the frustration of desire and agency, the rage at nonrecognition [by the father], by offering an avenue of escape and providing a figure of identification.⁸

Throughout her tale, Marcelle seems to be addicted to the ideals of suffering and disappointment, striving towards the spiritual absolute of suffering of the soul ("Être fort, et s'user en circonstances viles [p. 10]" is her

⁶ It is worth pointing out that Beauvoir may be making a point about these intense social restrictions imposed on her heroines; as Freud himself claimed, the only way out for them is illness. In this sense, it could be speculated that their neuroses are a form of feminine self-expression. But this, unfortunately, is another thesis.

⁷ Jessica Benjamin, The Bonds of Love, (London: Virago, 1990), p. 109.

⁸ *ibid*, p. 119.

motto), driven by dreams of her own domination by a god-like figure. Significantly, she does not lose these ideals even when she loses her faith in God following the horrors of the first World War. This important development does not mean, however, that Marcelle moves away from the spiritual towards more worldly, material concerns. She remains instead trapped in her idealistic desire for the absolute, seeking to bear the world's nebulous spiritual sufferings on her shoulders and hence to validate her own existence in a type of masochistic, saintly suffering reminiscent of her early sexual fantasies. By such sacrifice she will become worthy of the heroic god-like figure she feels sure awaits her, a man all the more necessary to her following the death of her father : "Cette pathétique figure," she ruminates while gazing at herself in the mirror, "méritait l'amour d'un héros [p. 10]." When Marcelle finally finds this hero in the idealised figure of the tortured poet Denis Charval, her latent masochism takes hold.

Upon her first sexual contact with Denis, Marcelle experiences a swift wave of submissive adoration which overwhelms her with desire. This sensuality is all the more intense since it is totally unexpected, for Marcelle has repressed her sexuality throughout her adolescence, and as a result Denis finds it easy to exploit her :

il semblait à Marcelle qu'elle était emportée comme un jouet docile par une destinée sur laquelle elle ne pouvait rien; elle n'avait plus conscience que des battements de son coeur et tout près de son visage, d'un souffle tiède. Quelque chose allait arriver, elle ne ferait pas un geste pour l'empêcher, immobile, passive, elle acceptait : pendant des années elle avait vécu en femme forte, tendre, inquiète; elle avait besoin, ne fût-ce qu'un instant, de renoncer à rien penser, à rien vouloir.

Ce fut d'abord sur ses yeux, au coin de sa bouche, une pluie de baisers pressés, puis la chaleur d'un corps contre son corps

et sur sa bouche un long baiser profond; elle se laissa aller; il n'y eut plus en elle que bien-être et faiblesse, abandonnée dans les bras de Denis, elle connut la douceur de communier avec le néant [pp. 25-26].

Her latent desire for passive submission is therefore finally made manifest : she is “un jouet docile”, “immobile, passive”, “faiblesse, abandonnée” : finally both the abandoned child of her infantile fantasy and the sexual toy of a strong man whose strength obliterates all need for active participation in her fate, and hence removes any concomitant guilt she may feel. Marcelle swiftly abandons her hapless fiancé Desroches, who regards premarital sex as an unnecessary expression of physical feeling (“céder à des impulsions purement physiques, c’est nier notre dignité humaine [p. 21]” he tells an unconvinced Marcelle). Compared with Desroches, who leaves Marcelle frustrated, limp, “prostrée sans force, sans désir” in an “engourdissement douloureux [p. 20]”, Denis stimulates her repressed sexuality to fever pitch, easily manoeuvring her into a frenzy of desire and adoration which serves as the catalyst for her dependence on him. Their wedding night proves to be the ultimate realisation of her quasi-religious infantile sexual fantasies of masochistic submission.

In ‘The Economic Problem of Masochism’, Freud writes of the masochist’s specific desires for debasement and infantilisation - desires which are in fact strongly reminiscent of Marcelle’s early sexual fantasies :

the manifest content [of masochistic fantasy] is of being gagged, bound, painfully beaten, whipped, in some way maltreated, forced into unconditional obedience, dirtied and debased. [...] The obvious interpretation, and one easily arrived at is that the

masochist wants to be treated like a small and helpless child, but, particularly, like a naughty child.⁹

As we will examine more fully below, it certainly seems that Marcelle's intense physical and emotional enjoyment of sex is firmly dependent upon this sense of humiliation and infantilisation, a pattern which she has apparently established for herself by combining her infantile influences with her nascent sensuality.

Describing Marcelle's first experience of sexual foreplay, Beauvoir places strong stress on her disturbing enjoyment of degradation and shame :

l'idée qu'un regard d'homme se repaissait de sa nudité la faisait ressaillir toute entière d'une honte dont la brûlure était plus douce que la plus douce des caresses [p. 28].

As suggested earlier, it is by embracing and intensifying this sense of shame that Marcelle feels that her guilt at her own vibrant sexuality is in some way expunged. Thus her saintly ideals of martyrdom serve not only to heighten her sexual desire, but also to defuse the repressive shroud of puritanism and sexual denial which is bound up with Catholic doctrine. As Freud states,

a sense of guilt [...] finds expression in the manifest content of masochistic phantasies; the subject assumes that he has committed some crime (the nature of which is left indefinite) which is to be expiated by all these painful and tormenting procedures.¹⁰

We could claim that Marcelle's enjoyment of her own sexuality is this unspecified, unconscious crime, and her projected ideals of martyred torment are her only way to experience intense libidinal impulses free from the

⁹ Sigmund Freud, 'The Economic Problem of Masochism' (1924), in On Metapsychology, (London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 411-426, p. 416. Far from describing sadism and masochism as perversions, Freud in fact claims that they are normal facets of human sexual relations. See Sigmund Freud, 'Anxiety and Instinctual Life', in his New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, (London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 113-144, p. 137.

religious guilt which accompanies her uncontrollable sensuality. Jessica Benjamin, discussing Pauline Réage's erotic classic L'Histoire d'Ô¹¹, draws a distinct parallel between the central character's masochistic sexual submission and the religious devotion of the martyred saints. The pain she feels annihilates the sin implied in her actions :

Ô's desire [...] increasingly assumes the symbolic and ritual character of a devotion [...]. Her lover is like a god, and her need for him can only be satisfied by obedience, [...] by becoming an instrument of his supreme will. In this way, Ô's story, with its themes of devotion [...], is suggestive of the surrender of the saints. The torture and outrage to which she submits is a kind of martyrdom, seeming "to her the very redemption of her sins."¹²

In the same way, Marcelle cloaks herself in the familiar ideological mantle of the saints, and offers herself as a sexual sacrifice to the experienced Denis. As it is for Réage's Ô, for Marcelle shame is a necessary forfeit for the enjoyment of the sins of sensuality.

The sexual act itself is described by Beauvoir in distinct terms of masochistic self-abnegation, humiliation and self-abasement¹³ :

le visage de Denis lui apparut, changé par le désir, avide, presque méconnaissable; il semblait capable de la battre, de la torturer; cette vue remplit Marcelle d'une jouissance si aiguë qu'elle se mit à gémir. "Je suis à sa merci", se dit-elle et elle sombra dans une extase où se mêlaient la honte, la crainte et la joie. Elle gémissait si fort que Denis dut lui fermer la bouche de sa main; elle baisa cette main; elle aurait voulu crier à Denis qu'elle était sa chose, son esclave, et des larmes coulèrent sur

¹⁰ 'The Economic Problem of Masochism', p. 417.

¹¹ Pauline Réage, L'Histoire d'Ô, Paris: Chez J.-J. Pauvert, 1969.

¹² Benjamin, p. 60.

¹³ It is interesting to note that the passages depicting Marcelle's wedding night (pp. 28-31) are among the most sexually explicit of all Beauvoir's writings. This, it could be speculated, may have been a significant contributing factor for the double rejection of the manuscript in 1937. Similarly, in Beauvoir's next novel, L'Invitée, the chapter detailing Françoise Miquel's discovery of her own body was also removed at the insistence of her publishers. See Les Écrits de Simone de Beauvoir, Francis and Gontier, Paris: Gallimard, 1979, p. 279.

ses joues. Soudain il pénétra en elle; sans qu'elle éprouvât exactement du plaisir, ce viol de sa chair la plus secrète la fit suffoquer de gratitude et d'humilité; elle acceptait avec une soumission passionnée chacun des coups que Denis lui portait, et comme pour rendre cette possession plus entière elle laissa sa conscience glisser dans la nuit [p. 29].

We see that the passage is littered with the vocabulary of violence, fear and submission : Denis is unrecognisable, his face transformed by a threatening leer; beatings, rape and torture loom; “la honte” and “la crainte” are the result of their lovemaking. His gestures are those of a rapist : he covers her mouth to stop her screaming, which only serves to intensify her sense of being “sa chose, son esclave”; she weeps, as would a victim, and not a consenting subject. When it finally occurs, the sexual act is sudden, unexpected, and does not bring her unmitigated pleasure; along with her gratitude she feels sensations of suffocation and submission : “ce viol [...] la fit suffoquer”.

It is therefore ironically clear from these passages that Marcelle is not seeking, as she confides to Desroches, an act of love “librement consenti et comme spiritualisé par une volonté de tendresse [p. 21]”, but “l’assouvissement brutal [*ibid*]” which she slates in the same sentence. Sexual satisfaction for Marcelle can only result from a sense of utter abnegation, in which she surrenders even her own consciousness to the brutal *Seigneur* of childhood fantasy. Ecstasy is mixed with shame, fear and enslavement; the act is depicted as a rape by which she is humiliated and yet for which she is disturbingly grateful. It is the humiliation which excites her, not the exchange between two subjects. There appears to be only one controlling and consenting partner in this unbalanced sexual act.

Denis is portrayed as the controlling master in their dichotomy, the existential ruling subject who thus determines Marcelle as the object. In The Bonds of Love Jessica Benjamin states explicitly that absolute omnipotence of the controlling partner is a vital factor in the masochist's enjoyment of her surrender, since it is only via the potential of the powerful subject to grant her freedom that the masochist can successfully define her self :

in the opposition between violator and violated, one person maintains his boundary and the other allows her boundary to be broken. One remains rational and in control, while the other loses her self. [...] Were both partners to give up control, the dissolution of self would be total. The violated partner would have no controlling partner to identify with; she could not 'safely' abandon herself. [...] Thus the desire to [...] receive pain, even as it seeks to break through boundaries, is also an effort to find them.¹⁴

When Marcelle's ideal has become reality, however, the sudden awareness of her irreparably broken sexual and emotional boundaries is a revelation she finds difficult to accept. Denis becomes the predatory existential Other, who successfully annihilates her personality without furnishing her with another comforting identity :

elle le haït violemment; elle pensa avec colère qu'elle avait gémi dans ses bras et qu'il avait deviné la profondeur de son trouble. Elle rougit de honte et cette fois sa confusion ne se doublait d'aucun plaisir. [...] elle savait que ces mains pressantes voulaient la faire sombrer dans un abîme d'abjection; cet homme était un ennemi [pp. 29-30].

Her situation is no longer a safely projected fantasy, but a terrifying reality, and she feels an intense wave of hatred for Denis which, however, also intensifies her passion. Love and loathing are therefore experienced on the same emotional plane. Freud, in 'Instincts and Their Vicissitudes', writes of

this ambivalence which results from the conflict of self-preservative instincts and the id as follows :

love [...] frequently manifests itself as ‘ambivalent’ [...]. The hate which is admixed with the love is [...] in part based on reactions of repudiation by the ego-instincts, which, in view of the frequent conflicts between the interests of the ego and those of love, can find grounds in real and contemporary motives. [...] If a love-relation with a given object is broken off, hate not infrequently emerges in its place, so that we get the impression of a transformation of love into hate. [...] the hate, which has its real motives [of self-protection], is here reinforced by a regression of the love to the sadistic preliminary stage; so that the hate acquires an erotic character and the continuity of a love-hate relation is ensured.¹⁵

As Denis drifts into a dissolute lifestyle, Marcelle loses her hold on him. Yet her love for him, already mixed with hatred, still retains this “erotic character”. Throughout the latter ambivalence of their marriage, Marcelle remains tied to Denis by the bonds of sexual idealisation with which, as we have seen, she has forged her own chains : “elle était bouleversée [d’un] jeune mâle impérieux, et elle se pliait avec un plaisir aigu à ses caprices [p. 36].” Sex therefore remains the dangerously brittle lynchpin of their relationship, and masochism is confirmed as the only emotional currency Marcelle has learned to value.

This sexual masochism gradually spirals out into a moral one as she seeks the familiar role of victim beyond the sensual sphere. As Denis proves himself to be more demanding and difficult, drifting into infidelity, draining their finances and refusing to work, Marcelle revels in the thought of future trials, clinging insistently to her misplaced absolute of saintly ideals and suffering :

¹⁴ Benjamin, p. 64.

“Tu ne laisseras jamais ma patience”, lui promettait-elle avec amour. Sans doute aurait-elle beaucoup à souffrir, mais elle accepterait ces souffrances avec joie [p. 36].

Elle avait toujours prévu qu’elle aurait à souffrir de la vie car ce n’est pas impunément qu’on préfère au plaisir l’héroïsme et la beauté [pp. 38-9].

She thus remains intensely dependent on Denis both for her own sense of identity and for a vindication of the stance she has taken. When she finally confronts him about his infidelity, he is under no illusions about her need of him :

“Je me suis dévouée à toi corps et âme”, dit-elle.

- Moi, je croyais que ça te faisait plutôt plaisir, dit Denis avec insolence. Maintenant, si tu n’y trouves plus ton compte, il y a une solution bien simple : nous n’avons qu’à nous séparer.

“Nous séparer!” dit Marcelle; le sang se retira de ses joues et elle se laissa tomber dans un fauteuil; elle avait envisagé cette affreuse destinée : vivre à côté de Denis sans amour, sans espoir; mais pas une minute elle n’avait pensé à le quitter [p. 41].

This exchange is particularly revealing, for it betrays Marcelle’s intense need at this point for moral as well as sexual suffering; significantly, she has already projected herself into “cette affreuse destinée,” accepting that it will bring her neither love nor hope. Denis, it is clear, has been more than happy to exploit this intense dependence, knowing that he can call his wife’s emotional bluff since he is safe in her need of him.

Finally, however, when Denis leaves her, Marcelle still refuses to relinquish these ideals. In a sense, she is ironically vindicated by his action, for her life so far has been the trying torment she has expected and wished for, and her thwarted desires are thus paradoxically successful in their failure :

¹⁵ Sigmund Freud, ‘Instincts and Their Vicissitudes’ (1915), in On Metapsychology, (London:

la souffrance seule pourrait-elle combler enfin son coeur. "Plus haut que le bonheur", murmura-t-elle. Cette grande chose amère qui était sa part sur la terre, elle saurait l'accueillir; elle saurait la transformer en beauté [p. 44].

Far from abandoning her absolute of suffering sadness, Marcelle loses herself in another ideal : that of abandoned solitude. Locked into her loss, instead of transcending her situation, she is only capable of embracing the hope of future suffering. We see therefore that Beauvoir, as she wished, has effectively portrayed in Marcelle a victim of her own ideals, who is "plus ou moins [consentante] [p. vii]." Anne Vignon, however, to whom we now turn, far from consenting to her emotional ordeals, is perhaps the most tragic victim of the religious absolute in Beauvoir's fiction.

In 'Anne' Beauvoir portrays the demands of the superego on the ego as unbearably repressive maternal demands. The excessive societal and religious ideals imposed on the heroine, who is torn between her desires and her duties, lead her into a fatal neurosis for which, it could be speculated, her mother is fundamentally responsible. Beauvoir's main stress in this particular narrative is on the mother/daughter dynamic, as in much of her fiction presenting it as extremely problematic. Madame Vignon appears to be the literary prototype for Freud's own theory that the mother represents mainly an unbendable authority whose sole duty is to restrict her daughter's will :

frequently the emotional relations between parents and their grown-up children fall behind the ideal set up by society, [...] hostility is ready to hand and would be expressed if it were not held back by admixtures of filial piety and affectionate impulses. [...] The daughter finds in her mother the authority which restricts her will and which is entrusted with the task of imposing

on her the renunciation of sexual freedom which society demands.¹⁶

The Catholic ideal into which Anne is moulded by her mother's ministrations revolves precisely around this particular social renunciation of sexual freedom; in the name of both filial and religious piety, she is eventually forced to renounce her love for Marcelle Drouffe's brother Pascal (a love which he does not appear to return with the same passion). Anne dies, delirious and tormented, suffering, it is hinted, from a broken heart, ironically becoming through her death the ultimate saintly icon her mother has always wished her to be.

Religious ideals pervade every page of 'Anne', mirroring the suffocating atmosphere in which the heroine is lovingly enveloped by Madame Vignon in the hope of saving her fragile soul. The spiritual absolute seems more real to Anne's mother than her flesh and blood : "il faut reprendre la direction de cette âme [p. 135]" she states, thus dehumanising her daughter by reducing her to an ideal. The very first passages consist of her mother's supplications to an omniscient God, during which she prays ostentatiously for her daughter, thrown into a frantic panic by Pascal's letters to Anne :

Je suis si inquiète, si incertaine : il n'y a pas de doute, c'est une écriture d'homme [...]; c'est la première fois qu'elle a un secret pour sa mère; ces enveloppes gonflées, que peut-il bien lui dire? [...] comment a-t-elle osé communier ce matin avec cette lettre dans son sac? [p. 133-136].

¹⁶ Sigmund Freud, 'The Archaic Features and Infantilism of Dreams' (1915-16), in Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, (London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 235-249, p. 242. It is worth pointing out here that Madame Drouffe's relationship with Marcelle belies this simplistic theory. However, most of the mother/daughter relationships in Beauvoir's fiction are intensely viciated.

Throughout these rambling prayers, however, Madame Vignon unwittingly deconstructs her own arguments and throws doubt onto her motivations, thus echoing another Beauvoirean mother - Murielle in 'Monologue' - who will be the subject of my final chapter. We see, for example, that although she claims never to have opened Anne's mail without her daughter's express knowledge, Madame Vignon is revealingly aware of the most effective methods of doing so :

Quand il s'agit de l'âme de sa fille, une mère a le droit de commettre une indiscretion, mais c'est difficile, même avec de la vapeur, de ne pas laisser de trace; jamais je n'ai décacheté les lettres de mes enfants, c'est abus d'autorité, c'est si maladroit [p. 134].

Her fury at her exclusion from this facet of her daughter's life stems from her wish to control every aspect of Anne's existence.

Wrapping Anne in the restrictive protection of religious dogma, Madame Vignon enmeshes maternal prohibitions with those of religion until Anne is entangled in unbreakable bonds of duty, cut off from all contact with potentially contaminating sources :

nous devons avant tout nous préserver nous-mêmes du péché et ne pas nous laisser contaminer par les brebis galeuses. Je souffre, crois-le bien, de te sentir souillée par des lectures malsaines, par la fréquentation de garçons sans scrupules, de femmes orgueilleuses et sans pudeur [p. 144].

The stress in this particular passage is on the horrors of illness and contagion; in her mother's eyes Anne is becoming "souillée" by her freedom, and should be locked into safe sterility. God's demands are mixed into Madame Vignon's invective in the form of elevated religious terminology, implicit parental expectations are added, and she forces her daughter to

swallow this bitter pill using overpowering emotional blackmail. The maternal denunciation is internalised by Anne in the form of a viciously overactive superego which gnaws away at her happiness and stability : “Maman,” she pleads, “vous savez bien que j’ai les mêmes croyances, la même morale que vous, [...] vous me faites souffrir [*ibid*].”

Her mother, however, remains unappeased, infuriated by any sign of filial freedom. Pascal’s correspondence with Anne is a threat to her mother’s control : “ Cette lettre l’a transformée”, pensa Madame Vignon avec amertume; jadis, c’était d’elle seule que dépendaient les joies et les peines de son enfant [p. 138].” Using the religious ideals which have been the ideological framework for Anne’s childhood, she manipulates her daughter into a paroxysm of guilt and fear :

- Je regrette de vous causer tant de souci, dit Anne faiblement.
[...] Le visage d’Anne s’était décomposé; ses lèvres mêmes étaient blanches; c’était atroce de torturer cet enfant, mais il fallait penser à son salut, non à son bonheur; Mme Vignon fit une brève invocation à Dieu pour le prier de durcir son coeur [p. 145].

Madame Vignon forces her daughter into the mould of a saint, the spiritual ideal to which Marcelle Drouffe aspires. According to her uncompromising religious code, emotional suffering on earth is necessary for spiritual salvation, and social adaptation, too, is part of the painful process.

In Quand prime le spirituel Madame Vignon forces Anne to assume a social mask which is vastly at odds with her natural exuberance and her love for Pascal, both of which she is made to hide. After she has forbidden her daughter to see him again, Madame Vignon instructs her daughter to return to their party and hence to the social game. White with shock and repressed

emotion, Anne naturally finds such a prospect far from attractive, and makes a desperate appeal to her mother, who once more ignores her daughter's real needs :

“Allons maintenant, dit-elle, nous ne sommes déjà restées que trop longtemps absentes.”

Anne eut un mouvement de recul. “Retrouver tous ces gens, dit-elle avec égarement.

–“Il faut faire ce que nous avons à faire sans tenir compte de nos humeurs, Anne”, dit Mme Vignon; elle haussa les épaules : J’ai été comme toi; mais on apprend à ne pas s’écouter.”

[...] Anne esquissa un sourire [...] en prenant place dans le cercle; elle savait se tenir [pp. 145-146].

It is not therefore only religious ideals which are internalised by Anne, but exhausting social rules, both of which gradually erode the foundations of her own personality. Storr writes of the effects of the imposition of such harsh cultural rules on children, who are gradually led to feel that their parents' love for them is based on the unstable sands of their own demure participation in society's game. As he states,

a child who is not [...] in any way ill-treated may yet grow up to feel that his parents' love for him is conditional. Such a child comes to believe that continuance of his parents' love for him, and hence his security, depends, not upon being his authentic self, but upon being what his parents require him to be. Parents who induce this kind of belief in their children are often deeply concerned about their welfare, but are apt to demand impossibly high standards of 'good' behaviour, making the child feel that its instinctive drives and spontaneous responses are wrong. In extreme instances, this leads to [...] the total repression of the true self. [The] child displays a false self when in the company of others.¹⁷

Anne therefore begins to lose all necessary sense of her own needs, instead permanently conforming to internalised external standards and rules imposed on her by her mother. Her placatory attitude is vital, since she is faced with

the terrifying loss of both maternal approval and divine protection, and thus the potential disappearance of the parental and religious structures which form her familiar framework of childhood protection.

Significantly from our current perspective, Freud himself draws specific parallels between the harsh introjection of parental and social ideals (the formation of the superego) and the process of religious devotion :

the child is brought up to a knowledge of his social duties by a system of loving rewards and punishments, he is taught that his security in life depends on his parents [...] loving him and on their being able to believe that he loves them. All these relations are afterwards introduced [...] unaltered into their religion. Their parents' prohibitions and demands persist within them as a moral conscience. [...] The amount of protection and happy satisfaction assigned to an individual depends on his fulfilment of the ethical demands; his love of God and his consciousness of being loved by God are the foundations of the security with which he is armed against the dangers of the external world and of his human environment.¹⁸

Madame Vignon and God are deeply connected in Anne's eyes : still a child in many ways, she views her mother as a warm but suffocating blanket of security, terrifyingly capable of divine retribution and omnipotent in her capabilities. Throughout 'Anne', Madame Vignon threatens her daughter with a temporary but devastating withdrawal of this vital childhood security. Furious at Anne's apparent defiance in writing to Pascal, Madame Vignon will have Anne sent away to England for a whole year, to a convent where she will be supervised relentlessly : "Ma décision est irrévocable. Je veux que tu rompes avec tout ce milieu [...]. Cela te fera grand bien de te retrouver seule en face de ta conscience [p. 145]."

¹⁷ Anthony Storr, *Solitude*, (London: HarperCollins, 1994), p. 95.

Caught therefore between this destabilising potential loss of her mother and her emotional security, and the vicious repression of her own sexual and emotional urges, Anne begins a slow but unrelenting downward spiral into madness and neurosis. She is manipulated even further by her childhood friend Chantal (who has her own personal axe to grind with the *haute bourgeoisie*'s pathetic social snobbery) and she is also unsure of Pascal's affection since he is himself emotionally repressed. Anne thus gradually loses all sense of security in either pole of reference available to her : Pascal and Chantal are pitted against Madame Vignon and God, and all vie for unstable control. Filled by their conflicting demands, Anne's ego is gradually hollowed out by a relentless superego.

Chantal, whose own agenda is extremely self-serving in its manipulation of Anne, also exacerbates this struggle against her own conscience :

Entre sa mère et son amie, Anne ne s'était pas encore décidée à choisir; incapable d'accepter les préjugés de son milieu et la vie que Mme Vignon lui destinait, elle n'avait pas encore la force de secouer toute contrainte [p. 155].

Through Anne Chantal aspires to a gloating spiritual victory over a social class she loathes for its past humiliations. She wishes to claim Anne as the territory for her own atheism in revenge for her past, and therefore uses her own ideals of a romantic absolute as ammunition against Madame Vignon's arguments. These conflicting ideals set off a violent battle of beliefs in her friend :

¹⁸ Sigmund Freud, 'The Question of a *Weltanschauung*' (1932), in New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, (London : Penguin, 1991), pp. 193-219, pp. 199-200.

- Ne me torturez pas, dit Anne d'une voix angoissée; elle cacha sa tête dans ses mains et resta silencieuse un long moment; le coup avait porté.
- Comment savoir? dit-elle avec agitation. Depuis trois ans je n'ai pas cessé de lutter; pour chacun des livres que j'ai lus, chaque sortie, chaque pensée, j'ai lutté. Je m'étais juré de ne jamais causer à maman aucune peine et je n'ai pas cessé de la tourmenter. Quand je lui cédaï, je me sentais méprisable; quand je résistais, je me haïssais. Et je n'ai jamais su quelle conduite Dieu attendait de moi. Je n'en peux plus [p. 160].

There is no way to win : “je n'ai pas cessé de lutter”, she pleads; also referring to the vitriolic battle which is internalised by her : “quand je lui cédaï, je me sentais méprisable, quand je résistais, je me haïssais.” Slowly, Anne loses her self-confidence as her superego is unable to direct its aggression at the influences bearing down on her, since they are all figures who claim to love her. Her moral impulses turn inwards instead and vent their frustration upon her own weakened ego, resulting inevitably in self-loathing and a neurotic illness triggered by this internalised conflict of interests.

Storr also discusses this repression of aggression, asserting that

the person who cannot stand up to other people, or assert himself when this is appropriate, represses his hostility. When he becomes depressed, his hostility toward others is displaced and becomes directed against himself in the form of self-reproach. [These] reproaches [...] are usually explicable as reproaches which he would like to have directed at someone close to him, but which he dare not express for fear of antagonizing a person upon whose love he depends.¹⁹

Unable, as we have seen, to express her anguish and anger to her mother since she is heavily dependent on her, Anne instead directs her frustration at herself. Throughout the latter half of her story, she hints at her sense of annihilation : having repressed her self for so long, she is no longer sure of

either her own worth or of the tenuous reality of the social mask she been forced to assume :

“pourquoi tiendrait [Pascal] à moi, Chantal? Je ne suis rien. J’ai voulu le charger de vivre pour moi.” Elle frissonna : “Je me suis jetée de tout mon poids sur lui, c’était si lâche au fond. [...] je ne peux pas n’empêcher de penser à présent que c’est seulement de la pitié qu’il a pour moi” [p. 167].

Je suis lâche, dit Anne, je ne vauds rien, Pascal; je ne mérite pas que vous teniez à moi; je ne peux pas m’empêcher de douter; il me semble que vous me voyez à travers un mirage et qu’il va brusquement se dissiper [p. 173].

“Ah! Pascal, [...] cela ne vous effraie pas l’idée que je serai toute votre part sur la terre? Quelquefois il me semble que vous devriez me haïr [p. 176].

Her self-esteem disintegrates into madness as Anne’s neurosis deepens. The warning signs at first appear only gradually : she becomes deathly pale and yet feverishly manic; she behaves disturbingly out of character, smoking and speaking so openly of herself that both Pascal and Chantal are perturbed by the sudden change in her :

Le visage d’Anne était blanc comme la craie, mais elle paraissait très gaie. “Vous savez, Pascal, je suis devenue raisonnable, dit-elle abruptement. Je suis honteuse de vous avoir fait avant-hier une telle figure de carême.” Elle sourit : “Pauvre Pascal, il était tout accablé en me quittant.” Elle s’assit sur le divan et Chantal lui offrit une cigarette. Anne qui fumait rarement accepta.

“Quand je pense que je possède tant et que j’ose me plaindre”, murmura-t-elle.

[...] Il était si rare qu’Anne parlât spontanément d’elle-même que Pascal se sentit décontenancé; Chantal aussi parut gênée. [...] Il y avait une sorte de ferveur dans sa voix [pp. 178-9].

¹⁹ Storr, p. 97. I will discuss Freud’s concepts as outlined in ‘Mourning and Melancholia’ more fully in my chapter on Beauvoir’s second published work, Le Sang des autres.

Her next textual appearance, however, shows Anne teetering on the brink of a far more apparent madness. Paying an impromptu visit to Marcelle, she is wild-eyed, delirious and paranoid, exhausted, rambling and confused :

“Excusez-moi, dit-elle, mais c’est tellement... tellement imprévu”; elle regarda sa main avec attention, hésita et la tendit à Marcelle : “Bonjour, madame”, dit-elle. Marcelle [...] était profondément choquée. [...] Le regard d’Anne la glaça.

“Naturellement, je ne suis pas digne de Pascal, dit-elle lentement, je ne veux pas essayer de vous éblouir. Mais je ne suis pas méchante; est-ce qu’il vous a dit que j’étais méchante? [...] Tout s’est mal arrangé [...]. Maman et Pascal ne se comprennent pas; ils sont si jeunes; ils ne savent pas ce qui est important;”, ajouta-t-elle avec indulgence.

Il fallait répondre; il y avait dans l’air une menace insupportable qui n’attendait que le silence pour se préciser.

“Ils finiront bien par comprendre, dit Marcelle au hasard.

- Bien sûr, dit-elle, c’est une attrape.” Un instant le sourire demeura figé sur ses lèvres, intolérable; on n’entendait pas un bruit dans la maison. “Elle est folle”, pensa Marcelle [pp. 181-3].

Significantly, Anne cannot remember even the social script which has been forced on her by her mother : her points of reference are blurring, and both her sense of self and her self-worth are fading away. She looks at her hand as if it does not belong to her; she is convinced of the low esteem in which she is held by others. Paranoid, she is highly suspicious (unsurprisingly) when Marcelle suggests that the conflicting interests may at some stage be resolved in her life. “C’est une attrape”, she states, hinting at the ring of fire in which she is caught, and in which the only way to peace is death. When Pascal delivers her to her mother, she is perhaps already dying : Anne’s intense headache may be the first sign of the brain tumour which kills her. Madame Vignon grants her the wished-for benediction : she does not have to leave for England; she can marry Pascal. But it is already too late, for Anne,

vacant-eyed and delirious, is dying from emotional exhaustion and lack of love.

Freud, in his examination of the conflict between the ego and the id, speaks of the fatal outcome of depressive melancholia as follows :

the ego gives itself up because it feels itself hated and persecuted by the super-ego, instead of loved. To the ego, therefore, living means the same as being loved [...]. The super-ego fulfils the [...] function of protecting and saving [the ego]. But, when the ego finds itself in an excessive real danger which it believes itself unable to overcome by its own strength, it is bound to draw the same conclusion. It sees itself deserted by all protecting forces and lets itself die.²⁰

Anne is subjected to such intense and unbearable pressure from her superego that her ego is ultimately overcome. Neither Madame Vignon, nor Chantal, nor Pascal offer her support, but instead tear her apart. Deserted by all her “protecting forces”, it could be speculated that Anne “lets [her]self die,” the victim of an unattainable spiritual absolute. Revealingly, the most poignant cry for help she makes is during her brief interview with Marcelle : “Ce n’est pas mal de vouloir être heureuse, ce n’est pas un péché? [p. 182]” she asks. It is this confusion which kills her.

In his specific discussion of religion, entitled ‘The Future of an Illusion’, Freud draws an analogy between excessive spiritual beliefs and illness, calling religion “the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity”.²¹ Bearing in mind the impossible external cultural and religious modes of behaviour with which she has had to comply and in which she has had no direct say, it is

²⁰ Sigmund Freud, ‘The Ego and The Id’ (1923), in On Metapsychology, (London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 339-407, p. 400.

²¹ Sigmund Freud, ‘The Future of an Illusion’ (1927), in Civilization, Society and Religion, (London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 181-241, p. 226.

unsurprising that Anne suffers from fatal feelings of inferiority and guilt. She has reluctantly conformed to her mother's ideal, but her deep unhappiness has annihilated her ego.

Finally, it should be stated that even in death Anne remains utterly voiceless.²² Her loss, as was her life, is appropriated by others and remoulded in the form of their own desires, with Madame Vignon, inevitably, using her daughter for religious glory. Ironically, her final prayers for her daughter's canonised soul are reminiscent of her claims in the first page of the text :

Je vous l'avais gardée si pure, mon Dieu, il y avait en elle l'étoffe d'une sainte, j'ai cru un temps que Vous nous feriez le grand honneur de Vous la réserver [p. 134].

Even in accepting her responsibility for her daughter's death when reading her private diary and discovering her torment, she feels vindicated for her actions. In Madame Vignon's eyes the revelations serve as proof of the internal emotional struggles which would consume only a saint, for in being so riddled with conflict Anne has been filled by God : "à travers ses cris d'angoisse, ses révoltes, l'amour de Dieu ne cessait de la dévorer [p. 188]." Intending to publish a book dedicated to her daughter's memory, she successfully manipulates Anne's image by selecting only the most pious

²² Although Anne without doubt forms the heart of her own story, it is significant that although the three influences which tear her apart are permitted to tell their own tales of self-justification, Anne herself is granted no chance to defend herself by Beauvoir. In her penetrating analysis of Beauvoir's narrative strategies, Elizabeth Fallaize points out that Anne's lack of a narrative voice in the text

emphasises the the pressures under which she suffers and tilts the balance of responsibility away from her. There is no evidence in fact that she shares the bad faith of the heroines of the previous stories, despite the fact that her fate and her strong religious beliefs place her under the banner of spiritualism.

See Elizabeth Fallaize, pp. 151-152.

passages from her diary. By proving to the world that her daughter has been so devout, Madame Vignon will manage to justify her own existence, and see fulfilled her wishes for reflected glory :

Mme Vignon souligna une page magnifique où Anne mettait sa vie et son salut entre les mains de Dieu. Les mots : abandon, soumission, acceptation revenaient sans cesse dans les derniers temps. Même la mort, Anne l'avait regardée en face et acceptée; [...] elle avait écrit : "Si l'on me disait que je dois mourir ce soir, je me soumettrais sans murmure et même avec joie." Mme Vignon souligna ces mots, il faudrait les mettre juste en dessous de la photographie. [...] la grâce l'avait emportée parfois jusqu'à d'inaccessibles sommets et c'était là les moments de sa vie qu'il fallait offrir en exemple au monde [p. 188].

The final words of the passage are sweepingly epic in their religious terminology when, alone with Anne's diaries, Madame Vignon basks in the pain she has caused her daughter. With her newly discovered guilt she has been provided with enough emotional ammunition for decades of sublime repentance, and prostrate at her own private altar, she worships Anne as the ultimate symbol of her own misguided spiritualism :

"Anne, ma petite sainte, murmura Mme Vignon, prie pour moi, pauvre pécheresse. Aide-moi à accepter sans murmure d'avoir été l'instrument de ta souffrance, de ton salut." Elle se laissa glisser à genoux le front contre la table; longuement elle demeura prosternée aux pieds de sa fille rayonnante de gloire [*ibid*].

The final voice in the text, however, belongs to Chantal - the figure who may well be Beauvoir's spokeswoman in this particular narrative. Bitter at the thought of Madame Vignon's gloating glorification of her daughter's corpse, she realises she has lost the battle for Anne's soul :

cette femme vieillie souffrait assurément mais il y avait quelque chose de triomphant dans sa souffrance; le malheur qui l'atteignait n'était pas une malédiction divine, c'était une signe d'élection; elle avait gagné la partie [pp. 190-191].

But Madame Vignon is not without her accomplices. For Pascal, too, guilty of depriving Anne of the reassurance she needed to bolster her collapsing ego, is accused by Chantal of her friend's murder :

“Deux complices, se dit Chantal avec colère, ils l'ont tuée tous deux.” Elle ne croyait pas à cette histoire de tumeur; ils l'avaient inventée pour tranquilliser leur conscience. Anne était morte d'avoir été mal aimée [p. 191].

In 'Marcelle', the heroine muses that “La vie s'entend assez bien à condamner les êtres à la solitude, [et] nous ne devons pas nous faire ses complices [pp. 23-4].” Although Marcelle does become a willing accomplice in her own suffering, Anne is very much the innocent victim of an emotional murder. In Quand prime le spirituel Beauvoir portrays the intense despair of solitude, hinting throughout the text at the missed opportunities for happiness. In 'Anne', she shockingly and successfully portrays the fatal consequences of its gratuitous suppression in an implicit textual engagement with psychoanalytic subject matter.

In Simone de Beauvoir's next work, which was to be her first published novel, she reworks these themes, which betray her own fears and her deep personal preoccupations. Throughout her fiction, in a textual repetition compulsion, Beauvoir's obsessive fictional themes are the horrors of loneliness, the fragility of identity, the dangerous desire for sexual and psychological symbiosis, the pull of idealised love, and the resulting shadows of breakdown and madness. Although Quand prime le spirituel was not published for over forty years, it therefore served as the foundation for her later fictional thematic development. As Beauvoir herself states in her

preface to the 1979 Gallimard edition, “c’est, somme toute, [...] un roman d’apprentissage où s’ébauchent beaucoup des thèmes que j’ai repris par la suite. [p. viii].” As I hope to demonstrate in the following chapters of this study, Simone de Beauvoir returns to these themes compulsively in an eternal literary return of her own repressed. Having argued that psychoanalytic preoccupations are already implicit in Beauvoir’s earliest fictional text, let us now turn to further exploration of these themes in her next work, L’Invitée.

CHAPTER THREE

L'INVITEE

Before examining the triangular textual patternings of Beauvoir's unconscious in her thematic treatment of the Oedipal trio, the breakdown of constructed identity and the dangers of idealised love in L'Invitée, it is perhaps useful to situate the current study in the scheme of existing critical readings of Beauvoir's first novel. Early criticisms viewed her texts mainly from a philosophical optic - no doubt largely in response to the distinct philosophical gloss Beauvoir herself was keen to place on her first fictional works, particularly L'Invitée.¹ However, later critics such as Jane Heath, Toril Moi and Elizabeth Fallaize have crossed these critical parameters to read Beauvoir's earliest fictional work in ways which are directly connected with the present contribution, since they draw specifically on psychoanalytic literary theory.

In her work Simone de Beauvoir Jane Heath refers to Beauvoir's "staging of the Oedipal drama", describing the final murder of Xavière as "a fatal phallic backlash."² Toril Moi explicitly defines the novel as a "psychoanalytic family romance" and her chapter 'L'Invitée : An Existentialist Melodrama' reads the novel from a specifically psychoanalytic perspective.³ And Elizabeth Fallaize, using psychoanalytical terms, refers to an "emotional crisis", a "highly charged psycho-sexual conflict", "Françoise's struggle toward

¹ Hazel Barnes, in The Literature of Possibility (London: Tavistock, 1961, pp. 121-36), offers one of the earliest and most persuasive philosophical interpretations of the novel, reading it in terms of Sartre's ontology, as theorised in L'Être et le Néant (Paris: Gallimard, 1943). And Merleau-Ponty, in Sens et Non-Sens (Paris: Nagel, 1966, p. 63), defends his philosophical reading of L'Invitée over a psychological one. Beauvoir was probably delighted by their critical approaches - see Elizabeth Fallaize's article 'Reception problems for women writers: the case of Simone de Beauvoir' in Women and Representation, (Nottingham: Department of French, University of Nottingham, 1995, pp. 43-56, p. 52).

² Jane Heath, Simone de Beauvoir, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989, p. 27 and p. 43.

³ Toril Moi, Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman, p. 106.

self-assertion", the "pseudo-oedipal triangle", and Xavière's "unease about sexuality."⁴ She goes on to defend a psychological interpretation of the emotional forces at work in L'Invitée against a textual approach which analyses purely its philosophical message :

One need not agree with Merleau-Ponty that psychological phenomena are a kind of 'superficial' manifestation of ontological anxieties [...]; in fact it is rather the reverse process (psychological phenomena giving rise to a rationalised philosophical discourse) that can be argued to be at work in the text.⁵

And has the text also been viewed from a Lacanian angle? Heath describes her perspective as deriving specifically

from the account of the construction of the subject (as irremediably split) and of sexual identity (as precarious) proposed by Lacanian psychoanalysis.⁶

Moi writes that in L'Invitée "at stake is the power to define the world, to decide what is to count as truth, to become the unchallenged possessor of true knowledge."⁷ Françoise and Xavière vie for each other's meaning in an attempt to subjugate/integrate it into their own defining systems. L'Invitée evidently not only offers rich emotional depths for the Freudian analyst to plumb, but also appears to lend itself well to the Lacanian linguistic approach.

From my current perspective, we could ask as readers whether the themes we have explored so far are also evident in L'Invitée. Do Simone de Beauvoir's unconscious preoccupations also filter through the textual tricks of her first published work? Since the text is an unalloyed, direct representation of her own personal experience, with few buffering agents between the emotional intensity of the work and the reader, it is unsurprising that the same

⁴ Elizabeth Fallaize, The Novels of Simone de Beauvoir, London: Routledge, 1988, pp. 26, 27, 30, 31.

⁵ *ibid*, p. 41.

⁶ Jane Heath, Simone de Beauvoir, p. 21.

⁷ Toril Moi, Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman, p. 98.

themes surface once more. Once more, we see the tangle of love and identity leading to breakdown, preoccupations which again hint at Beauvoir's implicit engagement with psychoanalytic themes; unlike Quand prime le spirituel, however, the spiked shadow of the Oedipal triangle is much more firmly in evidence and is the central textual motif of the work.

This chapter will involve a Freudian, followed by a Lacanian, rereading of L'Invitée. I will analyse the novel in Oedipal terms, pointing to the intensity of the sexual urges, to Xavière's adolescent denial of these, and to Françoise's near nervous breakdown - a violent physical manifestation of the return of the repressed hostile feelings she experiences. I will attempt to apply Freud's theories of the psyche to Beauvoir's "psychoanalytic family romance", its complex web of relationships serving as an appropriate foil for Françoise's intense self-observation, and her awareness of a hostile, predatory Other which threatens her own identity and position. Furthermore, her growing realisation that Pierre's ego also represents an Other and has not been internalised by her own ego is a cause of her *crise d'identité*. Jerome Neu writes of "the complex intertwinings of theory and observation (of self and other [...]), and their relation to evidence and confirmation"⁸ which emerge over and over in Freud's writings. As I hope to show, Françoise's own observations of these Others who jeopardise her ontological stability lead to a paralysing negation, instead of the confirmation Neu mentions above, of her identity. Beauvoir portrays an intensely viciated female conflict, based on sexual competition and the survival instinct. The struggle of the erotic and thanatal instincts are the dynamics of the text, and Thanatos triumphs in the form of the final murder, a murder motivated by a battle for erotic power.

Later, I will discuss the triangular structure of the text, paralleling it with the Lacanian tripartite of the Real/Symbolic/Imaginary, instead of with the

⁸ Jerome Neu's introduction to The Cambridge Companion to Freud, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 5.

Freudian Oedipal triangle, thus indicating in different terms how a subject's unconscious becomes the prey of another's. There is considerable evidence to support Moi's view, shared by Heath, that Françoise is locked in the Lacanian Imaginary, viewing her existence as inseparable from that of Pierre. Like Lacan's pre-Symbolic child, transfixed by the illusory shimmer of the Imaginary mirror, Françoise is

not a unified subject confronting and desiring a stable object, but a complex, shifting field of force in which the subject [...] is caught up and dispersed, in which it has as yet no centre of identity and in which the boundaries between itself and the external world are indeterminate.⁹

Moi writes that

psychoanalytically inclined readers may well want to argue that Françoise's relationship with Pierre exemplifies an imaginary fantasy of unity with the Other, and that the novel as a whole attempts to chronicle her difficult separation from this imaginary matrix and her painful entry into the symbolic order. Such a reading would certainly make sense of Françoise's attacks of extreme anxiety and depression. Nor can there be any doubt that the final murder represents Françoise's supreme effort to become a separate individual in relation to Pierre.¹⁰

In this chapter I wish to develop Moi's latter theory - namely that the murder represents her separation from Pierre and her transition from the Imaginary to the Symbolic. We could in fact reinterpret Françoise's "entry into the symbolic order" as doubly important to her since Pierre, the father figure in the text who is also a smooth manipulator of language, represents for her the power of the word. She finally wrests it from Xavière, pinning down the existential and Lacanian signifier of her own identity and at the same time integrating herself into Pierre's own Symbolic world.

Before our Lacanian textual reading however, let us begin with an exploration of L'Invitée in Freudian terms. Both existentially and

⁹ Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory, p. 154.

¹⁰ Toril Moi, Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman, p. 108.

psychoanalytically, Françoise and Xavière's struggle could be seen as the ego's attempt to delineate the boundaries between the self and the Other. In her article 'Freud on Women', Nancy Chodorow could in fact be describing Beauvoir's protagonists in the following paragraph :

Freud describes woman as subject of her own psyche, that is, as living experiencer of self and conscious and unconscious mental processes, as subject to herself. Woman as subject expands into woman as subject-object, that is, *object to her own subjectivity as she internally relates to and identifies with or against another internally experienced woman*.¹¹

Xavière in many ways experiences everything internally; Françoise's frequent attempts to understand her motivations, and hence "relate to and [identify] with or against [her]" are frustratingly thwarted by the girl's narcissistic retreat into her self. She has a dense psychological wall to break down, tantalising Françoise, for whom total knowledge represents a kind of possession - intangible and also illusory, since even self-knowledge is viewed by Freud as an unattainable goal.¹²

Sexual instincts, which according to Freud forever shift menacingly beneath the smooth surface of our socially conditioned behaviour, are the main motive force behind the conflict. Xavière is at first presented as an introverted child :

¹¹ Nancy J. Chodorow, 'Freud on Women', in The Cambridge Companion to Freud, p. 224.

¹² In a letter to Fliess of November 14, 1897 (Pre-Psychoanalytic Publications and Unpublished Drafts, S.E. I, p. 271), Freud wrote :

My self-analysis is still interrupted and I have realised the reason. I can only analyse myself with the help of knowledge obtained objectively (like an outsider). Genuine self-analysis is impossible; otherwise there would be no illness.

Also, Freud's former disciple Carl Jung states in The Undiscovered Self (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1958) :

the so-called normal person possesses only a limited degree of self-knowledge.

Most people confuse "self-knowledge" with knowledge of their conscious ego personalities. Anyone who has an ego-consciousness at all takes it for granted that he knows himself. But the ego knows only its own contents, not the unconscious and its contents. People measure their self-knowledge by what the average person in their social environment knows of himself, but not by the real psychic facts which are for the most part hidden from them [pp. 6-7].

Françoise regarda avec une soudaine tendresse le visage anxieux; il y avait des moments où la réserve de Xavière fondait; ce n'était plus qu'une petite fille aimante et désarmée dont on aurait voulu couvrir de baisers les joues nacrées.¹³

However, she swiftly metamorphoses into a more troubling, sexual Jezebel :

Elle [Françoise] la regarda avec un peu de surprise; la robe bleue moulait un corps mince et épanoui et c'était un fin visage de jeune fille qu'encadraient les cheveux bien lissés; cette Xavière féminine et déliée, elle ne l'avait jamais revue depuis leur première rencontre [p. 65].

Xavière therefore gradually becomes a predatory, sexual creature - Françoise has obviously underestimated her as a meek country girl, sexually unsophisticated and hence sexually unaware. Instead, there is a definite, threatening erotic charge about her :

Elle sourit et le malaise de François se précisa; quand elle était seule avec Françoise, Xavière laissa le dégoût, le plaisir, la tendresse, envahir malgré elle un visage sans défense, un visage d'enfant; à présent, elle se sentait une femme en face d'un homme et sur ses traits se peignait exactement la nuance de confiance ou de réserve qu'elle avait décidé d'exprimer [pp. 69-70].

Thus Françoise realises, with sudden vulnerable panic, that in her previously unthreatened world "Xavière s'était mise à compter soudain, sans qu'on sût trop pourquoi [p. 72]." In Freudian terms, we can diagnose her growing unease as an instinctive wish to claim Pierre as her own sexual territory, a territory now exposed to a sexual usurper she has - significantly - previously viewed as her "petite fille aimante et désarmée."

In simplified (Moi might say reductive) Freudian Oedipal terms, Xavière thus represents the erotic threat of the daughter, pitted against the mother-figure of Françoise, whose relationship with Pierre (representing the father) has apparently until now been relatively stable and secure. While Moi's

¹³ Simone de Beauvoir, L'Invitée, Paris: Gallimard, 1943, p. 48. All quotations are from this edition.

different interpretation - that Xavière in many ways represents the oppression of the mother rather than the threat of the daughter¹⁴ - is an interesting and complex reading, it remains important to note that the adolescent Xavière is in fact a pure textual incarnation of the *jeune fille* as later theorised by Beauvoir in Le Deuxième Sexe, simultaneously confused, excited and repulsed by her own sexuality.¹⁵ While the maternal echoes depicted by *Moi* may underlie L'Invitée, I believe that in analysing these we are analysing its author¹⁶, and not her text. When reading the text through the Freudian lens, as we are doing here, Xavière does appear to represent the Beauvoirean view of the adolescent, and her relationship with Françoise is very similar to the intense and ambivalent love the daughter has for the mother, as outlined by Freud. In his view, every mother/daughter relationship is complex and ambiguous : "for the daughter", writes Chodorow, "mother is an ambivalently loved and hated object in the daughter's psyche."¹⁷

In defence of my application of this traditional version of the Oedipus complex to L'Invitée it is important to remember that Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex as experienced by the daughter is in fact far less reductive than the simple father/mother/son triangle, a relationship to which I will turn in

¹⁴ *Moi*'s view is that Xavière represents the domineering, voracious and overbearing mother-figure despised by Beauvoir - the murder is the murder of the mother, not the daughter. "Looking carefully at Françoise's metaphors [concerning Xavière]", she writes :

it is hard to escape the conclusion that the timeless, suffocating monster that leaves no space in the world for Françoise is the very image of the omnipotent and malevolent archaic mother threatening to devour her daughter. Under the Oedipal scenario, then, lurks another fantasmatic configuration in which Françoise is the daughter killing the cruel, invasive and rivalrous mother [p. 118].

¹⁵ L'Invitée was published in 1943; in 1946 Beauvoir began work on Le Deuxième Sexe. The earlier text resembles Beauvoir's later work since it draws on the author's own experience, fictionalised in her first novel; Le Deuxième Sexe owes much of its persuasive conviction to the fact that its author draws on her own case, projecting herself into her text. Indeed, it could be speculated that Beauvoir plays out her own Oedipal struggle with her mother in the pages of L'Invitée as well as the implosive shifting triangles of the trio she formed with Sartre and Olga. Beauvoir is thus not only Françoise in this work, but may be Xavière too.

¹⁶ As sketched in my introductory chapter, Beauvoir's relationship with her own mother was complex and ambiguous. Madame de Beauvoir, like her daughter's first fictional heroine, was of course also named Françoise. *Moi* has analysed Beauvoir's reasons for using her mother's name (see pp. 119-120 in Simone de Beauvoir : The Making of an Intellectual Woman).

¹⁷ Nancy J. Chodorow, 'Freud on Women', p. 234.

the next chapter. It was Carl Gustav Jung who first introduced the term 'Electra complex' - Freud himself asserted that the term was in fact redundant, writing that "[i]t is only in the male child that we find the fateful combination of love for the one parent and simultaneous hatred of the other as a rival."¹⁸ As Laplanche and Pontalis clarify,

Freud's rejection of [the Electra complex], which assumes an analogy between the girl's and the boy's positions *vis-à-vis* their parents, is justified by his findings on the differing effects of the castration complex in the two sexes, on *the importance for the girl of the preoedipal attachment to the mother*, and on the predominance of the phallus in both sexes.¹⁹

With regard to this, Chodorow also states that

there is a unique complexity of identificatory and object-relational experiences and tasks for the daughter as she sorts out [her] relation to her mother [...] Freud's late theory [...] argues that the girl remains in the negative oedipal position - attached to her mother - for a long time. She may never give up this attachment completely, and she certainly does not dissolve her Oedipus complex as absolutely as does the boy.²⁰

Similarly, Françoise and Xavière initially enjoy an intense and tender relationship. Although we suspect that Françoise also enjoys a sense of power over the comparatively naïve Xavière, the girl is initially obsessively fond of the woman who represents for her all she would like to become :

Xavière la contempla un instant avec dévotion.

- Quand je me vois et que je vous regarde! dit-elle avec un accent passionné, j'ai honte!
- C'est absurde, dit Françoise.
- Vous êtes sans tâche, dit Xavière d'une voix fervente [p. 136].

However, the girl's initial fierce possessiveness towards her surrogate mother and her emotional and financial dependence on Françoise's generosity culminate only in a total disintegration of their relationship, echoing

¹⁸ 'Female Sexuality', S.E. XXI, p. 229.

¹⁹ Laplanche and Pontalis, The Language of Psychoanalysis, p. 152, my emphasis.

²⁰ Nancy J. Chodorow, 'Freud on Women', p. 233.

the later conflict of the adolescent girl and the protective mother who still wishes unconsciously to protect her own position as a sexually superior being. As Chodorow continues :

even as he describes this long period of attachment, however, Freud also describes how the girl strongly and forcefully turns on her mother - this mother who denied her love, milk and the phallus. The mother has, in her daughter's view during this period in her development, withheld what she could choose to give. [...] what should be the ego-ideal, the maternal object-become-subject that is taken in as "normal femininity," is a castrated, denying subjectivity.²¹

The denied phallus is Pierre; the only barrier between Xavière and this object of frustrated desire is, after all, Françoise herself. She is a "castrated, denying subjectivity" who is internalised to some degree by the younger girl as she also represents a role model. Xavière's 'pre-Oedipal' stage of intense love for Françoise is followed by the gradual emotional erosion of this relationship, and its inevitable collapse into pure hatred. Before examining this stage, however, we should first turn our attention briefly to the father figure of Pierre Labrousse. Interestingly, as with many of the sexual relationships in her fiction, Beauvoir paints the couple of Pierre and Françoise as based on a power dynamic of subject and object.

There is a noticeable shift of emphasis in chapter three, as not only is woman pitted against woman - two points of the Oedipal triangle vie for the third - but in addition, this struggle calls Françoise's own relationship with Pierre into question and is the first step onto the slope of insecurity which leads her to a massive *crise d'identité*. As with so many of Beauvoir's female protagonists, Françoise has based her partnership with Pierre on an illusory (Imaginary) union of minds, but now realises that they no longer view things as one: "ils ne la [Xavière] voyaient pas avec les mêmes yeux; si léger qu'il fût, ce désaccord était sensible à Françoise [p. 77]." There thus occurs a

²¹ Nancy J. Chodorow, 'Freud on Women', p. 234.

gradual fissuring of the ego Françoise has constructed : as Beauvoir writes, "[e]lle avait l'impression pénible d'être divisée *contre elle-même* [p. 133, my emphasis]." We could analyse Françoise's peculiar procedure of ego construction from a Freudian viewpoint here by briefly referring to Jennifer Church's article 'Morality and the Internalized Other', in which she writes as follows :

With the ability to recognize other people as psychological wholes [...] comes the possibility of internalizing not just individual properties of another but whole personalities. [...] Just which people I internalize will depend on which people are most regularly the objects of intense but unsatisfied desire - those whom I most regularly and intensely *desire* to possess or control yet am usually *unable* to possess or control.²²

Although Pierre and Françoise base their relationship on apparently admirable principles of truth and unity, it becomes clear that these are in fact principles which do not bring Françoise any stability. Theory and practice are incompatible since she is of course "*unable* to [fully] possess or control" either Pierre's personality, his desires, or her own sense of betrayal and jealousy. Furthermore, she is utterly unable to internalise Pierre's whole personality, and is horrified at realising that there exists a stark delineation between his ego and her own :

Françoise fut décontenancée; est-ce qu'il pouvait la juger du dehors, comme une étrangère, elle que n'arrivait pas à prendre le moindre recul devant lui? C'était déloyal [p. 125].

Il allait son chemin sans même se retourner vers elle [...] Des pieds à la tête elle se sentait changée en bloc de plomb; la séparation lui était cruelle, mais rien ne saurait la faire glisser sur cette pente de mirage au bout de laquelle s'ouvrait elle ne savait quel abîme [p. 131].

The true extent of her quasi-parasitic dependence on Pierre can be seen in the following passage :

²² *ibid*, p. 213.

Pour devenir totalement responsable d'elle-même, il lui aurait suffi de le vouloir; mais elle ne le voulait pas réellement. [...] tout ce qu'elle pensait c'était avec [Pierre] 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. Ce n'était pas gênant, d'ailleurs, elle n'aurait jamais besoin de recours à soi contre Pierre [pp. 138-139].

The 'splitting' of the illusory being who is Pierre/Françoise occurs via their respective appropriation/rejection of Xavière, and leads to Françoise's depressive illness which appears to be a nervous breakdown. We will now discuss this central textual and psychological development, representing as it does the turning-point for the novel since the book is in two parts, Françoise's illness being effectively the division between the two.

Chapter six, in which Françoise first begins to feel the physical symptoms of a massive psychological pain, is a chapter of depression and stagnation. Significantly, the feeling first begins to seep into her when she visits her parents :

Quand Françoise se retrouvait dans cet appartement, il lui semblait que toutes ces années ne l'avaient menée nulle part: le temps s'étalait autour d'elle en une mare stagnante et douceâtre. Vivre, c'était vieillir, rien de plus [p. 143].

The stage is therefore set for the infantile memory which leads her to her horrific sense of exile and alienation, thus catalysing her illness. For, although the first two chapters detailing Françoise's early life were removed by Beauvoir at the insistence of her publishers, there are in chapter six two paragraphs which are worthy of remark when viewing the text through the optic of Freudian psychoanalysis - a childhood memory floats into Françoise's consciousness in a haze of repressed terror.²³ The passage quoted is of some length, but it is a crucial one :

²³ This infantile episode is placed by Beauvoir at a particularly important point in the original draft of her novel : it in fact occurs in the first paragraph of the first chapter, which was later edited out of the published version. It would seem, therefore, that the episode has enormous significance for Françoise, since Beauvoir retained it in her later version of the text. See Les Écrits de Simone de Beauvoir, Paris: Gallimard, 1979, pp. 275-6.

Une angoisse la traversa: ce n'était pas une souffrance précise, il fallait remonter très loin pour retrouver un pareil malaise. Un souvenir lui revint [...] une petite fille collée contre le mur retenait sa respiration. [...] ça faisait peur; les meubles avaient leur air de tous les jours, mais en même temps ils étaient tout changés: tout épais, tout lourds, tout secrets; sous la bibliothèque et sous la console de marbre *stagnait une ombre épaisse*. On n'avait pas envie de se sauver mais on se sentait le coeur serré.

Le vieux veston était suspendu au dossier d'une chaise [...] Il était vieux et fatigué mais il ne pouvait pas se plaindre comme Françoise se plaignait quand elle s'était fait mal, il ne pouvait pas se dire "je suis un vieux veston fatigué". C'était étrange; Françoise essaya d'imaginer comment ça lui ferait si elle ne pouvait pas se dire "je suis Françoise, j'ai six ans, je suis dans la maison de grand-mère", si elle ne pouvait absolument rien se dire; elle ferma les yeux. *C'est comme si on n'existait pas; et pourtant d'autres gens viendraient là, ils me verraient, ils parleraient de moi.* [...]

[...] c'était sans rapport, pourquoi repensait-elle à tout ça? Elle regarda le ciel brouillé. *Ce qu'il y avait en ce moment, c'est que le monde présent était hors de portée; elle n'était pas seulement exilée de l'univers entier.* Les gens assis à la terrasse, les gens qui passaient dans la rue, ils ne pesaient pas sur le sol, c'étaient des ombres; les maisons n'étaient qu'un décor sans relief, sans profondeur. Et Gerbert qui s'avavançait en souriant n'était lui aussi qu'une ombre légère et charmante [pp. 145-147, my emphasis].

The six-year-old Françoise becomes aware of the annihilating potential of the Other through the ghostly shadow of an abandoned jacket. Its emptiness throws into relief its subjugation to the external gaze : it is only through others that it is granted meaning. The tiny child is terrified by this ontological void in which she senses the potential loss of her own identity.

Françoise answers her own question "pourquoi repensait-elle à tout ça?" for in the next sentence she specifically mentions this feeling of exile and negation, and the loss of self. Her memory of the old, forgotten jacket and its presence which is virtually an absence is correlative with her present sense of identity, an identity which she now feels to have been founded on the shifting sands of an ephemeral relationship. There are signs of deep-rooted insecurity - thinking of the two other members of the trio together elsewhere,

she has the impression that they belong to a closed universe which excludes her. At the very beginning of L'Invitée, wandering through the corridors of the theatre, Françoise feels she grants her surroundings the possibility of existence. Now, as her confidence in Pierre's constancy has deteriorated, so does her own sense of existence itself :

D'ordinaire, le centre de Paris, c'était juste l'endroit où elle se trouvait. Aujourd'hui, tout était changé. Le centre de Paris, c'était ce café où Pierre et Xavière étaient attablés et Françoise errait dans de vagues banlieues [p. 145].

She feels "comme si on n'existait pas" because Xavière, an Other who like the sinister "ombre épaisse" has been crouching in the wings, has slid insidiously into Pierre's affections. Françoise feels herself to be truly a shadow of her former self.

This passage is doubly important when we realise that the childhood threat of the "ombre épaisse" has in fact been haunting Françoise since its revelation; at the end of the novel she views Xavière specifically in terms of the stuff of childhood nightmare :

Cette présence ennemie qui s'était révélée tout à l'heure dans un sourire de folle devenait de plus en plus proche, il n'y avait plus moyen d'éviter le dévoilement terrifiant; jour après jour, minute après minute, Françoise avait fui le danger, mais c'en était fait, elle l'avait enfin rencontré *cet infranchissable obstacle qu'elle avait pressenti sous des formes incertaines depuis sa plus petite enfance* : à travers sa haine et sa jalousie, le scandale éclatait, aussi monstrueux, aussi définitif que la mort; en face de Françoise, et cependant sans elle, quelque chose existait comme une condamnation sans recours : libre, absolue, irréductible, une conscience étrangère se dressait. C'était comme la mort, une totale négation, une éternelle absence, et cependant par une contradiction bouleversante, ce gouffre de néant pouvait se rendre présent à soi-même et se faire exister pour soi avec plénitude; l'univers tout entier s'engloutissait en lui, et Françoise, à jamais dépossédée du monde, se dissolvait elle-même dans ce vide dont aucun mot, aucune image ne pouvait cerner le contour infini [p. 364].

Françoise seems to be in the grip of a distinct neurosis. A ghost from her childhood, a shifting, shadowy evil force represents for her a horrific conflict. Laplanche and Pontalis define neurosis in psychoanalytical terms as "a psychogenic affection in which the symptoms are the symbolic expression of a psychical conflict whose origins lie in the subject's childhood history."²⁴ If my interpretation of Françoise as neurotic seems an extreme one, then perhaps it should be pointed out that near the end of the novel, precipitating her tears, Françoise specifically again recalls the episode of the old jacket and its lack of identity, once more connecting it with a sense of exile and exclusion :

Des images traversèrent Françoise: *un vieux veston*, une clairière abandonnée, un coin du Pôle Nord où Pierre et Xavière vivaient loin d'elle un mystérieux tête-à-tête. *Déjà il lui était arrivé de sentir comme ce soir son être dissoudre au profit d'êtres inaccessibles*, mais jamais elle n'avait réalisé avec une lucidité si parfaite son propre anéantissement. [p. 365, my emphasis]

All her life Françoise has lived under the shadow of the exterminating potential of the Other. Now, in Xavière, this nightmare is real.

Negation, therefore, is at the heart of *L'Invitée*.²⁵ At the structural centre of the book, following Xavière's and Pierre's increasing *rapprochement*, Françoise finally, painfully, recognises the disjuncture between the tenets and practice of the romantic motto "On ne fait qu'un" which she has elaborated with Pierre as their catchphrase of commitment²⁶ : "le coeur un peu serré,

²⁴ Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, p. 266.

²⁵ I do not use the term 'negation' here purely in the psychoanalytic sense, which involves something other than my sense of an absence, an erasure, felt by Françoise and which leads her to question her identity. The Freudian term is quite distinct from this - as Laplanche and Pontalis define it, it involves a "procedure whereby the subject, while formulating one of his wishes, thoughts or feelings which has been repressed hitherto, contrives, by disowning it, to continue to defend himself against it [p. 261]."

²⁶ Significantly, Freud himself writes of the man in love that

At the height of being in love the boundary between ego and object threatens to melt away. Against all the evidence of his senses, a man who is in love declares that 'I' and 'you' are one, and is prepared to behave as if it were a fact.

Françoise regarda ce visage qu'elle avait si longtemps aimé avec *une paix aveugle* [p. 178 - my emphasis]." Elsewhere, she realises that

Pierre avait parlé pour lui-même. C'était là le plus grand changement : jadis il vivait pour le théâtre, pour Françoise, pour des idées, on pouvait toujours collaborer avec lui; mais *ses rapports avec lui-même il n'y avait aucun moyen d'y participer* [p. 192 - my emphasis].

Unable to enter into Pierre's adoring relationship with his own self, Françoise feels invalidated. She questions her past achievements and present identity, thus throwing her future into question also :

- Qu'est-ce que je suis, moi? se demanda-t-elle; elle regarda Paule, elle regarda Xavière [...]; ces femmes-là, on savait qui elles étaient; elles avaient des souvenirs choisis, des goûts et des idées qui les définissaient, des caractères bien arrêtés que traduisaient les traits de leurs figures; mais *en elle-même Françoise ne distinguait aucune forme claire; la lumière qui l'avait pénétrée tout à l'heure ne lui avait découvert que du vide* [...].

- *Je ne suis personne, pensa Françoise* [...] Et Pierre? Quand il la regardait, que voyait-il? Elle tourna les yeux vers Pierre, mais Pierre ne la regardait pas.

Il regardait Xavière; la bouche entrouverte, les yeux embués, Xavière respirait à peine; elle ne savait plus où elle était, elle semblait hors d'elle-même; Françoise détournait les yeux avec gêne [...] *Elle pouvait savoir avec beaucoup de certitude ce qu'elle n'était pas: c'était pénible de ne se connaître que comme une suite d'absences* [p. 184 - my emphasis].

The notion of 'absence' will now lead us from Freudian into Lacanian terms. Absence is a key concept in Lacanian theory - and here it fits in particularly well with Françoise's realisation of her self-deception. As noted earlier, Moi's view is that L'Invitée "attempts to chronicle her difficult separation from [the] imaginary matrix and her painful entry into the symbolic order."²⁷ Before the

See 'Civilisation and its Discontents', (1930 [1929]), in The Penguin Freud Library vol. 12, Civilisation, Society and Religion, pp. 245-340, p. 253.

Although it is debatable whether Pierre Labrousse feels his ontological boundaries dissolving into Françoise's in L'Invitée, this seems to be particularly relevant for the current discussion of Françoise's own experience of their relationship, and her eventual sense of annihilation.

²⁷ Toril Moi, Simone de Beauvoir : The Making of an Intellectual Woman, p. 108.

influence of Xavière's disruptive sexuality,²⁸ Françoise - like a pre-Oedipal child - is caught in the mirror stage of a false identification with Pierre, and a naïve belief that she is somehow protected against the contingency of existence. To quote Eagleton, the Lacanian mirror is a false window onto "a world of plenitude, with no lacks or exclusions of any kind."²⁹ Françoise, however, experiences only lack and exclusion after her separation from Pierre with her lack of a fixed sense of identity, and her exclusion in exile. Eagleton continues :

standing before the mirror, the 'signifier' (the child) discovers a 'fullness', a whole and unblemished identity, in the signified of its reflection. No gap has yet opened up between signifier and signified, subject and world. The infant is so far happily untroubled by the problems of post-structuralism - by the fact that, as we have seen, language and reality are not so smoothly synchronized as this situation would suggest.

With the entry of the father, the child is plunged into post-structuralist anxiety. It now has to grasp Saussure's point that identities come about only as a result of difference - that *one term or subject is what it is only by excluding another*.³⁰

The Imaginary mirror stage, then, is inherently transient. This condition in which, in Eagleton's words "what 'self' we have seems to pass into objects, and objects into it, in a ceaseless closed exchange"³¹ must end. We see that Françoise's and Pierre's "ceaseless closed exchange" is in fact strictly one-way, and Françoise herself realises that her identity has been reformed as a result of her exclusion from another duo. As Church writes, "in attaining a sense of self - that is, in attaining consciousness, or attaining an ego - boundaries between myself and other things must be drawn."³²

Françoise has constructed her identity on the foundations of another's ego. Without the comfort of Pierre's existential gaze, the constructed Françoise

²⁸ Jane Heath, in Simone de Beauvoir, writes that Xavière "represents a dynamic and subversive femininity which exceeds all masculine efforts at containment and control [p. 43]."

²⁹ Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory, p. 166.

³⁰ *ibid*, my emphasis.

³¹ *ibid*, p. 164.

³² Jennifer Church, 'Morality and the Internalized Other', p. 212.

has no meaning. He has been her mirror, reflecting back to her a misleading series of gratifying *méconnaissances*. This angle of Beauvoir's text lends itself particularly well to the current Lacanian optic, for as Eagleton comments, in Lacan's view

we arrive at a sense of an 'I' by finding that 'I' reflected back to ourselves by some object or person in the world. This object is at once somehow part of ourselves - we *identify* with it - and yet not ourselves - something alien. The image which the small child sees in the mirror is in this sense an 'alienated' one: the child 'misrecognizes' itself in it, finds in the image a pleasing unity which it does not actually experience in its own body. [...] As the child grows up, it will continue to make such imaginary identifications with objects, and this is how its ego will be built up. For Lacan, the ego is just this narcissistic process whereby we bolster up a fictive sense of unitary selfhood by finding something in the world with which we can identify.³³

While we are analysing the mirror stage, it is particularly significant that at the end of the novel Françoise, semi-annihilated, feels that the reflection has ceased to be either gratifying or unifying. It is no longer Pierre who grants Françoise her identity - instead, Xavière acts as a mirror of malevolence, but a mirror which reflects back only a pale ghost of a woman fading away into the half-light of her flickering sense of self :

Longtemps, Xavière n'avait été qu'un fragment de la vie de Françoise; elle était soudain devenue l'unique réalité souveraine et Françoise n'avait plus que la pâle consistance d'une image [p. 364].

There is a further interpretation we could apply to the trio here. Françoise's worryingly symbiotic relationship with Pierre could be seen as a fictionalisation of the dyadic mother/child structure - it is true that she is infantilised by him. He represents the parental 'ego-ideal', just as Françoise represents an ideal for Xavière prior to their violent descent into mutual conflict and sexual jealousy. We can see therefore that far from being a reductive road into the text, the Oedipal interpretation of the textual triadic

³³ Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory, pp. 164-5.

structure has an endless set of permutations, as the characters circle around each other in a shifting pattern of emotional change. To return briefly to Freudian theory, as Church writes :

we admire as well as fear our parents, and [Freud] speaks of an "ego-ideal" as well as of a super-ego. The two are closely related aspects of a single phenomenon, it seems, insofar as they both come about through the internalization of the qualities of another which one desires but cannot have. And just as a child's conception of a parent's power is typically an exaggeration, so too is the child's conception of a parent's virtue; the ego-ideal stands apart from the self partly on account of its idealized character.³⁴

When interpreting the trio in this specific pattern, it is Xavière who represents the Lacanian father, since she is the one whose entrance onto the scene leads to the disintegration of the previously stable and unified Imaginary partnership.³⁵ She is responsible for Françoise's entry into the Symbolic order (the domain of language) and with it what Eagleton terms falling "prey to desire",³⁶ since all language represents a constant attempt at filling the gap made by the loss of the mother's body. Language is "what hollows being into desire."³⁷ In this particular interpretation, Xavière/the father also inserts Françoise/the child into the social order which is concomitant with the Symbolic. I return again to Eagleton :

we are considering a register of being in which there are really no more than two terms: the child itself and the other body, which at this point is usually the mother, and which represents external reality for the child; But [...] when the father enters upon and disrupts this harmonious scene [...] the child is disturbed in its libidinal relation with the mother, and must begin to recognize in the figure of the father that a wider familial and social network exists of which it is only part [...] The appearance of the father divides the child from the mother's body [as Françoise is divided from Pierre].³⁸

³⁴ Jennifer Church, 'Morality and the Internalized Other', p. 218.

³⁵ See Heath, Simone de Beauvoir, p. 37.

³⁶ Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory, p. 167.

³⁷ *ibid*, pp. 167-8.

³⁸ *ibid*, p. 165.

As Elizabeth Fallaize has pointed out, Xavière's influence on the trio leads Françoise to a realisation that she is in fact not a disembodied consciousness, but part of the "wider familial and social network" specified by Eagleton. Fallaize writes :

Françoise's lack of awareness of her being-for-others, of how she appears to other people in the world, is damaging to her awareness of herself as a sexual and gendered being. To think of herself as 'no-one', as 'a naked consciousness in front of the world' (SCS p. 146) is to fail to perceive herself as body and as a woman. As the crisis intensifies, and Françoise is gradually forced to recognise her existence in the world on the same terms as other people, she begins to see that 'whether she liked it or not, she too was in the world, a part of this world. She was a woman among other women' (p. 146). The juxtaposition of these two statements is striking. The discovery of being-for-others, of her social existence, is a rediscovery of corporality, and hence of sexuality and gender.³⁹

This last line echoes Eagleton's observations that it is the father's introduction into the child's unified world "which signifies [...] sexual difference."⁴⁰ It would seem therefore that Xavière can be at any time a textual symbol of all three figures featuring in the Oedipal triangle - the daughter, (a Freudian interpretation), the mother (see Moi) or the father (my Lacanian view). As the father figure she is responsible for Françoise falling 'prey to desire' and jealousy, for her realisation of her female embodiment and also for the fissuring of the Imaginary Siamese twins who are Françoise and Pierre.

Ironically, Françoise owes much to Xavière for causing this recognition of her dislocation. The realisation that she owes her present situation to her own reliance on Pierre is a necessary pain to live through in order to gain a stronger sense of identity :

- C'est ma faute, pensa Françoise [...] C'était sa faute, Elisabeth avait raison, ça faisait des années qu'elle avait cessé d'être quelqu'un; elle n'avait même plus de figure. La plus

³⁹ Elizabeth Fallaize, The Novels of Simone de Beauvoir, p. 34.

⁴⁰ Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory, p. 165.

déshéritée de femmes pouvait du moins toucher avec amour sa propre main et elle regardait ses mains avec surprise. Notre passé, notre avenir, nos idées, notre amour... jamais elle ne disait "je". Et cependant Pierre disposait de son propre avenir, et de son propre coeur; il s'éloignait, il reculait aux confins de sa propre vie. Elle demeurait là, séparée de lui, séparée de tous, et sans lien avec soi-même; délaissée et ne retrouvant dans ce délaissement aucune véritable solitude [p. 216].

Thus Françoise gradually moves from the Imaginary to the Symbolic, in a Beauvoirean reworking of another reinvention - the Lacanian rereading of the triadic Oedipal structure in terms of the Real, Symbolic and Imaginary.

However, this is not the only way in which a Lacanian reading of the text can be made. Perhaps the most well-known Lacanian text is the application of his theories to Poe's tale of 'The Purloined Letter'. It is through this linguistic lens that I now wish to examine L'Invitée, turning from a Lacanian analysis of the emotional resonances in the text to a purer stress on meaning and its appropriation. There can be seen to exist three stages of semiotic understanding in the novel. Firstly, the Realist's imbecility, secondly the delusion of the Imaginary and thirdly the all-seeing perspicacity of the Symbolic. At first, Françoise is like the King in Lacan's seminar on 'The Purloined Letter', who as authority figure is lost in a Realist's sense of his own supremacy; we remember how, walking through the corridors of the theatre, she feels utterly empowered :

c'étaient ces corridors noirs qui l'attiraient. Quand elle n'était pas là, cette odeur de poussière, cette pénombre, cette solitude désolée, tout ça n'existait pour personne, ça n'existait pas du tout. [...] Elle avait ce pouvoir: sa présence arrachait les choses à leur inconscience, elle leur donnait leur couleur, leur odeur. [...] Elle était seule à dégager le sens de ces lieux abandonnés, de ces objets en sommeil; elle était là et ils lui appartenaient. Le monde lui appartenait [p. 12].

In Lacan's own words she appears to be solipsistically "investi par l'amphibologie naturelle au sacré, de l'imbécillité qui tient justement au

Sujet."⁴¹ Her position of power is wholly illusory, as is the child's sense of unity with its reflected self in the mirror (a concept we have discussed above). As we have seen, it is only in later chapters that Françoise moves into the position of the Symbolic, and realises that she is in fact not in inviolable possession of the pure, private meaning of the signifier, as the Queen believes in the second scene of 'The Purloined Letter' - representing as she does the Imaginary specular glance.

Pierre's role and the part he plays in Françoise's shifting of her position in the Real/Imaginary/Symbolic triangle can also be read in Lacanian terms. The term 'le Non/Nom du Père' could be rewritten as 'le Non/Nom de Pierre' since Pierre, described by Fallaize as "the master manipulator of language, the inheritor of the silver tongue [...] of Saint John Chrysostom"⁴² uses words both to control Françoise and order her life. He receives her confessions and returns them to her faceted, shining and pure, whereas before they were mere moments of opaque confusion, rough diamonds instead of flawless gems. In another reading of Pierre's power over Françoise, we could posit him as the psychoanalyst who by hearing and rewriting the patient's discourse makes soothing, sanitised sense of a troubled mind. Like the detective Dupin,⁴³ who is also cast in the role of psychoanalyst, he makes sense of Françoise's tumbling confessions :

On ne fait qu'un, se répéta-t-elle. Tant qu'elle ne l'avait pas raconté à Pierre, aucun événement n'était tout à fait vrai: il flottait, immobile, incertain, dans des espèces de limbes. Autrefois, quand Pierre l'intimidait, il y avait pas mal de choses qu'elle laissait comme ça de côté: des pensées louches, des gestes irréfléchis; si on n'en parlait pas, c'était presque comme

⁴¹ Jacques Lacan, 'Le séminaire sur "La Lettre volée"', Écrits, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966, pp. 9-61, 38.

⁴² Elizabeth Fallaize, The Novels of Simone de Beauvoir, p. 37.

⁴³ While discussing the detective Dupin, it is interesting to note that in Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman Moi equates Beauvoir's novel with the genre of detective fiction. She writes: "L'Invitée shares with the detective story a deep investment in knowledge as the signifier of authority and power [p. 101]."

si ça n'avait pas été; ça faisait en dessous de la véritable existence une végétation souterraine et honteuse où l'on se retrouvait seule et où l'on étouffait; et puis, peu à peu, elle avait tout livré; elle ne connaissait plus la solitude, mais elle était purifiée de ces grouillements confus. Tous les moments de sa vie qu'elle lui confiait, Pierre les lui rendait clairs, polis, achevés, et ils devenaient des moments de leur vie [p. 30].

Thus, as Sartre did for Beauvoir, Pierre delivers Françoise from the discomfort of her own unconscious : “des pensées louches, des gestes irréfléchis” could well be her own sexual urges and her revealing parapraxes, which, like Beauvoir, she is unable to face. However, like the negative view of psychoanalysts held by id-psychologists, Pierre also appears to return to Françoise a disinfected, soulless version of a life, which he has moulded to suit his own ends.

Furthermore, he murmurs confusingly in his silver-tongued, poetic way of the impossibility of conventional categorisation when defining his relationship with Françoise :

- On ne peut pas parler de fidélité, ou d'infidélité entre nous, dit Pierre; il attira Françoise contre lui. Toi et moi, on ne fait qu'un; c'est vrai, tu sais, on ne peut pas nous définir l'un sans l'autre [p. 29].

Twisting words to suit himself, he deconstructs poles of reference for Françoise, since the infidelities of which he speaks are mainly his own. By acknowledging them he is able to defuse them of emotional ammunition, but the pain of betrayal remains. Even Françoise herself comes to view his words as manipulative tools :

C'était un peu effrayant. La phrase caressante, le petit geste tendre, elle n'y voyait qu'une intention de gentillesse; ce n'étaient pas des objets pleins; ça ne touchait pas [p. 165].

Derrière les phrases et les gestes, qu'y avait-il? "Nous ne faisons qu'un." A la faveur de cette confusion commode elle s'était toujours dispensée de s'inquiéter de Pierre; mais ce n'était que des mots: ils étaient deux [p. 166].

Yet, now fully aware of their emotive power, and insistently clinging to Pierre's love as if it is still the constant rock of her Imaginary dream, Françoise is eager to appropriate the Word for herself. We could claim that she is doubly desperate to capture the migratory, elusive signifier of her own identity and establish herself in the Symbolic order because she has witnessed Pierre's own mastery of the Symbolic perspective. It is as if she hopes that, as it is for Pierre, language will be a potent force for exorcism : "[e]lle eut une lueur d'espoir; peut-être si elle arrivait à enfermer dans des phrases son angoisse, elle pourrait s'en arracher [p. 369]." This attempt to master the Symbolic order reaches fever pitch in the final chapter of the novel, when Françoise in fact murders the textual symbol of the pure elusoriness of the Lacanian signifier. In so doing she leaves the realm of the Imaginary, rewrites her perceived self in her own terms, and joins Pierre in a Symbolic union which is no longer threatened by a malevolent Other.

Finally, therefore, we come to Françoise's and Xavière's grappling over the signifier. Other than their Oedipal/erotic struggle over Pierre's affections, their motivation is the desire to be the ultimate definers of their own worlds. Into the lethal cocktail of sexual jealousy and emotional manipulation is mixed the battle for meaning and identity. Françoise at this stage proves herself still prey to the Imaginary as she is highly sensitive to the less than flattering reflection thrown back at her by the vicious mirror of Xavière's hate. In existentialist and Freudian terms, the girl represents the annihilating power of another's consciousness. Only the finality of murder can bring this chapter Françoise wishes to write into her own life to a satisfactory close. With one twist of the gas tap she literally pins down the signifier which is Xavière and repurloins an identity she wishes to reassume. As Fallaize writes :

Xavière seizes the power of the word and claims the right to narrate Françoise's story in her own terms. Françoise, who has always hated the idea of 'no longer being anything but a figment of someone else's mind' (SCS p. 7), can no longer tolerate

Xavière's challenge; she has to be destroyed both in the word and in the flesh. Françoise will destroy Xavière's image of Françoise as jealous and treacherous, will assert herself in order to defend her self-image, the reflection in the mirror which now concerns her urgently and 'which there has been a long enduring attempt to rob her of' (SCS p. 406).⁴⁴

Thus Françoise indeed "crushes the claim of another to narrate her story."⁴⁵

Lacan's theory is that words are not the property of those who use them. In killing Xavière, Françoise makes sure that her own definition of this particular scenario, at least, will resist any attempt at appropriation. And, most importantly, her definition will depict her own version of the Françoise she wishes to be. Her portrait cannot be erased or altered; her words cannot be purloined. From now on this woman will be truly self-possessed.

I conclude that Françoise is finally posited by Beauvoir as being in firm control of her own identity, and with a destiny which, it is hinted, will no longer be linked to emotional dependence on Pierre. The murder releases her from the Imaginary, the Oedipal conflict is resolved. In this chapter I have set out to prove that the psychoanalytic perspective is not a blinkered one - Xavière, Pierre and Françoise can be viewed from all three angles of the Freudian/Lacanian triangle. If we view this triangle as the solid figure of a pyramid instead of a unidimensional spinning pattern, however, the text's final score places Françoise firmly at its hierarchical tip.

Stepping outside the text for a moment, returning to the focus of Beauvoir's textual unconscious, we can also see that with the death of the elusive signifier/destructive Other comes the rebirth of the author, and a whole body of fictional writing. Through its textual tampering with the Oedipal triangles of her own experience, both in childhood and adult life, L'Invitée represented a catharsis for its writer, who managed to turn an emotionally destructive situation to her advantage and hence gave birth to a literature of her own.

⁴⁴ Elizabeth Fallaize, The Novels of Simone de Beauvoir, p. 35.

⁴⁵ *ibid*, p. 36.

Again, her psychoanalytic themes turn on a heady mixture of her own painful experience and projected insecurities. L'Invitée was written while Beauvoir herself was still in denial about the value of psychoanalysis and its relevance to her own experience. Yet we have seen that the obsessive themes still ripple beneath her fictional surface, repressed both in the tangle of the text in Françoise's unconscious and in Beauvoir's own later professed reservations. How, then, does her fiction progress? Are these themes of idealised love, childhood fears and Oedipal conflict returned to, or even resolved? As I hope to show in the chapter which follows, these themes in fact become more insistent, and her engagement with them steadily more explicit. In this chapter we have analysed her first published fictional child, L'Invitée - let us now turn to her next, Le Sang des autres.

CHAPTER FOUR

LE SANG DES AUTRES

Since one of my aims in this thesis is to trace the development of Simone de Beauvoir's attitude towards and engagement with psychoanalysis, while reading her fiction from a specific Freudian and Lacanian angle, it is worth noting that her second published work represents, to quote Alex Hughes, "an effort [...] to move away from the kind of solipsistic theorization of the self/other relation contained in [...] L'Invitée."¹ Elizabeth Fallaize also makes reference to this distinct shift of textual focus; in The Novels of Simone de Beauvoir she discusses Beauvoir's desire to situate her novels precisely in an arena far wider than that circumscribed by psychological boundaries of sexual jealousy and problems of individual identity :

the principal characters of The Blood of Others make a discovery which marks them off from the world of She Came to Stay, and which is quite simply the fact of the insertion of their personal lives in their own time, their own period of history.²

With Le Sang des autres Beauvoir thus offers her reader a socio-historical portrait of a turbulent political epoch - the Second World War - and in so doing stresses collective history, reflecting her own changing preoccupations and a

¹ See Alex Hughes, Le Sang des autres, Exeter: University of Glasgow French and German Publications, 1995, p. 24.

² Elizabeth Fallaize, The Novels of Simone de Beauvoir, London: Routledge, 1988, p. 44.

new move towards the universal from the personal.³ The reader may therefore justifiably enquire whether the current psychoanalytic approach is still valid for textual analysis of a work which could be described as a political *roman de situation*, focusing as it does on freedom, choice and action, and whether Beauvoir's by now familiar personal textual projections can be discovered in her second published novel.

As I hope to show in the current chapter, there in fact exists enormous scope for various psychoanalytic readings of Le Sang des autres, for Beauvoir's obsessive themes of identity, love, breakdown and Oedipal triangles mark their return in this novel also. As Fallaize continues,

the anxieties exhibited in She Came to Stay about the nature of our relations with others [...] are just as present, manifesting themselves in the obsessive imagery of blood and guilt, of nausea and the odour of corruption which permeate the text.⁴

Furthermore, echoing Freud, Alex Hughes describes the text as "a chronicle of desire and its discontents,"⁵ and much of both her own and Fallaize's readings is couched in distinctly psychoanalytic terms. It is indeed Jean Blomart's "desire and [his] discontents" on which I shall focus, concentrating particularly on the Oedipal triangle and guilt, infantile trauma and its resulting neurosis, object-attachment and the psychoanalytic account and procedure. The question of whether Jean's Oedipus complex is ultimately resolved, and

³ See her own comments in chapter 7 of the second volume of her autobiography, La Force de l'âge, Paris: Gallimard, 1960, where she admits discovering both human solidarity, and personal responsibilities, particularly pp. 624-625.

⁴ Elizabeth Fallaize, The Novels of Simone de Beauvoir, p. 44.

⁵ Hughes, Le Sang des autres, p. 4.

his neurosis overcome, also remains to be answered. As I hope to demonstrate, Jean Blomart ultimately masters his internalised superego and debilitating melancholia, and Hélène Bertrand progresses beyond her idealised love into a more mature and balanced relationship. Both protagonists move towards a redemptive final chapter together, which brings the tale to a successful psychoanalytic conclusion.

In this chapter I will treat Jean as a classical Freudian case study, but also take as a theoretical basis a feminist revision of Freud, since I return to Jessica Benjamin's reinterpretation The Bonds of Love. Benjamin's work examines domination and love in quasi-existential terms, analysing not only the dominator, but also the complicity of the dominated. She criticises Freud for his rationalization of authority while using his theories of the unconscious to elaborate terms of her own : namely the disavowal of the maternal body, the dangers of identificatory and ideal love, and the more positive models of mutual recognition and transitional space. I will move from Freud to Benjamin's feminist reinterpretations in the second half of this chapter; in this way I hope to avoid being unnecessarily reductive, while still using as a theoretical foundation the originator of psychoanalytic thought.

In terms of narratology, Le Sang des autres can be described in many ways as a psychoanalytic account in itself, with Jean Blomart as its main narrative and psychological focus; it therefore lends itself particularly well to our form of textual analysis. Fallaize, in her exhaustive examination of Beauvoir's textual strategies, points out that

Blomart is the dominant narrative power of the text; this status derives not only from the fact that his narrative is the longest, and is voiced by himself, but from the fact that the central argument of the text is made to rest heavily on the interpretation which Blomart gives to the account of his past, an account covering the period from his boyhood.⁶

Much of the text is thus similar to psychoanalytic discourse, not simply because of the weight given to the interpretation of childhood memory, but also because Jean's chapters are highly reminiscent of the murmurings of stream of consciousness of the analysand : plunging in and out of the past, they are shot through with flashes of emotional angst which are italicised in the text. Sitting alone with the dying Hélène, Jean's thoughts wander freely, obeying Freud's instructions to the analysand to

put himself into a state of quiet, unreflecting, self-observation, and to report to us whatever internal perceptions he is able to make - feelings, thoughts, memories - in the order in which they occur to him.⁷

Blomart's internal perceptions of the past are swift to assault him, providing both a loose structure for the novel and the themes which provide the central textual motifs. Peter Brooks, in his work on narrative theory Reading For The Plot, writes of psychoanalysis that it is primarily "concerned with the recovery of the past through the dynamics of memory and desire,"⁸ and throughout the agonising wait for Hélène's final breath, Blomart's past finds him again, with its traumatic memories and sexual undercurrents. Similarly, Hughes, in her

⁶ Fallaize, The Novels of Simone de Beauvoir, p. 47.

⁷ Sigmund Freud, 'Resistance and Repression', (published 1917 [written 1916-17]), The Penguin Freud Library, vol. 1, Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, London: Penguin, 1991, p. 328.

⁸ Peter Brooks, Reading For The Plot : Design and Intention in Narrative, New York: A. A. Knopf, 1984, p. xiv.

chapter entitled 'Narrative Strategies', appears to draw attention to the narrative parallels with psychoanalytic discourse :

in [...] central segments of the Blomart-oriented chapters in which his thoughts are impelled by 'present' events and reflections backwards towards the/his (more distant) past, and towards the crises, dilemmas and doubts of that past [,] information [...] enables us to comprehend more completely *why* and *how* it is that Blomart can arrive eventually at the particular decision about/solution to the sabotage issue which he articulates in chapter XIII. It confirms Susan Hayward's argument that (cinematic) flashbacks are 'hermeneutically determined'; that, 'by nature investigative or confessional narrative codes', they 'almost always serve to resolve an enigma.'⁹

In any psychoanalytic procedure, the patient brings an account or confession for investigation, and a symptom to solve. Similarly, Blomart's behaviour is presented to us as an enigma, and as narrative analysts we strive for textual resolution and understanding. His past, which is also the tale we read and unravel, is understood in retrospect, and his final decision regarding the sabotage hints at a tyrannical superego overcome.

The parallels of the text with analytic discourse do not end here, for, as in psychoanalysis, the teller is also the protagonist of his story of neurosis. In the same way, Blomart is swift to split his identity into both first and third person in the first pages of his tale :

Aujourd'hui et de tout temps, je suis là. J'ai toujours été là. Avant il n'y avait pas de temps. Dès que le temps a commencé, j'ai été là, pour toujours, par-delà ma propre mort.

Il était là, mais d'abord il ne le savait pas. Maintenant je le vois, penché à la fenêtre de la galerie. Mais lui ne savait pas. Il croyait que le monde seul était présent. Il regardait les verrières

⁹ Alex Hughes, Le Sang des autres, p. 54.

encrassées d'où montait par bouffées une odeur d'encre et de poussière, l'odeur du travail des autres [...]. Parfois, il restait longtemps immobile, laissant le remords entrer en lui par les yeux, par les oreilles, par les narines. Au ras du sol, sous les vitres sales, l'ennui stagnait; et dans la longue pièce aux murs clairs, le remords s'étirait en volutes douceâtres.¹⁰

This textual device is in fact similar to the specific splitting process demanded of the analysand by the psychoanalyst. Charles Rycroft refers to this process as “reflective self-awareness” :

psychoanalytical treatment requires the patient to split his ego, one part identifying with the analyst [...] and observing and reflecting on the free associations produced by the other. In this sense, splitting, so far from being a pathological phenomenon, is a manifestation of self-awareness.¹¹

The narrator/narratee of Le Sang des autres is both the analyst and the analysand. As readers we experience Blomart's self-analysis through a night which will inevitably change him, while he examines both his own motivations and those traumas which have been the catalyst for his past behaviour. The text is Jean's consciousness, and its immediate focus, to which we now turn, his conscience.

Throughout Le Sang des autres, as we can already see from the above-quoted passage (“l'ennui stagnait; [...] le remords s'étirait en volutes douceâtres”), Blomart's overwhelming sense of guilt seeps through his past memories into his present preoccupations and taints the text like the dank smell of ink and blood which hangs as a malevolent vapour over his childhood. Why, the reader/analyst wonders, does he insist on shouldering

¹⁰ Simone de Beauvoir, Le Sang des autres, Paris: Gallimard, 1945, p. 13. All quotations are from this edition.

this heavy emotional burden of blame? The textual clues are clear, for although Beauvoir decided to restrict the account of Hélène Bertrand's childhood,¹² which - revealingly - she had based upon her own, Blomart's narrative grants its readers full access to a wealth of infantile memory and emotion, leading the reader to a deeper understanding of his psyche and hinting at Beauvoir's unconscious recognition of the importance of childhood. According to Freud himself, infantile experience is paramount in any analysis. He writes as follows :

We [recognise] that particular importance attached to the first years of childhood [...] for several reasons. Firstly, because those years include the early efflorescence of sexuality which leaves behind it decisive instigating factors for the sexual life of maturity. Secondly, because the impressions of this period impinge upon an immature and feeble ego, and act upon it like traumas. The ego cannot fend off the emotional storms which they provoke in any way except by repression and in this manner acquires in childhood all its dispositions to later illnesses and functional disturbances.¹³

Blomart's first reference to the childhood trauma which is one catalyst for his later sense of horror and internalised guilt is significantly early in the text :

¹¹ Charles Rycroft, *A Critical Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, London: Penguin, 1995, p. 174.

¹² This restriction was not, as happened with the chapters concerning Françoise Miquel's childhood, at the insistence of Beauvoir's publishers, but of her own accord. As she explains in *La Force de l'âge*,

Je commis la même erreur qu'en commençant *L'Invitée*; je me crus obligée de ressusciter l'enfance d'Hélène; je m'inspirai de la mienne. Puis, je décidai de n'indiquer ce passé que par quelques brèves allusions. [*La Force de l'âge*, p. 619.]

Significantly Beauvoir thus felt obliged to evoke Hélène's infancy, which was based upon her own. It could be speculated that she felt compelled to repress these passages as the memories were too close for her own comfort.

¹³ Sigmund Freud, 'Explanations, Applications and Orientations', (1933 [1932]), *The Penguin Freud Library*, vol. 2, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, London: Penguin, 1991, p. 182.

soon after his disturbing reference to “l’absolue pourriture cachée au sein de tout destin humain [p. 12]” which is his belief in his own original sin, he describes his momentous first brush with death :

J’avais huit ans quand pour la première fois mon coeur a connu le scandale. [...] ma mère est rentrée avec un de ces visages que nous lui voyions souvent, un visage chargé de reproche et d’excuse et elle a dit : “Le petit de Louise est mort.” Je revois l’escalier tordu et le corridor dallé sur lequel donnaient tant de portes, toutes pareilles; maman m’a dit que derrière chaque porte il y avait une chambre où toute une famille habitait. Nous sommes entrés. Louise m’a pris dans ses bras; ses joues étaient molles et mouillées; maman s’est assise sur le lit, à côté d’elle, et s’est mise à lui parler à voix basse. Dans le moïse, il y avait un bébé pâle aux yeux fermés. J’ai regardé le carreau rouge, les murs nus, le réchaud à gaz et je me suis mis à pleurer. Je pleurais et maman parlait, et l’enfant restait mort. Je pouvais bien vider ma tirelire, et maman pouvait veiller des nuits entières : il serait toujours aussi mort. [p. 16]

It can hardly be doubted that such an early experience of death - particularly the death of an infant, which a child either may be inclined to protect, or with which he would strongly identify¹⁴ - would be described by Freud (here

¹⁴ Although there are few references to her in the text, Louise (by implication either Jean’s nurse or the Blomart’s maid) probably represents maternal security for the young Jean, and the dead infant is therefore his projected double. It is significant that Jean remembers “elle m’a pris dans ses bras” - he is almost taking the baby’s place.

It is also worth noting here that Beauvoir has chosen the name of her own childhood nurse for this particular fictional character. In Mémoires d’une jeune fille rangée, she writes as follows :

C’est à Louise que j’ai dû la sécurité quotidienne. Elle m’habillait le matin, me déshabillait le soir et dormait dans la même chambre que moi. [...] Sa présence m’était aussi nécessaire et me paraissait aussi naturelle que celle du sol sous mes pieds. [See Mémoires d’une jeune fille rangée, Paris: Gallimard, 1958, p. 10.]

Furthermore, Louise goes on to lose her baby, an experience described in Beauvoir’s autobiography in very similar terms :

Le triste boyau sur lequel donnaient une douzaine de portes, toutes semblables, me serra le coeur. [...] J’entrevis un univers où l’air qu’on respirait avec un goût de suie, dont nulle lumière jamais ne perçait la crasse : l’existence y était une lente agonie. A peu de temps de là, Louise perdit son enfant. Je sanglotai pendant des heures : c’était la première fois que je voyais face à face le malheur. J’imaginais Louise dans sa chambre sans joie,

discussing the traumatic neuroses) as “an increase of stimulus too powerful to be dealt with.”¹⁵ A childhood encounter with the horrific stillness of death may well have the same effect as that of a traumatic accident - which Rycroft defines as a “totally unexpected experience which the subject is unable to assimilate.”¹⁶ From now on, Blomart’s experience of mortality as an endless chain of deaths for which he feels responsible (the child’s death, the loss of his friend Jacques, the aborted foetus of Hélène, the murder of the hostages, Hélène’s own death) will be linked inextricably to the same infantile sense of guilt which is his personal “scandale.”

Further evidence that the child’s death has contributed towards a long-term neurosis is given to the reader when Blomart remembers the scene at the dinner table following the visit to Louise. His father’s voice, representative of paternal power (the Lacanian Nom/Non du Père and the symbolic function which “depuis l’orée des temps historiques, identifie sa personne à la figure de la loi”¹⁷) cuts through his horrified rêverie, forcing him to drink his soup, which will never reach either the dead baby or the families crowded into those minuscule rooms glimpsed by the young Jean. The neurosis thus leads to a symptomatic action - in Blomart’s case a gagging, which perhaps represents

privée de son enfant, privée de tout : une telle détresse aurait dû faire exploser la terre. [*ibid*, p. 183]

It could easily be argued that the disturbing effect of Jean’s experience probably draws most of its emotive strength from Beauvoir’s autobiographical resonances in the text.

¹⁵ Sigmund Freud, ‘Fixation to Traumas - the Unconscious’, (1917 [1916-17]), The Penguin Freud Library vol. 1, Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, London: Penguin, 1991, p. 315.

¹⁶ Charles Rycroft, A Critical Dictionary of Psychoanalysis, p. 187.

¹⁷ Jacques Lacan, ‘Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage en psychanalyse,’ Écrits, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966, pp. 237-322, p. 278.

both a refusal to take in a nourishment he feels he does not deserve, and for which he believes the dead child has paid, and a refusal to incorporate the imposed societal values (a theme repeated in Les Belles Images, which will be the subject of my penultimate chapter) :

Papa écoutait en mangeant son potage. Je ne pouvais pas manger. Là-bas, Louise pleurait, elle ne mangeait pas; rien ne lui rendrait son enfant, jamais; rien n'effacerait ce malheur qui souillait le monde.

- Eh bien! mange ta soupe, dit mon père. Tout le monde a fini.

- Je n'ai pas faim.

- Force-toi un peu, mon chéri, dit maman.

Je portai la cuiller à mes lèvres et la reposai sur l'assiette avec une espèce de hoquet :

- Je ne peux pas!

- Écoute, dit mon père. C'est très triste que le petit de Louise soit mort, j'en suis navré pour elle, mais nous n'allons pas le pleurer toute notre vie. Allons, dépêche-toi un peu.

J'ai mangé. D'un seul coup, la voix dure a desserré cet étau autour de ma gorge. Je sentais le liquide tiède glisser contre les muqueuses et avec chaque cuillerée coulait en moi quelque chose de plus nauséabond que l'odeur de l'imprimerie. Mais l'étau s'était desserré. Pas toute notre vie. [pp. 16-17]

Indeed, the tightness is not relieved indefinitely. With the infantile trauma, the concomitant neurosis takes hold and Jean's inability to swallow, the symptomatic action which betrays this neurosis, occurs again and again in the text. In his lecture on 'The Sexual Life of Human Beings', Freud states specifically that a "hysterical neurosis can produce its symptoms in any system of organs and so disturb any function."¹⁸ As with an obsessional action, it surfaces as "a representation, a repetition, of the significant scene"¹⁹ and offers further proof of the formative nature of the childhood experience

¹⁸ Sigmund Freud, 'The Sexual Life of Human Beings', (1917 [1916-17]), The Penguin Freud Library, vol. 1, Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, London: Penguin, 1991, pp. 349-350.

and its effects on the ego.²⁰ Later in life, Jean has difficulty swallowing his food on discussing the horrific fate of the Jews : “la bouchée que j’avalais me resta au travers de la gorge” [p. 151], and again, after indirectly causing the deaths of French hostages, his throat tightens :

Ma gorge est nouée. Heureusement mon père parle, il explique. La vieille odeur d’encre et de poussière flotte dans la galerie; jadis, elle me suffoquait, et sous le piano je griffais le tapis : le petit de Louise est mort. Mort sans remède, pour toujours. J’ai pris leur vie pour toujours, leur vie unique, personne ne la vivra pour eux. [...]
La bonne apporte le potage. Je n’ai pas faim, mais il faut que je mange. Ma mère ne mange pas : elle me regarde. Il ne faut pas qu’elle sache. *Elle sait. Je sais qu’elle sait. Elle ne me pardonnera jamais.* [p. 289]

It would seem clear at this stage, therefore, that the swallowing action, when linked with traumatic situations which cause guilt and shame, betrays an infantile neurosis precipitated by the sight of the dead baby, a sight which has proved too much for the infant Jean’s fragile and underdeveloped ego.

There is, however, a further precipitating cause for this neurosis in the form of a strong Oedipus complex which remains unresolved for most of the work. As Freud discovered, sexual life begins in infancy, and the “nodal point of development”²¹ is in fact this Oedipus complex. Throughout Le Sang des autres we discover the intense triangle of father, son and mother,²² which is only truly resolved in the final pages of the text with Jean’s reciprocated love

¹⁹ Sigmund Freud, ‘The Sense of Symptoms’, (1917 [1916-17]), *ibid*, p. 302.

²⁰ Significantly, Blomart’s artist friend Marcel declares that “Il n’y a pas de meilleure manière d’atteindre l’être que de manger.” [p. 186] This may be a further textual (implicit) psychoanalytic clue from Beauvoir that Jean’s ego is damaged.

²¹ Jessica Benjamin, The Bonds of Love, London : Virago, 1990, p. 134.

²² See also Hughes, pp. 38-40, and Fallaize, p. 62.

for Hélène, his desire for uncompromising political action and his respective acceptance of the paternal legacy. Until then, his endless sense of shame is connected to his desire for the mother, his rivalry with the father and his struggle with the resulting frustrated libidinal impulses. In the following paragraphs I will take up Hughes' invitation to her readers to "speculate as to the source of the exaggerated culpability he manifests"²³ and hope to show that it is also directly connected to Jean Blomart's Oedipal conflict and resulting internalised superego.

Discussing the Oedipus complex, Freud writes as follows :

While he is still a small child, a son will already begin to develop a special affection for his mother, whom he regards as belonging to him; he begins to feel his father as a rival who disputes his sole possession.²⁴

An early indication of the identical Oedipal feelings Jean has towards Madame Blomart is granted the reader with another childhood memory. The young Jean witnesses his mother attempting to stop the panic of a crowd caught up in a *coup d'état* in Seville when she is suddenly seized by her husband :

je pensais que nous aurions dû nous prendre par la main et parcourir la ville, elle trotinant dans ses petits souliers à talonnettes, et moi la tirant en avant avec ma fougue d'enfant; nous aurions arrêté les passants sur les places, nous serions entrés dans les cafés, et nous aurions harangué les foules. Ça ne semblait pas tellement impossible. Dans une rue couverte de Séville, par un matin fiévreux de coup d'État, des gens s'étaient mis brusquement à courir en panique; [...] elle s'est

²³ Alex Hughes, *Le Sang des autres*, p. 28.

²⁴ Sigmund Freud, 'The Archaic Features and Infantilism of Dreams', (1916 [1915-16]), *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, p. 243.

arrêtée, et pour contenir la poussée stupide elle a étendu ses petits bras; j'étais convaincu que si papa ne l'avait pas empoignée, s'il avait étendu lui aussi ses grands bras d'homme, la foule subjuguée aurait repris son pas tranquille. [p. 19]

There are clear references here to the possessiveness of the child, his wish to enter into an exclusive partnership with his mother, and his sexual jealousy of the father, with his “grands bras d'homme” and their phallic connotations. Jean infantilises his mother (perhaps due to the retrospective viewpoint of the memory), focusing on her “petits souliers à talonnettes” which are a sexual focus of his childhood. His desire to rush forward “la tirant en avant” is also a sexual image, although by emphasising his “fougue d'enfant” he also retains his childhood vulnerability, with all the exclusive filial rights of a favoured son. Together he and his mother are safely locked into the mother/child dyad, capable if they wish of stopping the world around them. This is, however, a short-lived dream : Jean's father grasps his mother in a quasi-sexual embrace, leaving the child alone and unable to enter their symbiosis.

I could also, however, point to a warp in the tight textual weave of the Oedipal reading here. Although Jean appears sexually possessive of his mother, he also seems to be in awe of Monsieur Blomart's perceived paternal power : the child feels that had he joined his wife in spreading out “ses grands bras d'homme”, then the terrified crowd, *subjuguée*, would have calmed down. There is thus a hint to the reader that the power of the father is admired by the child - and, as we shall see, later in the text Jean in fact joins with Monsieur Blomart in political complicity. This may be therefore an early

textual clue of his wish to bond with the father, and an acceptance of the latter's inevitable partnership with the mother, who, although desired, is recognised by the child even at this stage to be sexually inaccessible. Having recognised this ambivalence, however, let us now return to our traditional Oedipal interpretation of Jean's initial struggle against his father.

This struggle, symbolic of the child's unconscious libidinal impulses of patricide, continues beyond Jean's adolescence in different manifestations - it later takes on a political dimension (which may well be driven by the Oedipal conflict) when Jean attends a Communist meeting and rejects the traditional capitalist values of his father. His action causes another dispute at the family table, the scene of his past horror and neurosis, and his early submission to the power of the father. It is significant that even at this stage in his life Jean is still intimidated by Monsieur Blomart :

Toute une vie de travail et d'honneur... Jean fixait les veinules violettes qui striaient les joues de son père; des joues d'apoplectique. Le calme de M. Blomart témoignait d'une maîtrise de soi difficilement conquise. Jean avait beau faire : malgré la couperose et la barbiche grise, cette vertueuse figure l'intimidait. [p. 26]

This fear of the father, according to classical Freudian theory, is due to the powerful threat of castration with which, "in the very earliest years, he opposes a boy's sexual activities"²⁵ - namely the child's forbidden, incestuous desire for sexual union with the mother. As a result the child's libidinal impulses must be repressed, a delicate process prey to both fixation and

²⁵ Sigmund Freud, 'Some Analyses of Sample Dreams', (1916 [1915-16]), Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, p. 225.

regression, and which may lead to an Oedipus complex which is forever unresolved.

There are many textual hints in Le Sang des autres that Jean's resolution of his Oedipus complex is problematic, and that his sexual development is inhibited as a result. Despite his repeated desperate wish to escape the heavy shadow thrown by his father, and with it the social identity and values which are his birthright ("le fils Blomart; il occupait donc une place sur la terre, une place qu'il n'avait pas choisie" [p. 27]), he still remains within the protective womb of his family as he cannot bear to leave his mother : "je ne partais pas encore. [...] C'était à cause d'elle. Elle était là, figée, silencieuse" [p. 31].²⁶ In his controversial (and later challenged)²⁷ essay 'Femininity',

²⁶ It is significant that Blomart refers to his mother simply as "elle" in the text - it is as if his intense feelings are so clear that they need no further definition.

²⁷ Freud's attitude towards women, and the resulting forum of debate, would need a thesis of its own to do justice to its theoretical complexity. In the current context, however, see Samuel Slipp's study The Freudian Mystique : Freud, Women, and Feminism, particularly pp. 13-19, for an examination of the feminist reaction to Freud's theories. Among Freud's feminist detractors Slipp refers to Betty Friedan [The Freudian Mystique : Freud, Women, and Feminism, New York : New York University Press, 1993, p. 14], Melanie Klein [pp. 14-16], Karen Horney [pp. 16-17] Marie Bonaparte [p. 17] and Clara Thompson [*ibid*]. It is worth noting that these critics were not all women : Freud's biographer Ernest Jones [*ibid*] also disagreed with his conclusions on femininity, as did Fritz Wittels [p. 18] and Sandor Ferenczi, Freud's closest colleague, who blamed the prevailing patriarchal European culture for women's sexual neuroses [p. 18]. Slipp names Juliet Mitchell among Freud's female defenders [p. 14], and Nancy Chodorow could also be added to this list.

Slipp himself blames the cultural atmosphere of the Victorian era and Freud's ambiguous relationship with his own mother for his erroneous judgements about women. However, in defence of Freud's attitude, Slipp also writes :

He has been sharply criticized by feminists because of his views on women, yet he himself acknowledged that his writings on women were the weakest part of his work. His great genius had a flaw - his misunderstanding of women. Despite this imperfection, we cannot discount the inestimable value of his other contributions - the understanding of the development and workings of the human mind as well as the healing of its afflictions. [p. 8].

Nor, according to Slipp, was Freud a pronounced misogynist, as has been claimed :

Freud actually opened up psychoanalysis to women, respected their contributions, nurtured their careers, and developed strong personal friendships with many of them [*ibid*, p. 13].

Freud writes of the mother/son bond as being the most intense emotional link of his lifetime : “a boy’s mother,” he claims, “is the first object of his love, and she remains so too during the formation of his Oedipus complex and, in essence, all through his life.”²⁸ Throughout the text of Le Sang des autres, Jean betrays his jealousy of his father, and this intense desire for the mother, which is the cornerstone of Freudian Oedipal theory. When, for example, he finally leaves home, his tone echoes that of a jealous lover abandoning his mistress :

Il sortit du salon; au passage il donna un coup de pied dans un pouf de soie. Avec quel emportement de justice hargneuse elle prenait parti pour cet homme qu’elle n’aimait pas! Toujours prête à se sacrifier la première et à sacrifier avec elle ce qui lui tenait le plus à coeur. [p. 33]

C’était si facile alors; il n’avait qu’à décider de ne pas la voir; même pas: à ne pas décider de la voir et il ne la voyait pas. Mais tandis qu’il emballait son linge, elle était là. Dans le petit salon ou dans sa chambre. Quelque part dans l’appartement. Il dit avec colère : “Ce n’est pas ma faute. Je ne pouvais pas faire autrement.” Je ne pouvais pas...[...] Mais l’écharde était dans son coeur. “Elle n’avait que moi.” Seule désormais parmi les satins et les velours, avec le remords qui rôde et mille écharde vives qui percent aussi son coeur. [p. 34]

It is never clear in Le Sang des autres that Madame Blomart does not love her husband, and we could thus interpret Jean’s reference to his father as “cet homme qu’elle n’aimait pas” as wishful projection on his part. He states over and over again that he is easily capable of not seeing her, but his protests are too loud and too vacillating to be taken at face value by the reader/analyst. The tone of the above passage is sexual : Jean’s sensuously

²⁸ Sigmund Freud, ‘Femininity’, (1933 [1932]), New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, p. 152.

alliterative description of her as “seule [...] parmi les satins” has distinct boudoir connotations of lovemaking and coquetry. We could therefore speculate that Blomart’s neurosis may also be due to an unconscious desire for the mother which can never be consummated - a maternal/filial connection so intense that it must be held firmly in check by an intimidating patriarchal figure, and which results in an uncompromising sexual repression leading to neurosis and frustration.

This repression leads also to hesitation and anxiety, and, as already mentioned, an overwhelming Freudian “unconscious sense of guilt,”²⁹ all of which Jean betrays as constant preoccupations. Jessica Benjamin states that “it was Freud’s conclusion that we could not do without authority (internalized as guilt), and that we could not but suffer under its constraint.”³⁰ If this is the case, then by usual psychoanalytic standards Blomart’s endless sense of shame is a normal reaction to the necessary paternal denial of the mother. As Benjamin puts it, “for Freud, the tragedy of Oedipus was the key to our unconscious desires and our inevitable sense of guilt.”³¹ Jean’s guilt, therefore, is not simply due to the child’s death, but is also a legacy from the father in the form of the superego, the inner voice of interdiction.

However, although the superego is a result of the Oedipus complex, developed through a necessary identification with paternal influence, it could

²⁹ Sigmund Freud, ‘Anxiety and Instinctual Life’, (1933 [1932]), New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, p. 142.

³⁰ Jessica Benjamin, The Bonds of Love, p. 10.

³¹ *ibid*, p. 141.

be argued that in Jean's case his intense and relentless guilt also represents an unnecessary neurotic reliance on shame. Shame seems to be the neurotic foundation of his identity, perhaps resulting from a superego which is overdeveloped.³² Freud, writing specifically about the melancholic (which is a term I will later apply to Jean), states :

his super-ego becomes over-severe, abuses the poor ego, humiliates it and ill-treats it, threatens it with the direst punishments, reproaches it for actions in the remotest past [...] as though it had spent the whole interval in collecting accusations and had only been waiting for its present access of strength in order to bring them up and make a condemnatory judgment on their basis. The super-ego applies the strictest moral standard to the helpless ego which is at its mercy; in general it represents the claims of morality, and we realize all at once that our moral sense of guilt is the expression of the tension between the ego and the super-ego.³³

We see these reproaches in Jean's endless self-castigation at pivotal points in the text. For example, during Hélène's (self-imposed, it could be argued) abortion, he blames himself for turning her away :

A chaque élançement de souffrance, le désespoir, le scandale me labouraient sauvagement le coeur. La douleur s'apaisait un instant et elle renaissait aussitôt : chaque fois, elle se faisait plus violente. Celui qui l'avait couchée sur ce lit, c'était moi. Je n'avais pas voulu entrer dans sa vie, j'avais fui, et ma fuite avait bouleversé sa vie. Je refusais d'agir sur son destin et j'avais disposé d'elle aussi brutalement que par un viol. Tu souffrais à cause de moi, parce que j'existais. [p. 127]

It is unclear in the above passage to whom the physical agony belongs : whether this pain stems from his own psychological anguish, or from the

³² As Elizabeth Fallaize states, "setting a high value on 'personal scruples' [is] progressively revealed in the text to be [...] neuroticism." See The Novels of Simone de Beauvoir, p. 51.

³³ Sigmund Freud, 'The Dissection of the Psychical Personality', (1933 [1932]), New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, p. 92.

horrific bloody tearing at Hélène's womb. The text is pregnant with sexual brutality : that pain which "se faisait plus violente" echoes the increasing sexual intensity of the "viol" for which Jean blames himself. Jean's heightened sense of guilt thus stretches into the physical domain and is raised to neurotic levels of psychosomatic sensation.

This self-castigation means that any form of sexual contact is also tainted by shame, marked by criminality and Beauvoir's textual motif of blood. For example, he confesses that "je me sentais toujours criminel" [p. 137] whenever making love to Madeleine, and although Hélène has entered into a relationship with him knowing that he does not love her exclusively, he feels guilt for her despair at seeing her rival Madeleine's lipstick, described almost as a bloodstain :

Je me sentis rougir. C'était toujours la même histoire. Sur ma chair cette trace rouge qui n'existait pas pour moi et que tes yeux voyaient; une tache insensible qui était cette morsure dans ton coeur. [p. 143]

It is almost as if guilt is the core of Jean's identity, in any and every guise, endlessly capable of self-invention, chameleon-like and inescapable :

la honte était là. Il fallait bien m'habituer à vivre avec elle, c'était la nouvelle figure du remords. On pouvait la chasser d'un coin de sa vie, la polir, la rendre bien lisse et bien nette : aussitôt, on la retrouvait tapie dans un autre coin. Elle était toujours quelque part. [p. 155]

Adam Phillips states that

A capacity for guilt seems to define our sense of what it is to be human; on this psychoanalysis and the Judaeo-Christian religions agree. Freud simply added the idea of unconscious

guilt - and the violence of guilt itself - to the picture, seeing it, towards the end of his life, as a fundamental obstacle to psychoanalytic cure; the patient desperately needs his symptoms as a punishment. His symptoms are his [illusory] cure.³⁴

If this is the case, then where is the real road to recovery for Jean? How does he overcome this neurosis which seems to cling obscenely to his sense of self, as does the smell of guilt which has invaded his childhood and has since either stuck incessantly to his skin (“tenace, insistante, je sentais rôder autour de moi une odeur fade” [p. 197]) or splashed into his life like a bloodstain, yet which he appears eager to embrace? As psychoanalytic readers we should perhaps now pose the “real question”, according to Phillips, which “is not how one gets into guilt, but how one gets out of it.”³⁵

Other critics have also discussed Jean’s progression towards a final, freeing paragraph which, as I hope to show, represents a neurosis overcome. For example, Alex Hughes’ perceptive interpretation of Jean’s evolution (in this case his moral evolution) is as follows :

(i) a primordial or formative phase, which establishes other-related culpability as his dominant - indeed obsessive - characteristic;

(ii) a phase of non-interventionism during which, in an effort to ‘se garder pur’ (238), he tries unsuccessfully to avoid confronting the ‘malédiction originelle’ (194) of our dangerous entanglement with the existence of other people;

³⁴ Adam Phillips, On Flirtation, London: Faber and Faber, 1995, p. 141.

³⁵ *ibid*, p. 143. Phillips is quoting here from Friedrich Ohly’s The Damned and The Elect: Guilt in Western Culture, trans. Linda Archibald, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

and (iii) a final phase that is characterized by radical action, by a commitment to the freedom of the individual/Other, and by a lucid acceptance of the price the pursuit of that freedom may elicit.³⁶

In psychoanalytic terms, this evolution could also be schematised into :

- i) the overdeveloped superego responsible for his sense of guilt due to childhood trauma and an unresolved Oedipus complex;
- ii) a descent into depression, or, in Freudian terms, melancholia, with its ambivalent conflict, emotional withdrawal and correlative mourning for a lost love-object (the mother); and
- iii) an eventual liberating libidinal cathexis onto another woman, and a final understanding and acceptance of that necessary evil which is his superego.

The resulting resolution of his Oedipus complex returns Jean to the Lacanian *Père* before a final cathartic confrontation with the demons of the past and the death of the present.

Having discussed Jean's childhood trauma, his Oedipal pattern and internalised, uncompromising superego above, let us therefore now move on to the second phase, which represents his slow and tortuous libidinal withdrawal from the maternal body, and its resulting melancholia.

On leaving the family home, and his mother, Jean's despairing thoughts are distinctly ambivalent, tinged not only with an intense sadness, but also with a fury and contempt :

Nous étions libres, libres de salir nos âmes, de gâcher nos vies;
elle ne prenait que la liberté d'en souffrir. C'était pire que si elle

³⁶ Alex Hughes, Le Sang des autres, p. 10.

avait exigé quelque chose. J'aurais pu haïr ses exigences et ses reproches. Mais elle était là, rien de plus : je lui en voulais d'être là; simplement parce qu'elle était là. C'était sa présence même qu'il me fallait détester. Pouvais-je l'aimer et haïr sa présence? Je ne comprenais pas et je me débattais contre la vérité. [p. 32]

Jean's confusion is evident here : his vacillations between contempt, blame and self-doubt throw his emotional turmoil into relief. As Freud states in 'Mourning and Melancholia', it is indeed possible both to love and hate the attachment-object from which, unwillingly, the patient is forced to withdraw his libido :

In melancholia, the occasions which give rise to the illness [...] include all those situations of being slighted, neglected or disappointed, which can import opposed feelings of love and hate into the relationship or reinforce an already existing ambivalence.³⁷

Such a violent break with maternal identification is for Freud a necessary stage, a fact later recognised by Jean himself : "nous en serions toujours arrivés là : mon départ, sa solitude [p. 35]." As Jessica Benjamin writes, according to classical psychoanalytic theory "male children achieve their masculinity by denying their original identification or oneness with their mothers";³⁸ the maternal body must be disavowed : "the boy must struggle free with all the violence of a second birth from the woman who bore him."³⁹ And yet Jean Blomart's struggle seems at times to engulf him. He remains emotionally suffocated by this maternal body, incapable of connecting with

³⁷ Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', (1917 [1915]), The Penguin Freud Library vol. 11, On Metapsychology, London: Penguin, 1991, p. 260.

³⁸ Jessica Benjamin, The Bonds of Love, p. 75.

³⁹ *ibid*, p. 81.

the outside world, unwilling finally to cut the cord and enter into a mutually satisfying sexual relationship with another woman. Sinking into an alienating melancholic state, he refuses to involve himself in either political or sexual responsibility.

The initial stage of Jean's Oedipal resolution thus appears in many ways to be a step backwards in terms of infantile development, a regression into a primary narcissism. In 'Mourning and Melancholia', Freud writes that the usual reaction to the loss of a loved object involves

a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment.⁴⁰

We have examined above Jean's endless "self-reproaches and self-revilings"; let us now briefly turn to this loss of "the capacity to love", which is the tragic legacy of what Jessica Benjamin, in The Bonds of Love, the feminist reinterpretation of Freudian psychoanalysis to which I have already referred, terms "one-sided differentiation." Benjamin's view is that

because men originally define themselves through separation from and opposition to the mother, [...] they reject experiences of merging and identification that blur the boundary between subject and object.⁴¹

At this stage Jean cannot even attempt to cross this boundary, and it is only in the final pages of Beauvoir's novel that he is able to take part in a relationship based on the mutual recognition advocated by Benjamin. Jean

⁴⁰ Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', p. 252.

himself speaks of a barrier between them, believing it to be an emotional block caused by Hélène Bertrand, and thus refusing all responsibility for his ego's self-imposed solitude :

c'est Hélène qui dressait une barrière entre nous. Souvent je me tournais vers elle avec l'espoir de lui faire partager mes hésitations, mes angoisses; mais j'étais seul; elle me regardait avec soupçon : c'était presque une ennemie qui marchait à mes côtés. Seul dans la paix douceâtre qui était en train de mourir, seul dans le supplice de l'attente, ayant bu jusqu'à la lie la honte, et souhaitant l'explosion qui m'arracherait enfin à moi-même. [pp. 202-203]

As Alex Hughes has observed, Jean's deeper, spiritual and non-sexual love seems "reserved for the Mother alone,"⁴² and while still in mourning for the loss of the maternal body, as Freud writes of melancholics, Jean cannot yet "adopt any new object of love (which would mean replacing [her])."⁴³

This inability to love beyond the maternal body is sustained even in the face of his mistress's intense adoration. When thinking of Hélène Bertrand, he realises that "sa présence me touchait, mais loin d'elle, jamais je ne pensais à elle : je l'aurais quittée d'un jour à l'autre sans regret. Ma tendresse, mon estime étaient bien loin de l'amour" [p. 136]. Jean's alienation also extends beyond his romantic entanglements, hinting at an ego which has withdrawn from any human connection. Freud, again in 'Mourning and Melancholia', writes specifically of an "emptying" of the ego which would seem to reflect Jean's isolation :

⁴¹ Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*, p. 190.

⁴² Alex Hughes, *Le Sang des autres*, p. 39.

⁴³ Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', p. 252.

The complex of melancholia behaves like an open wound, drawing to itself cathectic energies - which in the transference neuroses we have called 'anticathexes' - from all directions, and emptying the ego until it is totally impoverished.⁴⁴

Jean's sense of individual alienation from his compatriots means that he is trapped within his "impoverished", empty ego which, while acting as a makeshift screen from his sense of guilt (if he does not act, he has less responsibility), still does not dam the inescapable memories of the past, and brings him no relief in the form of human contact :

chacun portait sa vérité au plus secret de lui-même hors de toute atteinte; ce qui lui arrivait n'appartenait qu'à lui seul; aucune compensation ne serait jamais possible. [pp 154-155]

Jean's refusal to interact is couched in terms of negation, alienation and absence : "hors de toute atteinte" he is "lui seul", with "aucune compensation". Jean is thus at this stage incapable of replacing the lost love-object with another, having withdrawn into a brittle shell of emotional solitude. Following his friend Jacques' death during a political demonstration, he withdraws even further from external object-attachments, remaining inside this shell, torn between his repressed desire and guilt, until his mourning is complete and his ego becomes free to discover other libidinal cathexes. Despite leaving his father's home and escaping his law, he is therefore still trapped emotionally until he is able to love a woman who is not his mother. Let us therefore move forward to the next stage of analysis, which can finally include Beauvoir's other textual (if somewhat muted) voice, Hélène Bertrand.

⁴⁴ *ibid*, p. 262.

As already discussed in chapter one, Simone de Beauvoir viewed Freud as primarily reductive and essentialist in his catalogue of women's many 'deficiencies', which included their castration complex/penis envy. Yet it could be argued that Beauvoir's own depictions of women - the narcissist and *l'amoureuse* among them - are equally essentialist. Nor are these depressing portraits of contemporary women restricted to Le Deuxième Sexe - as I hope to demonstrate in the current study, most of her female fictional protagonists are haunted by madness, depression, a problematic sexuality and a debilitating reliance on their stronger, more active male counterparts, whom they idealise.⁴⁵ Initially, Hélène is no different, representing in many ways a prototype of the 'Freudian woman' so execrated by Beauvoir and later feminists. Hélène's development, however, is more promising : she eventually progresses beyond a Régine-like narcissism (which we shall examine in Tous Les Hommes sont mortels) and apparent God/Father-fixation, and is granted at (and perhaps by) her death a dignity and existential *authenticité* denied to other Beauvoirean heroines.

⁴⁵ In her chapter of the second volume of Le Deuxième Sexe, entitled 'L'Amoureuse', Beauvoir quotes a patient of Pierre Janet, the doctor of nervous illness. The woman seems to echo Hélène's obsessive desire :

Aussi loin que je me souviens, toutes les sottises ou toutes les bonnes actions que j'ai pu commettre viennent de la même cause, une aspiration à un amour parfait et idéal où je puisse me donner tout entière, confier tout mon être à un autre être, Dieu, homme ou femme, si supérieur à moi que je n'aurais plus besoin de penser à me conduire dans la vie ou à veiller sur moi. Trouver quelqu'un qui m'aimerait assez pour se donner la peine de me faire vivre, quelqu'un à qui j'obéirais aveuglement et en toute confiance, sûre qu'il m'éviterait toute défaillance et me menerait tout droit, très doucement et avec beaucoup d'amour, vers la perfection. [p. 551]

Ideal love, its attractions and dangers, as I have repeatedly stated, were obviously favourite preoccupations. See Le Deuxième Sexe, vol. 2, pp. 546-581.

When Hélène is first introduced to the reader, she appears convinced of her own superior uniqueness, and, like Xavière of L'Invitée, is initially portrayed as a child-like and self-centred figure. During her childhood, we are told, she “faisait ce qu'elle avait envie de faire sans jamais hésiter” [p. 47] and her later behaviour appears no less solipsistic. As Paul tells her,

- tu as besoin de t'imaginer que ce qui t'arrive est unique, et que tu es unique toi-même.
- J'en suis bien persuadée, dit Hélène. [p. 51]

Alone in her room, she loses herself in an intense gaze of self-absorption before her mirror, which is the shimmering, seductive Lacanian realm of Imaginary mastery :

Elle remonta dans sa chambre et s'approcha de la glace. “Mes yeux, mon visage,” pensa-t-elle avec un peu d'exaltation. “Moi. Il n'y a que moi qui suis moi.” C'était rare qu'elle arrivât à tirer d'elle-même ces brèves étincelles; on avait beau toucher sa propre main comme si elle vous avait été étrangère, tout de suite on se retrouvait au coeur d'une intimité sans espoir. [pp. 55-56]

That her intimacy is “sans espoir”, however, immediately alerts the reader to a deeper unhappiness behind the façade. She cannot escape from her self, and remains trapped within this despairing narcissism until her Resistance activities later in the text. At this stage, she feels little empathy for those around her. Attached to Paul, who grants her a sense of security, she does not however appear to love him, feeling merely “toute confortable avec ce bras solide autour d'elle [p 52].” Nor does she spare his feelings at any stage in the text, projecting a harsh self-protective screen of unconcern :

il avait l'air tout malheureux. "Je ne suis pas gentille," pensa Hélène. Mais quoi? depuis si longtemps, elle mijotait dans son propre suc, elle avait besoin d'un peu de nouveauté; si elle ne se souciait pas de ses intérêts, personne ne s'en soucierait pour elle; c'était la règle : chacun se préférait. [p. 53]

She is not yet in the grip of the idealised love she later bears for Jean, a frustrated desire which, as we shall see, reflecting Jean's reaction following the loss of his mother, causes Hélène to sink into a deep sense of self-annihilation. She also subsequently withdraws into a melancholic depression, during which she feels that "il n'y avait que du vide autour d'elle [p. 100]."

Returning to her first meeting with Jean Blomart, as we can see from the above passage ("elle avait besoin d'un peu de nouveauté"), she is at a particularly vulnerable stage. Apparently dissatisfied with her family life, and stagnating with the stable, safe Paul, she claims a little too vociferously to be utterly self-sufficient : "Je n'ai besoin de personne. J'existe, moi, Hélène; est-ce que ce n'est pas suffisant?" [p. 55]. The interrogative tone, however, betrays her sense of insecurity, and later clues in the text point also to her boredom, her self-hatred and her lack of direction :

Paul l'aimait, c'était sûr, il l'aimait depuis trois ans avec fidélité, [...] mais elle ne se sentait pas tellement précieuse à ses yeux; elle n'était précieuse pour personne. [p. 55]

Cette lumière triste; dehors la bruine qui tombe. Et moi. On est là. Pourquoi là, justement? Moi. Qui? quelqu'un qui dit moi. Et un jour cette présence ne sera plus sentie par personne. Elle appuya sa main contre le zinc. C'est impossible. J'ai toujours été là, j'y resterai toujours, c'est l'éternité. Elle considéra ses pieds, ils étaient rivés au sol; comment pourrait-elle jamais bouger? pour aller où? [p. 67]

It is significant that after describing herself in such helpless terms, forlorn in the "lumière triste," suddenly "dans le froid glacé, une flambée crépita" [*ibid*]. At this moment Hélène places her future in Jean's unwilling hands : "lui saurait me dire" [*ibid*]. Blomart is cast as a sparkling flame, Hélène's torch in the fog of confusion which surrounds her. He is, typically, a strong Beauvoirean hero for her lost and misguided heroine, who idealises and idolises him. Benjamin writes that

woman's missing desire so often takes the form of adoring the man who possesses it [; Women] seem to have a propensity for what we may call "ideal love" - a love in which the woman submits to and adores an other who is what she cannot be.⁴⁶

Hélène has not yet discovered her way out of her self in the form of the Resistance struggle which will lead her to personal fulfilment and into a relationship which is mutually supportive. At this stage, she sees in Blomart an active force - as she cannot yet become like him, she wishes instead to possess him in the sense of an exclusive love, referring to their tenuous relationship in absolute terms : "lui seul existe." [p. 100] Benjamin, who interprets traditional Freudian penis envy as a desire for a bond with the father and the symbolic phallus because of its connotations of liberatory power and autonomy, rather than as a desire for the physical organ itself, applies this theory when discussing the ideal/identificatory love (the love valued by Hélène) :

The longing for the missing phallus, the envy that has been attributed to women, is really the longing for [...] a homoerotic bond [...], just such an identificatory love. This is why there are

⁴⁶ Jessica Benjamin, The Bonds of Love, p. 86.

so many stories of woman's love being directed toward a hero such as she herself would be - the wish for discipleship, serving an idol, submission to an ideal.

[...] The more common variety of adult ideal love [is] a woman's adulation for the heroic man who rejects love for freedom.⁴⁷

In the same way, Beauvoir portrays H  l  ne as unsure, weak and flickering, obsessed by her love, a foil for Jean's shining freedom, determination and self-possession - all of which however, as we have seen, are illusory, hiding his dark inner emotional emptiness. In her eyes, though, he is all she is not, feeling at this stage in the text "rien qu'une petite fille superficielle, capricieuse." [p. 66]

This emphasis on her own childlike nature is revealing, since, as I will now discuss, H  l  ne's ideal love for Jean is based partly on the infantile relationship she shared with her childhood God, whom she has now lost. One of the few childhood memories Beauvoir grants H  l  ne is of "l'oeil bienveillant de Dieu" [p. 248]. Her child's view of God is as a protective paternal force, whom she evokes later in the text, just before driving to her death :

Elle se sentait l  g  re et combl  e comme aux plus beaux soirs de son enfance, quand elle reposait dans les bras d'un Dieu paternel. [p. 301]

This childhood father-figure is also mentioned on our first introduction to H  l  ne; with the first hint of her insecurity, she wonders "Qui se souciait d'elle en cet instant?" [p. 55], wistfully thinking back to a time when she felt loved and secure :

⁴⁷ *ibid*, p. 111.

Elle était là, baignée dans l'odeur de miel et de cacao qui montait dans la boutique ; elle aurait pu être n'importe où ailleurs, ç'aurait été juste pareil. Dans son enfance, elle n'était jamais ni là ni ailleurs : elle était dans les bras de Dieu ; il l'aimait d'un amour éternel et elle se sentait éternelle comme lui ; blottie dans la pénombre, elle lui offrait chacun des battements de son cœur et le moindre de ses soupirs prenait une importance infinie puisque Dieu même le recueillait. Paul était moins attentif ; et même s'il l'eût été davantage, Paul n'était pas Dieu. *[ibid]*

This idealised figure is described in terms of permanence and strength, offering her “un amour éternel”, “une importance infinie.” Hélène is looking for a replacement for this God, someone who will take over the rôle of a reliable, admired protector who has vanished from her life. With him, there will be a renewed sense of meaning and purpose; as she confides to Jean, “Quand j'étais petite, je croyais en Dieu, c'était magnifique; quelque chose était exigé de moi, à chaque instant, alors il me semblait que je *devais* exister.” [p. 92]

Hélène is desperate to relive her childhood love affair with an ideal of her infancy, the dependent stage which provides the emotional foundation for later erotic love. Freud himself, in his paper on narcissism, emphasises the strong connection between the chosen love-object and the childhood ideal :

Being in love consists in a flowing-over of ego-libido on to the object. [...] It exalts the sexual object into a sexual ideal. Since, with the object type (or attachment type), being in love occurs in virtue of the fulfilment of infantile conditions for loving, we may say that whatever fulfils that condition is idealized.⁴⁸

Elsewhere, discussing specifically the child's vision of God, in ‘The Question of a Weltanschauung’ he writes as follows :

⁴⁸ Sigmund Freud, ‘On Narcissism : An Introduction’, (1914), in On Metapsychology, pp. 95-96.

this god-creator is undisguisedly called 'father'. Psychoanalysis infers that [for the religious man] he really is the father, with all the magnificence in which he once appeared to the small child. [...] the father [...] also protected and watched over him in his feeble and helpless state, exposed as he was to all the dangers lying in wait in the external world; under his father's protection he felt safe. When a human being has himself grown up [...] his insight into the perils of life has also grown greater, and he rightly concludes that fundamentally he still remains just as helpless and unprotected as he was in his childhood, that faced by the world he is still a child. Even now, therefore, he cannot do without the protection which he enjoyed as a child. [...] He therefore harks back to the mnemic image of the father whom in his childhood he so greatly overvalued. He exalts the image into a deity and makes it into something contemporary and real.⁴⁹

Jean Blomart is Hélène's "contemporary and real" deity - she believes that his emotional stability stems from his solid, eternal values and a God-like higher sense of purpose : "vous savez pourquoi vous vivez. [...] Moi, je ne sais pas [*ibid*]," states Hélène flatly. Revealingly, Jean's refusal to accept this idealising mantle of deification is couched in religious language : "elle me harcelait de questions : on aurait dit qu'elle me prenait pour Dieu le Père" [p. 92]; "Les larmes de Madeleine ou les larmes d'Hélène? [...] comment donc comparer leurs amertumes étrangères? Je n'étais pas non plus Dieu." [p. 144].

Jean's refusal to accept the rôle of lover/protector, and with it the God-like status with which he is invested in Hélène's eyes leads her to a deep depression, which parallels his own. Unlike Jean, however, Hélène displays disturbingly semi-masochistic tendencies, suffering a brutal abortion and

⁴⁹ Sigmund Freud, 'The Question of a Weltanschauung', in New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, (1933 [1932]), pp. 198-199.

constantly exposing herself to Blomart's harsh rebuffs, hysterically contemplating suicide and dragging her thoughts through a mire of seemingly deliberate despair. Having followed Jean obsessively, he finally tells her that her devotion is misplaced and futile, which leads her to a hysterical and childish display of fury :

- Ah! mais je ne me laisserai pas faire, dit-elle. [...] Tous les jours j'irai vous guetter à la sortie de l'atelier, je vous suivrai dans les rues, je... [p. 118]

When Jean, locked inside his private emptiness, leaves her alone in the flat, her plans become increasingly extreme :

Cela, elle pouvait le faire : se faire du mal. Je voudrais rouler dans le ruisseau et dans un an il me rencontrerait au coin d'une rue et je lui dirais : "Tu viens, chéri", et il s'écrierait : "C'est vous!" [...] Vous avez besoin de distraction. Il va voir comme je vais me distraire! Je vais me saouler à en crever et je passerai sous un autobus, et Paul lui dira : "Hélène a passé hier soir sous un autobus." Il fera une drôle de figure. [pp. 120-121]

In this way she displays characteristics of the Freudian melancholic as described in 'Mourning and Melancholia' :

Feelings of shame in front of other people [...] are lacking in the melancholic, or at least they are not prominent in him. One might emphasize the presence in him of an almost insistent communicativeness which finds satisfaction in self-exposure.⁵⁰

In her absolute and uncompromising adoration of Jean, Hélène has no shame. For example, she displays an "insistent communicativeness which finds satisfaction in self-exposure" when she flatly tells Jean that she has slept with Pétrus purely to gain his elusive attention :

⁵⁰ Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', in On Metapsychology, p. 255.

- Je voulais me venger, dit-elle.
- Mais quelle drôle de vengeance!
- Je pensais que si vous saviez, vous auriez des remords. [pp 126-127]

Hélène's love for Jean is hardly based on the mutual recognition of two subjects advocated by Benjamin in The Bonds of Love, although such desperate measures are guaranteed to win her some sympathy for her emotional anguish, and serve to reinforce the iciness of Jean's stance, which is an appropriate fictional foil for her burning intensity.

Sinking later into a void of depression, during which she feels completely erased, she becomes, like Jean, an ego emptied of everything :

Elle essuya ses yeux. Dieu n'existait pas, elle n'aimait pas Paul. Jean ne l'aimait pas. Toutes les promesses étaient fausses. L'avenir s'écoulait goutte à goutte hors de la ville, et le passé se vidait; une carapace sans vie qui ne méritait pas un regret; il tomba déjà en poussière; il n'y avait plus de passé; il n'y avait pas d'exil. La terre entière n'était qu'un exil sans retour. [p. 248]

Without Jean, Hélène's universe has become a desert wasteland, the result of apocalyptic destruction : her ego itself is in exile. Writing of identificatory love, Benjamin speaks of its ability to subsume the self :

The dangers of identification arise in adult life, Freud suggests, when we cannot live up to our ideal and so make the loved one the "substitute for some unattained ego ideal of our own." This love of the ideal can become so powerful, Freud points out, that it is stronger even than desire for sexual satisfaction. The "devotion" of the ego to the object becomes so compelling that the subject loses all conscience : "In the blindness of love remorselessness is carried to the pitch of crime. The whole situation can be completely summarized in a formula : *The object has been put in the place of the ego ideal.*"⁵¹

⁵¹ Jessica Benjamin, The Bonds of Love, p. 144.

Hélène's loss of Jean is equated with a loss of her self, and a loss of her sense of purpose, or "unattained ego ideal." Unable to find any purpose for her life, she has internalised Jean's ego as her own - and when he leaves her, so does her sense of self. "Je n'existe pas pour lui," she states, "Je n'existe pas du tout." [p. 101]; later, she feels as if "elle n'avait plus ni corps ni âme. Seulement cette voix qui dit : "Je ne suis plus moi."" [p. 264] Hélène lives her life as an absence, lost in the void of heartbreak and lacking any psychological foundation : "perdue sous un ciel insolite, elle assistait à une histoire d'où sa présence était exclue. "Exactement comme si je n'étais pas là."" [p. 265]

Totally depersonalised, she does not yet feel a need to mourn the loss of her nation to the Nazis. It is only when she reconnects with the atrocity around her - particularly the brutal deportation of the Jewish children - that she can progress beyond her narcissistic self-absorption and false, obsessive love into what Benjamin terms a "transitional space", which is the ideal aim of the psychoanalytic process :

Ideally, in the psychoanalytic process, analysand and analyst are able to create a transitional space, in which the line between fantasy and reality blurs and the analysand can explore his own inside. The analytic relationship then becomes a version of the space within which desire can emerge freely, can be felt not as borrowed through identification but as authentically one's own.⁵²

⁵² *ibid*, p. 127.

During Hélène's collaborative dance with a German, she catches sight of herself in the mirror. Unlike her former self-hypnosis however, when she is transfixed in the delusional specular space by the Lacanian illusion of the Imaginary unified body, the reflection has the refractive power of shattering a myth. Hélène sees her true self; her "own inside" is finally accessible : "C'est bien moi. Elle se voyait." [p. 273]. It is at this point in the text, as both Hughes and Fallaize have noted, that Hélène changes. Her desire, in the form of an awakening social conscience, emerges freely, not "borrowed through identification" from Jean, but "as authentically [her] own." Jean can now love her as she has always wished to be loved, thus freeing his own libido and allowing the narrative to progress towards a tragic but redemptive conclusion, a conclusion to which we can now finally turn.

In his essay on 'The Development of the Libido and the Sexual Organizations', Freud writes that

the human individual has to devote himself to the great task of detaching himself from his parents, and not until that task is achieved can he cease to be a child and become a member of the social community. For the son this task consists in detaching his libidinal wishes from his mother and employing them for the choice of a real outside love-object, and in reconciling himself with his father if he has remained in opposition to him.⁵³

Jean's eventual mastery of his neurosis involves both the possibility of an external libidinal cathexis (his deep love for Hélène), and his ultimate return to, and reconciliation with, the Lacanian *Père* in the form of Monsieur Blomart

⁵³ Sigmund Freud, 'The Development of the Libido and the Sexual Organizations', (1917 [1916-17]), in Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, p. 380.

and his political action. This action, and its resulting blood loss, is finally accepted by Jean as an inevitable debt which is due to the community :

- nous devons agir, dit Blomart. Nous n'existons que si nous agissons.

[...] Il était là, [...] disposant avec des mots d'un sang qui n'alimentait pas son propre coeur. Mais ce n'était pas de lui qu'il était question.

[...] - J'ai appris de cette guerre que le sang qu'on épargne est aussi inexpiable que le sang qu'on fait verser, dit Blomart. [p. 244]

Jean finally accepts his guilt as an inevitable consequence of his actions, and thus appears to break from the chains of blame with which he has tethered himself to inaction. It is significant that he returns to the fold of the Father directly after the above exchange : "je suis réconcilié avec mon père" [p. 279] In a sense, therefore, he accepts the law/the name of the Father - the name of Blomart which, he has felt until now, has stuck to his skin and annihilated the person he wishes to be. Jean thus exemplifies Benjamin's view of the "seemingly unbreakable circle, [in which filial] revolt is always followed by guilt and restoration of authority."⁵⁴

The circle is also closed in a repetition of the scene at the dinner table, a scene already quoted, and to which I now return for a different form of analysis. When Madame Blomart reads of the deaths of the twelve hostages, her horror is in direct contrast to her husband's reaction :

- Est-ce qu'ils ne vont pas se dénoncer? dit ma mère. Est-ce qu'ils vont laisser fusiller douze innocents?

⁵⁴ Jessica Benjamin, The Bonds of Love, p. 6.

[...] “Ils se doivent à la cause, dit mon père. Il est tout fier. C’est lui qui a jeté la bombe et il ne regrette pas son acte; c’est un homme fort.” [p. 288]

The triad then proceed to the table, where Jean must once more eat the soup and literally swallow his guilt, a guilt he assumes to be guessed at by his mother : “*Elle sait. Je sais qu’elle sait. Elle ne me pardonnera jamais.*” [p. 289] He is apparently still fantasising a close communion with Madame Blomart, since it is never explicit from his first-person narrative that she definitely knows Jean is indirectly responsible for the deaths of the hostages. Alternatively, her son could be projecting his own guilt onto his mother. In either case, in a reversal of the former supper scene Jean swallows the soup to placate/deceive her and lines up instead with the father. There is thus a significant change of allegiance - having lost his mother’s approval and won that of Monsieur Blomart, he sides with him : by returning to the father and becoming “un homme fort” Jean also breaks away from the Oedipal dyad and their shared values. In a Freudian sense, this is a natural and necessary progression from the Oedipal love which can never be consummated. Although he admits that “je voudrais que ma mère me borde dans mon lit, qu’elle m’embrasse longtemps; je voudrais rester ici” [*ibid*], he leaves, knowing that ultimate separation from her was inevitable : “je ne peux pas rester; son regard me chasse.” [p. 290] He has entered the Lacanian domain of the Symbolic, accepted the brutal law of the Father, is a “criminel [...] résigné au crime” [*ibid*].

This final break from the mother, therefore, hints that his libido is free and that he can now love Hélène - an emotional love which goes far beyond the sexual love he has already shared with her. To speak briefly of this sexual relationship, there are many textual clues that their lovemaking has been far more satisfying both spiritually and sexually than the cold sense of criminal guilt which has assaulted Jean during his nights with the detached Madeleine. There is therefore already a definite progression in terms of his emotional development, and a hint at their later close bond. He states specifically (echoing the final pages of the novel) that “Il y a eu au moins cette minute dans ma vie où [...] je n’ai pas marchandé avec ma conscience. [...] tu m’as sauvé du remords” [pp 136-7]. Hélène’s willingness to give of herself is already a step forward on the path towards the resolution of their problematic sexuality - with Paul, she feels a glutinous mollusc (“une obscure et flasque méduse couchée sur un lit d’orties enchantées” [p. 104]);⁵⁵ with Jean she can finally be “une femme toute entière [...] pas perdue dans le tumulte de [son] sang” [p. 137] However, although Jean may be sexually fulfilled, at this early stage of their relationship he does not love her; he is still detached. It is only following his farewell to his mother and his guilt, and his respective acceptance of the phallic order in terms of the political action it may symbolise that he can truly give himself to Hélène.

⁵⁵ Beauvoir frequently employs Sartrean mollusc terminology for sexual imagery, hinting at a personal disgust with the body. It is interesting in this context to note that Freud himself, in his - arguably highly reductive - lecture ‘Symbolism in Dreams’, writes that “among animals, *snails* and *musshells* at least are undeniably female symbols.” See ‘Symbolism in Dreams’, (1916 [1915-16]), in Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, pp. 190-191.

Yet it is not simply his insertion into the phallic order which leads Jean beyond his neurosis. His spiritual love for Hélène, his “seul amour” [p. 306], also inserts him into the emotional order of mutually responsible society, and brings him to recognise that “chacun est responsable de tout devant tous” [Beauvoir’s epigraph, taken from Dostoyevsky, p. 9]. In The Bonds of Love, Benjamin defines her ideal of “the intersubjective mode where two subjects meet, where not only man but also woman can be subject [and an] alternative to the phallic order”⁵⁶ as follows :

recognition of the other is the decisive aspect of differentiation. In recognition, someone who is different and outside shares a similar feeling; different minds and bodies attune.⁵⁷

Both Hélène and Jean share a common cause in their Resistance struggle. They are thus ethically attuned, and their relationship can reach a different level of understanding. The mourning for his mother complete, Jean’s libido is free, and his ego is no longer empty, but uninhibited. There is no longer talk of a barrier which separates him from Hélène :

- Tu seras en danger, et je ne serai pas près de toi : je ne peux pas supporter ça, dit-il.
- Tu seras près de moi, dit-elle. La distance n’y fait rien : tu es toujours près de moi.

⁵⁶ Jessica Benjamin, The Bonds of Love, p. 126.

⁵⁷ *ibid.* It is worth drawing attention to the fact that Benjamin’s definition of recognition is remarkably similar to Beauvoir’s concept of *réciprocité* as outlined in Le Deuxième Sexe, which involves the recognition of the other as a free, responsible subject. Referring to ideal heterosexual love, she writes :

Sous une forme concrète et charnelle, s’accomplit la reconnaissance réciproque du moi et de l’autre dans la conscience la plus aiguë de l’autre et du moi. [...] l’altérité n’a plus un caractère hostile; c’est cette conscience de l’union des corps dans leur séparation qui donne à l’acte sexuel son caractère émouvant; il est d’autant plus bouleversant que les deux êtres qui ensemble nient et affirment passionnément leurs limites sont des semblables et sont cependant différents. [Le Deuxième Sexe, vol. II, Paris: Gallimard, 1949, p. 189.]

Il mit un bras autour de ses épaules et elle appuya sa joue contre la sienne :
- Tu as raison, dit-il. Maintenant, rien ne nous séparera, jamais.
[p. 302]

Death, however, is the final stage of the text, the ultimate separation which breaks them apart and forces Jean to face his guilt once more. In an analogy of the psychoanalytic procedure, he must deal with the past which floods into his memory and replays past traumas. Freud, writing of transference, describes the psychoanalytic procedure as follows :

a violent struggle takes place in the patient's mind about the overcoming of each resistance [...] between the motives which seek to maintain the anticathexis and those which are prepared to give it up. The former are the old motives which in the past put repression into effect; among the latter are the newly arrived ones which, we may hope, will decide the conflict in our favour. We have succeeded in reviving the old conflict which led to repression and in bringing up for revision the process that was then decided. [...] Thus we may expect to lead the revived conflict to a better outcome than that which ended in repression.⁵⁸

In the same way, with Hélène's impending death, the "old conflict" is revived in Jean, and the old guilt threatens. Throughout the night he has examined his past; he has relived the return to the father and subsequent separation from the maternal body. The final process, his decision on the sabotage plans, is reserved by Beauvoir for the last sentence of the work, and leads both Jean and the text to "a better outcome". The "newly arrived motives" which allow him to decide this conflict, and give his assent, are those provided by the resolution of his Oedipal complex, his newly-found libidinal

⁵⁸ Sigmund Freud, 'Transference', in Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, 1917 [1916-17]), p. 489.

freedom in his love for Hélène, and her unselfish absolution of his internalised guilt and its neurosis with their intensely moving final exchange.

To conclude, I return to Benjamin's concept of recognition, as outlined in The Bonds of Love :

A person comes to feel that "I am the doer who does, I am the author of my acts," by being with another person who recognizes her acts, her feelings, her intentions, her existence, her independence. Recognition is the essential response, the constant companion of assertion. The subject declares, "I am, I do," and then waits for the response, "You are, you have done." Recognition is, thus, reflexive; it includes not only the other's confirming response, but also how we find ourselves in that response.⁵⁹

When Hélène whispers before she dies that she is the author of her own acts, she is not only relieving Jean of his guilt, but also allowing him to recognise her as an autonomous subject, and say "You are, you have done" :

- Hélène, tu sais que je t'aime.
- Oui, maintenant, tu m'aimes, dit-elle. Elle serra sa main. Je suis heureuse que tu sois là; tu penseras à moi.
- Mon seul amour, dit-il. Tu es là. Et c'est par ma faute.
- Où est la faute? dit-elle. C'est moi qui ai voulu y aller.
- Mais j'aurais pu te le défendre.
Elle sourit : Tu n'avais pas le droit de décider pour moi.
Les mêmes mots. Il la regarda. C'est bien elle. Elle disait :
c'est à moi de décider. [p. 306]

The couple therefore make a positive exchange, granting each other freedom and independence, drawing the tale to a conclusion. Since the death of the child, Jean has felt soaked in the blood of others. Now, far from being the stagnant stench and stain of Jean's childhood, this blood is a mark he can

⁵⁹ Jessica Benjamin, The Bonds of Love, p. 21.

wear, if not with pride, at least with courageous resignation. He can, at last, accept his curse as an innocent stone on the path of other's choices, and therefore travel more lightly on his own way, towards "ces horizons futurs où ne rôderait aucun remords" [p. 24], the dream of his youth. The final words of the text : "je suis d'accord" are a fresh decision, compelled by a struggle with former conflicts, a hint at a resolution both of the text and of Jean's neurosis. Hélène's death grants Jean's life, and by implication his future, a renewed meaning, no longer based on guilt and shame. In order to validate her loss, he must continue to fight.

We see therefore, that although the final tone of the novel is one of redemption and closure, Beauvoir's pet themes of love and loss are again evident in Le Sang des autres. Furthermore, as with Quand prime le spirituel and L'Invitée, although the childhood chapters concerning Hélène were removed, there is still direct, explicit reference to Jean's - and Hélène's own - infantile experience, which to some extent explains their later attitudes and behaviour. And, once more, Beauvoir's own unconscious seeps into her sentences. The Oedipal conflict, the idealisation of the mother followed by alliance with the father, the need for symbiosis with a powerful masculine figure on whom the central female protagonist is heavily dependent for her own sense of solid identity : all these themes recur insistently in Le Sang des autres.

Beauvoir's next text, Tous Les Hommes sont mortels, however, escapes the current critical parameters. Its metaphysical message may be clear

enough when read against Le Sang des autres, for Jean Blomart states : “Il y a une chose pour laquelle on peut accepter la mort. [...] C’est pour que ça garde un sens de vivre. [p. 202]” Deaths of future hostages can be accepted by him, for they are validated by other lives Jean can save : their deaths pass meaning to the struggle, a struggle which in turn grants sense to their sacrifice. Beauvoir’s next fictional hero cannot find death, and hence by extension all “sens de vivre” is forever beyond his grasp. Yet beyond this metaphysical message, from a psychoanalytic standpoint we could ask whether the text is completely beyond our critical grasp. In a novel which - as we shall see in the following chapter - stands alone in Beauvoir’s corpus, do Beauvoir’s themes still murmur beneath the text in a drumming of insistent, obsessional repetition? Or does Beauvoir’s fantasy of immortality also leave us without a sense of purpose? Let us therefore now move on to Tous Les Hommes sont mortels and enter into its eternal search for meaning.

CHAPTER FIVE

TOUS LES HOMMES SONT MORTELS

Simone de Beauvoir's next work, Tous Les Hommes sont mortels, displays an abrupt shift in tone and genre from her previous texts. While still revolving around Beauvoir's endlessly returning themes of the fragility of constructed identity and the lure of idealised love, the text is unique among her works in that it seems to draw more on myth than philosophy, and could even be described as a novel along the fantastic lines of Latin American magical realism. The subject of this chapter - her fourth published work, representing the midway point in her fictional writing career - is therefore a more marginal text in Beauvoir's corpus, for it escapes her usual literary framework of realist fiction.

The novel is also a marginal text in terms of the current critical psychoanalytic perspective since in a sense it also escapes all systematic classification. Instead of patterns of Oedipal triangles, and beyond Beauvoir's obsessive preoccupations of identity and love, Tous Les Hommes sont mortels treats the sweeping themes of immortality, the loss of boundaries and the disturbing disintegration of differentiation. Neither protagonist can be neatly summarised or diagnosed as hysterical, and the text thus successfully builds into itself its own uncontainable core theme of irreducibility. Although another would-be dyadic pair takes centre stage in a psychoanalytic drama of symbiosis and separation, unlike Hélène and Jean of Le Sang des autres each ultimately finds the needs of the other impossible to fulfil. The entire

novel hinges upon this impossibility, concluding on a note of frustration which is paradoxically profoundly satisfying thematically, for Beauvoir's anti-hero of Tous Les Hommes sont mortels can be read as a literary representative of ever-deferred signification.

Has Simone de Beauvoir thus beaten psychoanalytic literary theory? Admittedly, the thematic thread of this thesis is threatened by the shadowy literary analysands of Fosca and Régine, since their text presents us with problems we have not yet encountered. This, however, is no reason to abandon a psychoanalytic reading of the novel; as I argue below, we can still use both Lacan and Freud to help us extract innovative readings from the text. In fact, by using these theorists' critical tools I demonstrate how psychoanalysis in fact offers different ways of handling texts themselves. Furthermore, the novel still reveals the emotional residues of Beauvoir's own unconscious textual patternings. If it is true that this specific textual peg will not fit into the triangular hole of Oedipal structures, as already stated above Beauvoir's themes of identity and symbiotic union are still firmly in evidence, even if they apparently escape the critical grid of the psychoanalytic literary approach. Let us therefore begin this reading of Beauvoir's novel, bringing to the text both a Freudian and a Lacanian critical lens, and discovering what a psychoanalytic reading through each reveals.

In Tous Les Hommes sont mortels, Beauvoir tells of an immortal Count, a mortal actress and their doomed love affair. Their desire is unsatisfied, remaining in a permanent Lacanian void which escapes both meaning and closure; the synthetic end towards which both they and the narrative strive

remains in a Sartrean present which is forever ahead. This present - time itself - is also a protagonist in the novel, both acting as a catalyst for the couple's interaction and ultimately separating them, since their temporal boundaries can never be the same. "Mankind," writes Sigmund Freud, "never lives entirely in the present."¹ Raymond Fosca's story, however, is the tale of a man condemned to live as an unwilling embodiment of the Freudian repetition compulsion, trapped in an eternal present which also symbolises the Derridean web of interminably deferred meaning. Fosca is the main narrative focus of the work, relating the tale of his life as an endless renewal of the same story. His listener is the narcissistic actress Régine, intent on immortality through an unforgettable memory she will leave to Fosca through her talent and beauty. Caught in the empty realm of the Lacanian Imaginary, self-obsessed and yet initially vulnerably reliant on the flattering reflections she glimpses in both the mirrors around her and the eyes of others, she is however desperate to attain in Fosca what she views as the Symbolic, the Count being the only man who is capable of giving her a signifying identity which will outlast her lifetime.

Although Simone de Beauvoir's fictional works are intensely bound up with her existential precepts, and she thus may be referring to the lure of *mauvaise foi* and *le regard des autres* by her references to reflections, in this chapter I shall introduce a different perspective by using Lacan's lecture on the mirror stage - defined by him as "la transformation produite chez le sujet,

¹ Sigmund Freud, 'The Dissection of the Psychical Personality,' (published 1933, written 1932), in New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, p. 99.

quand il assume une image.”² I will analyse Régine, and her motif of the mirror, using this Lacanian theory in an attempt to see beyond the glittering reflection she projects. I will then return to Freudian psychoanalysis and look at Régine through the lens of narcissism - a state which Freud in fact regarded as ultimately untreatable by psychoanalysis. As stated above however, our second analysand is simple neither to define nor to understand. Fosca, being immortal, is beyond conventional analysis; he is an aimless Lacanian free-floating signifier in the infinite linguistic chain of history. Although the story of his life, as in Le Sang des autres, is the core of the novel, and appears to be what Adam Phillips refers to as “a progress narrative through time,”³ it never reaches either the Freudian death instinct’s goal of quiescence, or the conventional narrative’s aim of finality. Fosca is unable to attain a sense of his own identity, and, like Régine, finds human empathy ultimately impossible.

The conclusion of the novel, therefore, far from the redemptive tone of Le Sang des autres, is both empty and, as I will explain, using Peter Brooks’ psychoanalytic literary theories as developed in his Reading for the Plot, a necessarily disappointing goal for the reader. Neither Régine nor Fosca are inherently “treatable” - Fosca even escapes definition on his own account. There is thus no neat, psychoanalytic closure, and indeed we could not have expected one with such an analysand.

² Jacques Lacan, ‘Le stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je telle qu’elle nous est révélée dans l’expérience psychanalytique’, in Écrits, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966, pp. 93-100, p. 94.

³ Adam Phillips, On Flirtation, London: Faber and Faber, 1995, p. 7.

Let us first turn, however, to Régine and her constant search for elusive definition. Throughout the text of Tous Les Hommes sont mortels, mirrors surround Régine, whose life is likened to "un grand lac où le monde se reflétait en pures images immobiles."⁴ Before meeting Fosca, who leads her to a horrific understanding of her own inevitable annihilation, Régine is dependent on these mirrors around her for their calming confirmation of her identity. During her slow realisation of her own irrevocable future history (her place as object in, not subject of, history), and thus what could be termed her tentative entry into the lucid awareness of the Symbolic order which structures humanity, however, she comes to understand that the reflection is only a specular image of lack, and that her identity is trapped in its own alienation. In these later, more lucid moments, her mirrors only serve to taunt her with an empty sparkle which she comes to see as a deceptive reflection of a hollow truth.

Régine is very quickly introduced as a reflection to the reader. During the first paragraph, for example, we read of her image shining in the endless eyes of an adoring audience : "dans chaque face, il y avait des yeux, et au fond de tous ces yeux, Régine s'inclinait et souriait [p. 13]." A stage actress by profession, she is therefore already deeply dependent on the perception of others for a sense of her own reality, needing their stage-door adulation :

Ils disaient les mots qu'ils devaient dire : "C'est génial! C'est bouleversant! Et leurs yeux brillaient d'enthousiasme : une petite flamme qui s'allumait juste à propos. [pp. 13-14]

⁴ Simone de Beauvoir, Tous Les Hommes sont mortels, Paris: Gallimard, 1946, p. 91. All quotations are taken from this edition.

She is warmed by the glow of approval emanating from this controllable flame of enthusiasm, but when she finds herself without the audience, away from the theatre, she needs other reflections. Similar to Sartre's Estelle of Huis Clos, she must look at herself when in particular need of reassurance : for example, threatened both by Florence's talent and her potential for happiness ("cette blessure acide dans mon coeur" [p. 16]), Régine immediately seizes her powder mirror, eager to reassert her sense of superior self. This self is also desperate to apprehend itself, to be both existential reflection and spectator :

Elle sortit une petite glace de son sac et feignit de rectifier l'arc de ses lèvres; elle avait besoin de se voir; elle chérissait son visage; [...] "Ah! si seulement j'étais deux, pensa-t-elle, une qui vive et l'autre qui regarde, comme je saurais m'aimer! Je n'envierais personne." [p. 16]

By thus splitting her ego not only would Régine be assured of a mirror at all times, but, more importantly, would also be able to control the image thrown back at her, in an attempt to avoid the alienating identity concomitant with Lacanian reflection.

Her aim is impossible, however, since alienation is inevitable, as Lacan himself states in his lecture on the mirror stage, defining it as

un drame dont la poussée interne se précipite de l'insuffisance à l'anticipation - et qui pour le sujet, pris au leurre de l'identification spatiale, machine les fantasmes qui se succèdent d'une image morcelée du corps à une forme que nous appellerons orthopédique de sa totalité, - et à l'armure enfin assumée d'une identité aliénante.⁵

⁵ Jacques Lacan, 'Le stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du *Je* telle qu'elle nous est révélée dans l'expérience psychanalytique', p. 97.

At this stage of Tous Les Hommes sont mortels, Régine, protected by this “armure [...] d’une identité aliénante” still seems enraptured by the flattering specular image beamed back at her by adoring spectators. Although alienated from her body, it in fact seems less real to her than this image thrown to her by her lover, her audience and herself. When she first meets Fosca, therefore, she is disconcerted by his empty eyes, unable to find herself in them :

Il la regarda. Du moins son regard se posa sur elle [...] mais il ne la voyait pas. Elle ne savait pas ce qu’il voyait, et pendant un moment elle pensa : est-ce que je n’existe pas? N’est-ce pas moi? [...] Elle resta figée sur place, sans voix, sans visage, sans vie : une imposture. [p. 21]

It is from now on that her reflection slowly begins to flicker and blur, and she perceives the masks of both her social and personal identity as façades, relics as fragile as her treasured Japanese masks, which later she symbolically smashes in a frenzy of panic. Following Fosca’s revelation that he has immortal status, Régine sees the mirror-tiled world around her of theatre (the audience’s eyes, the dressing-room mirrors) and nightclubs (the mirrors around the restaurant) as nothing but a distant, dancing illusion, Lacan’s “destination aliénante [du Je]”⁶ :

Tout [...] semblait si lointain : la musique, les voix, les rires, les visages connus et inconnus dont les glaces du cabaret reflétaient à l’infini les images papillotantes. [p. 54]

Disconnected from her surroundings, she enters the ladies’ and, again, sees that her reflection represents an identity which, in fact, was never hers - it is

⁶ *ibid*, p. 95.

instead the Shakespearean character of Rosalind who has received the audience's adulation :

Dans la glace des lavabos elle aperçut son visage; elle était pâle, avec des narines pincées, des plaques de poudre sur les joues.

- Voilà tout ce qui reste de Rosalinde. [p. 55]

It is as if, in a flash of lucidity, Régine grasps the difference between her transient, fragile persona⁷ and her own personality.

During the histrionic scene at her dinner party, a few pages before the narrative focus shifts to Fosca and his tale of civilisation and its discontents, Régine feels the mirror begin to crack disturbingly :

“Ce soir, je veux leur montrer mon vrai visage...” Elle s’approcha de la glace et sourit. Son sourire se figea. Ce visage qu’elle avait tant chéri avait l’air d’un masque, il ne lui appartenait plus; son corps aussi lui était étranger : un mannequin. De nouveau, elle voulut sourire, et le mannequin sourit dans la glace. Elle se détourna : dans un instant, elle allait se faire des grimaces. [p. 102]

Régine no longer perceives a flattering, cohesive image of a mastered identity, but sees herself with horror as a fragmented puppet. Following Fosca’s confession, she realises she is still obsessed with phantoms, incapable of being anything other than an alienated mannequin with a fractured smile, on its way to death. There is no refuge from her own mortality, and her idealised fiction of omnipotent control is revealed to her as a sham. As Lacan states in his lecture, the concept of the Ideal-I, that illusory

⁷ The concept of the persona is in fact Jungian (Jung and Freud were at odds most of their lives, following Jung’s secession). The word derives from the term for a Roman actor’s mask, and is also used to refer to a character in a drama. It would thus seem fitting in this particular context to deviate slightly from specifically Freudian terms. Jung defined the term ‘persona’ as an individual’s manner of dealing with the exterior world : in effect, it is the social mask which hides interior thoughts.

phantom which is the apparently cohesive image in the mirror, serves only to situate the ego

dans une ligne de fiction, à jamais irréductible pour le seul individu, - ou plutôt, qui ne rejoindra qu'asymptotiquement le devenir du sujet.⁸

Régine is eventually forced from this fictional direction, and made to face the Real future ahead of her by Fosca's forthcoming tale of his six centuries of history. It could be argued, therefore, that Fosca brings Régine out of her specular hypnosis. Before we turn to Fosca's story, however, and prior to our brief return to Freud with an examination of Régine's narcissism and megalomania, let us first analyse how, loath to leave the mirror stage, she attempts to turn Fosca into another reflecting gaze, hoping to find in him a mirror which this time will not shatter around her.

"Sous son regard," Régine believes, she is "hors de l'espace, hors du temps [p. 56]." She has not yet progressed beyond her *mauvaise foi* and the desire to see in her reflection a comforting *méconnaissance* of power and control which will help her cheat death. When, for example, she gives an impromptu recital at Florence's supper party, Régine no longer searches for her gratifying reflection in the eyes of "pauvres hommes sans importance [p. 13]," as she describes her provincial audience at the beginning of the novel. Instead, she turns to Fosca's immortal gaze, which has seen the greatest actresses of her own century, and other artists long before :

- Fosca, murmura-t-elle, écoutez bien. C'est pour vous que je vais dire ces vers.

⁸ Jacques Lacan, 'Le stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je telle qu'elle nous est révélée dans l'expérience psychanalytique', p. 94.

Il inclina la tête. Il la contemplait avidement avec ces yeux qui avaient regardé face à face tant de femmes célèbres par leur beauté, par leurs talents. Pour lui, tous ces destins épars composaient une seule histoire, et Régine entrait dans cette histoire; elle pouvait se mesurer avec ses rivales défuntes, avec celles qui n'étaient pas encore nées. "Je triompherai d'elles et j'aurai gagné la partie dans le passé et dans l'avenir." Ses lèvres bougèrent et chaque inflexion de sa voix se répercutait à travers les siècles des siècles. [p. 67]

Her reflection, however, is as precarious as her previous projected identity; for when Fosca's eyes leave her, she perceives her world as a hollow lack, indicative of her sense of alienation :

Elle pensait à Fosca qui était resté planté au milieu du salon et qui regardait d'autres femmes. Elle avait cessé d'exister pour lui et dans l'éternité; le monde autour d'elle était creux comme un grelot. [p. 68]

Not only have Fosca's eyes seen too much, for far too long, but they are too capable of moving away from Régine's brilliance and beauty.

According to Lacan, desire begins precisely where there is a lack. Knowing she must die, Régine is desperate to overcome the void of her anticipated annihilation through Fosca's desire for her. This desperation, however, is doomed, since all desire has become deadened for him over six centuries which have been all too similar. As we shall see, although at first he appears to need Régine, Fosca's lack is now too great ultimately to be filled by any human need. He sees the hollowness of Régine's mirror stage for what it is : "le jeu de glaces, les glaces vides ne reflétant l'une l'autre que leur vide" [p. 104]. Immune to the specular shimmer, he also knows he cannot save her from her own emptiness :

Il souriait et elle était nue jusqu'à l'os. Il lui arrachait tous les masques, et même ses gestes, ses mots, ses sourires; elle n'était plus que ce battement d'ailes au milieu du vide. "Elle

essaie, elle essaie.” Et il voyait aussi pour qui elle essayait : derrière les mots, les gestes, les sourires, en tous la même imposture, le même vide. [p. 106]

Not only is he unable to perceive a flattering fullness where there is only an endless void, but he also acts as an unwilling mirror, telling her that “quand on est vivant, on ne se contente pas de regarder” [p. 88]. Fosca, therefore, is beyond the illusory bliss of the mirror stage, finding a sense of completion only fleetingly with Régine and then returning to his inevitable emotional apathy : “j’avais retrouvé l’attente, l’ennui, le désir,” he tells her, “mais jamais encore cette illusion de plénitude” [p. 79]. It is significant that - as already stated above in chapter three - Terry Eagleton refers to the mirror stage specifically as “a world of *plenitude*, with no lacks or exclusions of any kind,”⁹ although, of course, as we have seen, and as Fosca says, this reflection of plenitude is a deceptive illusion. Régine is also referred to in Tous Les Hommes sont mortels in terms of lack, disconnection and emptiness, hinting at the truth behind the social façade of the successful actress : her sparkling image is only an alienating projection. Even during sex with Fosca, for example, Régine can only feel she is “ce désir, ce vide brûlant, cette épaisse absence” [p. 108], lost in narcissistic despair at her own inability to connect.

Freud, in his 1914 paper ‘On Narcissism : An Introduction,’ wonders what the catalyst for the emergence of the state of narcissism could be, since only the auto-erotic instincts exist from the start of the infant’s life :

the ego has to be developed. The auto-erotic instincts [...] are there from the very first; so there must be something added to

⁹ Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory, p. 166.

auto-erotism - a new psychical action - in order to bring about narcissism.¹⁰

In his lecture on the mirror stage, Lacan speaks of “la relation évidente de la libido narcissique à la fonction aliénante du *je*,”¹¹ thus filling a Freudian gap with his theory of the mirror phase. With Lacan’s reply to Freud’s question in mind, let us now return to the question itself, and turn briefly to his concept of narcissism, exploring the text of Tous Les Hommes sont mortels with a Freudian theoretical map.

Firstly, it should be clarified that although the term ‘narcissism’ has, as Rycroft states, “inescapable disparaging overtones,”¹² according to Freud, like the superego and Oedipus complex it is an unavoidable part of childhood development, and a necessary intermediate stage between ego formation and external libidinal cathexis. As Rycroft is swift to point out,

classical theory distinguishes between *primary narcissism*, the love of self which precedes loving others, and *secondary narcissism*, love of self which results from introjecting and identifying with an object.¹³

Régine, however, seems trapped in a destructive primary narcissism which prevents her from any positive empathy with others, being obsessed with herself and trapped by her hopeless desperation to impose her formidable will on the world around her. Fosca, with characteristic, simplifying perspicacity, states flatly “Vous pensez trop à vous” [p. 97]. It is interesting from the

¹⁰ Sigmund Freud, ‘On Narcissism : An Introduction’, (1914), in On Metapsychology, Penguin Freud Library vol. 11, London: Penguin, 1991, pp. 59-97, p. 69.

¹¹ Jacques Lacan, ‘Le stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du *Je* telle qu’elle nous est révélée dans l’expérience psychanalytique’, p. 98..

¹² Charles Rycroft, A Critical Dictionary of Psychoanalysis, p. 107.

¹³ *ibid.*

current perspective that Beauvoir even draws a literary parallel between Régine and the narcissus flower, mythical symbol of solipsism :

Elle effleura du bout des doigts les narcisses posés sur la table.
Et si je croyais moi aussi : je suis immortelle. Le parfum des
narcisses est immortel, et cette fièvre qui gonfle mes lèvres. Je
suis immortelle. [p. 52]¹⁴

Narcissistically obsessed with herself and her own needs, she must relate everything back to an ego which appears utterly insatiable : when Roger offers her his loyal but mortal love, for example, she refuses, stating coldly “Rien ne me suffit” [p. 69]. Her empathy is only ever on her own terms, and, as we have already seen from her obsession with mirrors and reflections, she is lost in an endless examination of her own beauty, in truly narcissistic fashion. Freud (making, it must be stated, yet another sweeping generalisation about his vision of the female essence) writes as follows about the narcissistic streak in beautiful women :

Women, especially if they grow up with good looks, develop a certain self-contentment which compensates them for the social restrictions that are imposed upon them in their choice of object. Strictly speaking, it is only themselves that such women love with an intensity comparable to that of the man’s love for them. Nor does their need lie in the direction of loving, but one of being loved; and the man who fulfils this condition is the one who finds favour with them.¹⁵

Let us take this controversial paragraph as our starting point for a brief analysis of Régine through the optic of Freudian narcissism. From the beginning of the novel, we see that her love for others is portrayed as extremely limited : Roger, for example, is only loved “autant qu’elle pouvait

¹⁴ There is in fact a deep irony implicit in this sentence, in that death, not immortality, is the result of Narcissus’ self-absorption - he wastes away for love of his own reflection.

¹⁵ Sigmund Freud, ‘On Narcissism : An Introduction’, p. 82.

chérir un autre qu'elle-même" [p. 33]. As Freud states, the narcissist's "attitude towards men remains cool,"¹⁶ and Régine is desperate to be loved, not to love, hence maintaining her hitherto "unassailable libidinal position"¹⁷ by investing all emotional cathexes in her own ego. She has few scruples about using those around her and then casting them aside in boredom :

[Fosca] l'agaçait; elle eut envie soudain de troubler son repos et d'exister pour lui. Il n'y avait qu'à parler; c'était toujours si facile: ils répondaient, et le mystère se dissipait, ils devenaient transparents et creux et on les rejetait loin de soi avec indifférence; c'était si facile même qu'elle ne s'amusait plus guère à ce jeu, elle était sûre d'avance de gagner. [pp. 20-21]

Her power over others is a game to her, one she is sure to win, and which thus brings little emotional reward. Like her Lacanian mirrors, their opinion is only a hollow, transparent shell filled by her own projected desire. Régine thinks of others only in as much as they threaten her own sense of control over her private universe, unable even to accept that they exist on their own accounts : "elle avait horreur de s'endormir; pendant qu'on dormait, il y avait toujours d'autres gens qui veillaient, et on n'avait plus aucune prise sur eux" [p. 19].

With Régine's wish to control others' destinies, she therefore also seems to betray distinct megalomaniac tendencies along with her narcissism - fittingly, since according to Freud

megalomania is the direct result of a magnification of the ego due to the drawing in of the libidinal object-cathexes - a

¹⁶ *ibid*, p. 83.

¹⁷ *ibid*.

secondary narcissism which is a return of the original early infantile one.¹⁸

The supremacy of her ego is Régine's personal obsession, and during the novel she betrays a deep desire to leave a wake of destruction and drama behind her, thus making her mark on others and history. When in the sterile surroundings of her hotel room, for example, she laments the fact that she will leave no trace of her own past or personality in the atmosphere :

Tout sera juste pareil, et je ne serai plus là. "C'est cela la mort, pensa-t-elle. Si du moins on laissait dans les airs une empreinte où le vent s'engouffrerait en gémissant; mais non; pas une ride, pas une faille. Une autre femme sera couchée sur ce lit..." [pp. 28-9].

She wishes to shape the very air around her, thus leaving her own image imprinted on time. Similarly, her supper party is carefully planned down to the most minute, exquisite detail - not for her guests' pleasure, but merely to satisfy her own desire for omnipotent control :

Régine voulait faire de cette soirée un chef-d'oeuvre dont aucune copie ne fût possible. Elle aimait recevoir. Pendant toute la nuit leurs yeux refléteraient ce décor où s'écoulait sa vie, ils mangeraient les plats préparés par ses soins, ils entendraient les disques qu'elle avait choisis pour eux : toute la nuit, elle régnerait sur leurs plaisirs. [p. 101]

Again, it is only in order to enjoy an adoring reflection of her own taste and beauty that Régine wishes to give to others.

As we can see, therefore, she appears incapable of relating to objects beyond herself, and her libidinal position seems terrifyingly pristine, as sterile as the anodyne hotel rooms through which she passes while on tour. Fosca,

¹⁸ Sigmund Freud, 'The Libido Theory and Narcissism', (1917 [1916-17]), in Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, The Penguin Freud Library, vol. 1, London: Penguin, 1991, p. 474.

however, appears to upset this libidinal balance to a certain extent, just as he has already interrupted the mirror stage, revealing her reflection to be nothing but sharp shards of insidious delusion. Although it is clear in Tous Les Hommes sont mortels that Régine does not love Fosca - as Fallaize has noted, she merely tries "to use him for her own ends"¹⁹ - she does seem to need him more than she needs Roger, Annie or others in their seemingly vast entourage. We could ask at this point why such a confirmed narcissist should connect with - and even need - Fosca. A summary answer, still in Freudian terms, could be that in his inhuman self-sufficiency Fosca is an alluring representation of Régine's own ego ideal. In The Bonds of Love, Jessica Benjamin writes of this ideal as

the locus of the child's desire for omnipotence and aspirations to perfection [,] the ego ideal represents the narcissistic love of the perfect being, whose nearness produces heights of fear and exhilaration, annihilation and self-affirmation. [pp. 148-9]²⁰

Fosca, in Régine's eyes representative of omnipotence and perfection due to his god-like status, is precisely an exhilarating embodiment of affirming power in that he has the potential to save her identity from the future. Referring back to Benjamin, we could also claim that he produces a vertiginous awareness in Régine of her potential for annihilation. Let us therefore now leave the actress and turn to our next analysand, her immortal lover Raymond

¹⁹ Elizabeth Fallaize, The Novels of Simone de Beauvoir, p. 84.

²⁰ Jessica Benjamin, The Bonds of Love, London: Virago, 1993, pp. 148-9.

Fosca, who, by escaping death, is in many ways Beauvoir's own ultimate hero.²¹

Tous Les Hommes sont mortels traces Fosca's cycle of behaviour from his initial withdrawal into his own ego, to his emotional reawakening and transient passion for Régine, through his tale of repeated pasts - all different, yet all seemingly the same - and ultimately returns to his withdrawal and despair. There is thus no real progression, because Fosca has nowhere to go. How, therefore, to psychoanalyse him at all? How to treat a character who has "oublié mon passé" [p. 323] and for whom the future is "cette plaine sans limite qui fuyait vers le ciel" [*ibid*]? As a point of departure, we could perhaps try and discover precisely what it is, if he is so difficult to place on our theoretical couch, which sets Raymond Fosca apart from the conventional, psychoanalysable literary character.

As we have seen above, Régine betrays a horror of death, and, until she meets Fosca and learns his secret, refuses to face her own mortality and its Freudian "significance of annihilation."²² Fosca, on the other hand, embodies man's need for death, uniquely recognising that, in its tension with Eros, the death drive holds the necessary dynamic of life. In the following pages I will

²¹ The fear of death is a constant preoccupation in all Beauvoir's writings. In La Force de l'âge, she writes as follows :

La mort m'a épouvantée dès que j'ai compris que j'étais mortelle. Au temps où le monde était en paix et où le bonheur me paraissait sûr, je retrouvais souvent le vertige de mes quinze ans devant cette absence de tout qui serait mon absence à tout, pour toujours, à partir d'un certain jour; cet anéantissement n'inspirait tant d'horreur que je n'admettais pas qu'on pût l'affronter de sang-froid : dans ce qu'on appelle courage, je ne voyais qu'une aveugle légèreté. [La Force de l'âge, Paris: Gallimard, 1960, p. 686.]

Yet another private obsession, therefore, surfaces in her fiction.

²² Sigmund Freud, 'Thoughts for the Times on War and Death,' (1915), in Civilization, Society and Religion, The Penguin Freud Library, vol. 12, London: Penguin, 1991, p. 82.

analyse the elusive Fosca, employing such Freudian concepts as the death instinct and the repetition compulsion in an attempt to define him. In terms of a Lacanian definition, I will turn to the psychoanalyst's lecture 'Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage en psychanalyse',²³ where he also discusses the death instinct and history. Finally, I will draw a parallel between Fosca and the death drive of narrative, using Peter Brooks' theories in Reading For The Plot, examining the human need for conclusion and its implications both for writing and for life itself.

Firstly, therefore, let us return to Freud, and his theory of the death drive. Fosca realises - too late - that death is a necessary goal which grants meaning and consequence to life's actions. In his chapter on 'Our Attitude Toward Death' Freud writes as follows :

Life is impoverished, it loses in interest, when the highest stake in the game of living, life itself, may not be risked. It becomes as shallow and empty as, let us say, an American flirtation, in which it is understood from the first that nothing is to happen, as contrasted with a Continental love-affair in which both partners must constantly bear its serious consequences in mind.²⁴

For Fosca, trapped in an impoverished, deathless existence, all meaning is lost, for he can no longer relate to the concept of risk, or consequence, or morality. As Phillips writes in On Flirtation, analysing Freud's essay,

A world without loss [...] is a world without morality. Life is only of value [...] because, or when, we can risk it. It is worth having - and here Freud inserts the notion of choice - because we can live in a way that endangers it. [...]
For Freud, [...] flirtation was the relationship for those who were too fearful of death, those who must agree to make nothing

²³ In Écrits, pp. 237-322.

²⁴ *ibid*, p. 79.

happen. But like the continental lovers, of course, they cannot agree not to die.²⁵

Although Fosca is not fearful of death, flirtation is still the only relationship of which he is capable. He has agreed not to die, and as a result must face a valueless universe to which he can never fully commit himself, since he knows he will win every romantic game and see his prizes dissolve in a cloud of ephemeral dust. Each of his love affairs, Continental or otherwise, is revealed in retrospect to be only a “shallow and empty [...] flirtation,” one in which nothing of value has really happened, in an all too distant past. No sacrifice is validated, for he has nothing to lose, as Béatrice reminds him :

vous, qu'est-ce que votre courage? [...] vous donnez sans compter vos richesses, votre temps, vos peines, mais vous avez tant de millions de vies à vivre que ce que vous sacrifiez n'est jamais rien. [p. 214]

For Fosca, blessed and cursed with his million lives, life is never fresh, but an interminable repetition of a past with the same characters, the same emotions and the same plot. In ‘Beyond The Pleasure Principle,’ Freud writes of the patient’s compulsion to “*repeat* [...] material as a contemporary experience instead of, as the physician would prefer to see, *remembering* it as something belonging to the past.”²⁶ In the same way, Fosca’s past blurs into his present : both remembrance and contemporary experience are mixed into an eternal, inescapable and unchangeable now. Similarly, the psychologist Oliver Sacks, referring to a specific patient with a brain tumour, describes his lack of distinction between past and present as a

²⁵ Adam Phillips, On Flirtation, pp. xx/xxiii.

confinement, in effect, to a single moment - "the present" - uninformed by any sense of a past (or a future). Given this radical lack of connection and continuity in his inner life, [...] he lacked the constant dialogue of past and present, of experience and meaning, which constitutes consciousness [...]. He seemed to have no sense of "next" and to lack that eager and anxious tension of anticipation, of intention, that normally drives us through life.

[...] he seemed immured, without knowing it, in a motionless, timeless moment.²⁷

In the same way, since he is suspended in a lack of meaning, there is for Fosca no experience from which to learn. Instead, every action is compulsively repeated throughout centuries past and present in a psychoanalytic "continual disclosure of the past."²⁸ Life is "toujours le même effort, le même échec. [...] Toujours ils recommencent l'un après l'autre," as he tells Régine. "Et moi je recommence, comme les autres" [pp. 92-3]. In mediaeval Carmona, he feels the same lassitude : "Jour après jour les mêmes gestes [...]. Sans fin! M'arrivera-t-il jamais de me réveiller dans un autre monde, où le goût même de l'air serait différent?" [p. 187].

Tired of life, Fosca yearns for death. It is in 'Beyond The Pleasure Principle' that Freud fully discusses this death drive, claiming that life is a result of the tension between Eros and the death instincts, which drive us unceasingly forward - or indeed backwards - to our former state of inorganic quiescence :

It would be in contradiction to the conservative nature of the instincts if the goal of life were a state of things which had never yet been attained. On the contrary, it must be an *old* state of

²⁶ Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond The Pleasure Principle,' (1920), in On Metapsychology, the Penguin Freud Library vol. 11, London: Penguin, 1991, p. 288.

²⁷ Oliver Sacks, An Anthropologist On Mars, Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995, p. 49.

²⁸ Adam Phillips, On Flirtation, p. 12.

things, an initial state from which the living entity has at one time or other departed and to which it is striving to return by the circuitous paths along which its development leads. If we are to take it as a truth that knows no exception that everything living dies for *internal* reasons - becomes inorganic once again - then we shall be compelled to say that '*the aim of all life is death*.'²⁹

When Fosca begs Régine passionately to save him from his empty, circuitous paths of history, it is as if he is asking her specifically to return him to this original state of being :

- Sauvez-moi de la nuit et de l'indifférence, dit-il. Faites que je vous aime et que vous existiez entre toutes les femmes. Alors le monde retrouvera sa forme. [p. 58]

If he loves her enough to care about the next moment, if he can imagine himself mortal once more, it will be as if the world can find its original shape : the initial state of inorganic nature could be within his grasp. We know, however, that it is only Régine who will attain this state; Fosca is eternally condemned to his indifferent night, and must watch her die. Any retrieval of the Freudian "initial state" can only be vicarious, for the theme of the death instinct is threaded through the text primarily in Fosca's reactions to the deaths of those he loves. When Marianne passes away, for example, he is desperate to follow her, briefly remembering the others :

Catherine était morte, et Antoine, Béatrice, Carlier, tous ceux que j'avais aimé étaient morts, et j'avais continué à vivre; j'étais là, le même depuis des siècles; [...]. J'enfonçai les doigts dans la terre, je dis avec désespoir : "Je ne veux pas." Un homme mortel aurait pu refuser de poursuivre sa route, il aurait pu éterniser cette révolte : il pouvait se tuer. [p. 438]

Suicide may be the ultimate revolt against life, and yet, according to Freud, death is always the ultimate, unavoidable goal : it is the proof of humanity.

²⁹ Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond The Pleasure Principle,' pp. 310-11.

Wrapped - and trapped - in his protective curse, Fosca has only prevented himself from reaching what Schopenhauer terms the “true result and to that extent the purpose of life.”³⁰ There will never be any quiescent origin for Fosca : although his life is an interminable cycle, humanity’s ultimate origin will forever remain tantalisingly beyond its ceaseless whirl.

Lacan, forever returning to Freud’s theories, also discusses the death instinct in his lecture ‘Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage en psychanalyse’, claiming that

l’instinct de mort exprime essentiellement la limite de la fonction historique du sujet. Cette limite est la mort, non pas comme échéance éventuelle de la vie de l’individu, ni comme certitude empirique du sujet, mais selon la formule qu’en donne Heidegger, comme “possibilité absolument propre, inconditionnelle, indépassable, certaine et comme telle indéterminée du sujet”, entendons-le du sujet défini par son historicité.

En effet cette limite est à chaque instant présente en ce que cette histoire a d’achevé. Elle représente le passé sous sa forme réelle, c’est-à-dire non pas le passé physique dont l’existence est abolie, ni le passé épique tel qu’il s’est parfait dans l’oeuvre de mémoire, ni le passé historique où l’homme trouve le garant de son avenir, mais le passé qui se manifeste renversé dans la répétition.³¹

Thus death confirms the subject, defines him and places him in history. Although he may operate looking forwards, it is only towards a horizon of illusion : he operates in terms of his death, which is his ordering principle, his limit to his life, the ultimate limit of a past which he has not yet had. Without death, Fosca is therefore without definition; there is no “passé qui se manifeste renversé dans la répétition” :

³⁰ Schopenhauer quoted by Freud in ‘Beyond The Pleasure Principle,’ p. 322.

³¹ Jacques Lacan, ‘Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage en psychanalyse’, p. 318.

- Je vis et je n'ai pas de vie. Je ne mourrai jamais et je n'ai pas d'avenir. Je ne suis personne. Je n'ai pas d'histoire et pas de visage. [p. 48]

Not only is death the concept which defines the man, it also defines emotion by its structuring force of potential absence, thus granting him the possibility of empathy. Lacan states that "vie et mort se composent en une relation polaire au sein même de phénomènes qu'on rapporte à la vie."³² By removing death, one of Fosca's poles of reference is removed, and he is thus no longer able to gauge life as a normal man :

la guerre était finie, nous fêtions la victoire; ils ne demandaient rien de plus. Moi je voulais tenir ma victoire entre mes mains. Où était-elle? En vain cherchais-je sur ces visages l'ardeur d'un après-midi de bataille, l'odeur de la poussière et de la sueur, le poids écrasant du soleil sur les armures d'acier. [...] Je me levai, j'ouvris brusquement la chemise qui serrait mon cou. Mon sang affluait dans ma tête et dans ma poitrine; ma vie allait éclater comme une bulle de feu. L'étoffe se déchira entre mes doigts et je laissai retomber mes mains, mes mains vides. [pp. 169-170]

Arriving at every goal he sets for himself, Fosca is unable to measure joy in victory in the same way; without the fear of death, and its pull against the other instincts, his emotional polar system has been warped beyond repair.

As he relates to Régine :

Je ne pouvais pas mesurer mes désirs. Je ne pouvais pas m'arrêter à meubler un palais, à aimer une femme, à écouter un concert, à être heureux. [p. 266]

Possession and fulfilment of ambition are no longer terms with meaning; when all is attainable, nothing is precious - it merely exists. There is no absence and hence no real presence. Without emotion, Fosca is lost in an

³² *ibid*, p. 317.

isolated wilderness, exempt from all contingent human pattern; he can never travel hopefully because he always arrives. As Phillips writes, “fantasies are reliable *because they cannot be achieved*.”³³ Writing about ambition, he continues :

to have ambitions [...] one needs, firstly, an object of desire, an ideal, a state of the world or of oneself sufficiently separate from oneself to aspire to. So one needs to have perceived a lack, of sorts, in oneself. Secondly, one needs a belief in Time as a promising medium to do things in; one needs to be able to suffer the pains and pleasures of anticipation and deferral.³⁴

Time provides no medium for Fosca; compared with Carlier, he cannot taste violent anticipation. When, for example, Fosca is exploring the New World, although the horizons have shifted, he can always reach the destination. Riveted to the world, possessing it, he cannot love what is there ceaselessly to attain :

Je regardais le fleuve boueux, la savane plate. Parfois il me semblait que cette terre n'appartenait qu'à moi seul, qu'aucun de ses hôtes passagers ne pouvait me la disputer; mais parfois aussi, voyant avec quel amour ils la contemplaient, je sentais que pour moi seul elle était sans voix et sans visage; j'étais rivé à elle, mais j'en étais exclu. [p. 343]

However, as already stated, the one goal Fosca cannot attain is death. Death is not only vital for a sense of value; it is one of the binary oppositions which classifies and organizes the subject. If Fosca is beyond death, he is also beyond classification - he escapes his own identity. Returning to Lacan's lecture, we see also that, as in existential philosophy, death is the only totally essentialising/signifying force for the subject :

³³ Adam Phillips, On Flirtation, p. 44.

³⁴ *ibid*, p. 47.

quand nous voulons atteindre dans le sujet ce qui était avant les jeux sériels de la parole, et ce qui est primordial à la naissance des symboles, nous le trouvons dans la mort, d'où son existence prend tout ce qu'elle a de sens.³⁵

From this perspective, Fosca therefore represents the slippery signifier, forever on the run from the subject (perhaps represented by Régine) who is desperate to pin it down. Although she believes him capable of bestowing an identity on her (in her desired superlative terms), he is impossible for her to describe, remaining a sinister and shadowy figure, perpetually slipping from the comforting stasis of definition :

Que pouvait-on dire de lui? Ni avare, ni généreux, ni courageux, ni craintif, ni méchant, ni bon; devant lui tous ces mots perdaient leur sens. Ça semblait même extraordinaire que ses cheveux et ses yeux eussent une couleur. [p. 85]

Although Régine sees in him the power of ultimate definition, the power to name her, Fosca is incapable of using the words she longs to hear, for after centuries of the same sentences, he feels they have lost their meaning. As he states of Laure :

Si j'avais encore su me servir de mots humains, j'aurais dit : "De toutes les femmes que j'ai connues, c'est la plus généreuse et la plus passionnée, c'est la plus noble, la plus pure." Mais tous ces mots ne signifiaient plus rien pour moi. [p. 511]

This lack of control over words, over the Lacanian signifier, is significant. Régine is desperate for Fosca to write a play for her, the ultimate play, in which she can star as the perfect heroine. However, as we will discuss more fully below, he is immune to her ceaseless reminders, realising that his characters must die all too soon, and that the words are ultimately

³⁵ Jacques Lacan, 'Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage en psychanalyse', p. 320.

meaningless. How can he end a play when he has forgotten all sense of anticipation? Where is his sense of plot if his punctuation is awry? If he cannot live, how can he write?

In Tous Les Hommes sont mortels, as I argue below, narrative is a clear analogy for life, and since Fosca cannot die, the conclusion of the novel is necessarily loosely structured. Peter Brooks, to whom we now turn, writes in Reading For The Plot of the vital tension between origin and ending, taking as his theoretical basis Freud's essay 'Beyond The Pleasure Principle' and using it to examine narrative strategy in general. Conclusions, claims Brooks, are vital for meaning, since they grant the reader a sense of structure, something on which to hang existence. Fittingly, in terms of this chapter, they are also a reminder of death :

Narrative is one of the large categories or systems of understanding that we use in our negotiations with reality, specifically, in the case of narrative, with the problem of temporality : man's time-boundedness, his consciousness of existence within the limits of mortality.³⁶

Narrative order orders our selves, the final sentence of the novel also being the death sentence of the text. From a psychoanalytic perspective, it is worth noting that the analytic procedure in general also heads towards neat closure, the aim being diagnosis and some sense of cure. Writing and analysis therefore also have an inbuilt death drive, a wish to return to the inorganic form of the blank page or the silence of (ac)quiescence. Bearing these concepts in mind, let us now conclude our theoretical explanation of Tous Les

³⁶ Peter Brooks, Reading For The Plot : Design and Intention in Narrative, New York : Knopf, 1984, p. xi.

Hommes sont mortels with a psychoanalysis of the text itself, and its symbol of Fosca.

If, according to both Brooks and Freud, we live for our ends - narrative or otherwise - then there is little wonder that Fosca feels disconnected from humanity. To quote Brooks,

the concept of an ending is necessary to that of a beginning. The idea of "adventure" has to do with what is to come, the *ad-venire*, so that an adventure is a piece of action in which beginnings are chosen by and for ends. The very possibility of meaning plotted through sequence and through time depends on the anticipated structuring force of the ending : the interminable would be the meaningless, and the lack of ending would jeopardise the beginning.³⁷

There are many references in Tous Les Hommes sont mortels to Fosca's sense of interminable meaninglessness. He attempts to stop the flow of time, to give himself some sense of sequence, but it is relentless :

Il y a des moments où le temps s'arrête. [...] Des moments où l'on est par-delà la vie et où l'on voit. Et puis le temps se remet en marche, le coeur bat, vous tendez la main, vous avancez le pied; vous savez encore mais vous ne voyez plus. [p. 35]

Squinting into a future which is too bright and too promising, he can no longer see the horizon towards which his narrative/life must progress; although the plot is interminable, no meaning develops. The plot stagnates for him, and all sense is lost. There is a permanent suspension of the final predication - Barthes' hermeneutic code is scrambled in a faulty transmission from a narrative which in any case is itself unsure of the agreed destination.

³⁷ *ibid*, p. 93.

Plot, states Brooks, is “the internal logic of the discourse of mortality.”³⁸ Being immortal warps all sense of plot; when Fosca attempts to write a play which will be a vehicle for Régine’s talents, he cannot find either the discourse or the logic to fill his empty pages. Furthermore, it is futile to try and create new plots - without a sense of an ending, he cannot rescue meaning from temporal flux, or grant it a totalising structure : “J’ai écrit pendant vingt ans. Et un jour je me suis aperçu que c’était toujours le même livre” [p. 63]. Being disconnected from death, and therefore also from life, neither can he infuse life into his characters :

Par instants un de mes personnages commence à respirer;
mais il s’éteint tout de suite. Ils naissent, ils vivent, ils meurent,
je n’ai rien de plus à dire sur eux [p. 96].

Time is the essence of narrative, according to Brooks, but narrative is necessarily finite, and aware of its - and the reader’s - limitations.

Fosca’s life has been too long; the infinite strata of his psychological foundations are too deep for even the Freudian archaeologist/analyst to plumb, and hence any narrative he produces will escape necessary lengths and limits. As Brooks states,

plot must be “of a length to be taken in by the memory.” This is important, since memory - as much in reading a novel as in seeing a play - is the key faculty in the capacity to perceive relations of beginnings, middles, and ends through time, the shaping power of narrative.³⁹

Although he relates his tale to Régine, Fosca’s memory is unwilling. He wants to forget his pasts : “Si j’avais la chance d’être amnésique...” [p. 35];

³⁸ *ibid*, p. 22.

³⁹ *ibid*, p. 11.

“Laissons le passé [...]. Si je veux redevenir un homme parmi les hommes, il faut que j’oublie le passé” [p. 61]. His past is too long; writing is “seulement pour passer le temps” [p. 75]. Fosca’s discourse can never be one which aims to convey any meaning.

All this, therefore, means that Fosca escapes the confines of traditional psychoanalysis. We cannot write a character for him because his account is too long, too empty for our sense of tense : past merges into present, and the future does not exist. He relentlessly remembers points of origins, and the inescapable linear progression through the centuries masks a dizzying eternal return, yet Beauvoir betrays no Freudian primal scene. Without the tension to drive him, Fosca loses us along the way.

It would seem, therefore, that our psychoanalytic aim has been frustrated by Brooks’ “narrative interminable.”⁴⁰ The analysis leads to no cure, the narrative has no closure, history cannot end. Knowing Fosca is immortal, the reader/analyst is perhaps not surprised by this frustration. After all, the hollow, open ending is necessarily weak. How, after all, can Beauvoir end a novel with no ending? As Brooks states,

If the past is to be read as present, it is a curious present that we know to be past in relation to a future we know to be already in place, already in wait for us to reach it.⁴¹

The future may belong - transiently - to Régine. Fosca, however, the narrative engine of the text, must leave her alone with her blocked desire, and attempt to find what Barthes terms *la passion du sens*. We know, however,

⁴⁰ *ibid*, p. 23.

⁴¹ *ibid*.

that as an eternal exile from meaning his future will never be in place for him to reach it.

How, therefore, to conclude this psychoanalytic reading of Tous Les Hommes sont mortels? Although for Fosca there may be no ending, for Régine, already dying, there is. It could be argued that there is also - in a sense - a psychoanalytic progression in Lacanian terms. "Ce moment où s'achève le stade du miroir," writes Lacan, "inaugure [...] la dialectique qui dès lors lie le *je* à des situations socialement élaborées."⁴² Following Fosca's story, Régine realises she is only an / in a situation shared by millions - an unwilling ant in an ant-heap, a blown blade of grass in a vast field :

Une horrible nausée monta aux lèvres de Régine : dans la prairie, des millions de brins d'herbe, tous égaux, tous semblables...

- Il y a eu un temps où moi seule existais pour vous...

- Oui. Et puis vous m'avez ouvert les yeux...

Elle cacha son visage dans ses mains. Un brin d'herbe, rien qu'un brin d'herbe. Chacun se croyait différent des autres; chacun se préférait; et tous se trompaient; elle s'était trompée comme les autres. [p. 112]

In this way she is brought out of her self, made to step beyond both the Imaginary and her narcissism, and hence makes a progression in a sense, albeit an inevitable progression towards a bleak final page.

"Au fond, toutes les histoires finissent bien," states Régine optimistically halfway through Fosca's narrative of despair [p. 228]. "Et moi?" she asks him at the end of his tale. "Oh! vous! dit-il. [...] Ça finira. [p. 527]." The ending of her own tale ironically means that she must comply with the Symbolic order -

⁴² Jacques Lacan, 'Le stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du *Je* telle qu'elle nous est révélée dans l'expérience psychanalytique', p. 98.

she must slot into the pre-ordained order of history with its interminable, meaningless deaths and, ultimately, its endless unhappy endings.

To bring this chapter to its own ending, we can conclude that Tous Les Hommes sont mortels stands alone both in Beauvoir's fictional corpus and in our psychoanalytic reading of Beauvoirean themes. Although her horror of death is plainly evident in the text, her obsessional repetition of her own key experiences : the permutations of the Oedipal triangle, the fragility of identity, the horrors of breakdown and the lure of idealised love are perhaps not as deeply etched into the novel as they are into the six other texts under examination in this thesis. While Régine is attracted to the charismatic power of her ideal man, as readers we are also aware that she is even more attracted to the Lacanian lure of her own reflection : there is no real desire for symbiotic union with Fosca beyond an attempt to make history. Similarly, the frail nature of identity, while a key theme in the work, is submerged by the looming historical shadow of Beauvoir's central protagonist, and his ultimate escape from psychoanalytic classification.

As stated in my introductory paragraph, Tous Les Hommes sont mortels represented a sharp departure into a different literary genre for Simone de Beauvoir. Significantly, it was a genre to which she would not return. Her next novel, Les Mandarins, which is the subject of my next chapter, marked her reversion to the realist fold. The work also represents a return to the obsessive themes which are spattered almost everywhere in her fiction. Let us therefore move on to Les Mandarins, the novel in which Simone de Beauvoir also places clinical psychoanalysis in the literary dock, and therefore

moves towards an increasingly explicit engagement with the critical motor of this thesis.

CHAPTER SIX

LES MANDARINS

Les Mandarins, Beauvoir's own favourite novel, is probably also her most famous work after Le Deuxième Sexe, winning her both her greatest public acclaim and the Goncourt Prize on its publication in 1954. In the eight years between its appearance and the publication in 1946 of Tous Les Hommes sont mortels, however, Beauvoir worked on her ground-breaking study of female oppression, which would be one of the theoretical foundation stones of the twentieth-century feminist movement. Le Deuxième Sexe represents an important break between Les Mandarins and Beauvoir's previous fiction : after this painstaking analysis of the female condition, she writes far more consciously about women's sexual interaction, their social roles, the mother-daughter relationship and takes as a psychological model the haunting and tragic spectre of *l'amoureuse* for one of the novel's central female protagonists. Having also extensively researched psychoanalytic theory for the polemical purposes of Le Deuxième Sexe, it is clear that these theories were at the forefront of her mind when she came to write her next fictional work, which she began the following year.

As we have already examined in the first chapter, Beauvoir's professed views of psychoanalysis in Le Deuxième Sexe were far from positive. These views also filter into the fictional text of Les Mandarins : as I hope to demonstrate below, through the preoccupations of her central protagonist Beauvoir attempts to hack at the roots of Freudian theory - an action she

perhaps feels validates her own theoretical position, since it is from Anne Dubreuilh's privileged position of the trained expert. It is therefore clear to us as readers that Beauvoir is still vigorously anti-psychoanalysis as a discipline, viewing it as an anaesthetising emotional anodyne, a sterilising force which by normalising neurosis also kills the passion of its patients.

Yet, we could also ask, why does Beauvoir expend so much time and literary effort on this explicit and meticulous deconstruction? Surely this central thematic position is both proof that psychoanalysis is in fact a deep personal preoccupation, and a further validation of the current psychoanalytic optic through which we are reading her texts? Once again, we view in Simone de Beauvoir's fiction a literary transcription of her own private, painful experience : the shadow of the Oedipal triangle reemerges within Anne's relationship with her husband (he is, she states, a substitute for her father), both central characters undergo massive psychological and emotional breakdowns following their separations from their idealised lovers, and their sense of identity is under constant question throughout the work. The Beauvoirean themes of solitude and isolation are once more at the heart of the text.

Les Mandarins can of course be read on many other critical levels, covering as it does the sweeping preoccupations of post-war intellectuals : namely political commitment and action, idealism, ethics and the pursuit of a truth which wavers disconcertingly in the politically unstable winds which follow the comforting value system of absolutes during the war. I wish however in this chapter to examine specifically the psychoanalytic themes of

idealised love and its paranoid delusions, absence and isolation, and the denial of time. Although the madness and insecurity which threaten to shroud the women in Les Mandarins do not totally bypass the male characters (Henri, for example, suffers a *crise d'identité* which mirrors Anne's intense self-doubt, and Robert himself must come to terms with the shattering loss of his own ideals), I will concentrate on the two central female characters of Anne Dubreuilh and Henri's mistress Paule, both of whom, he hints, are repressed and unhappy in their particular fashions : "il éprouvait une pitié presque angoissée pour [...] ces vies qui ne tentaient même pas de s'exprimer : celles de Paule, d'Anne."¹ Whether or not they are repressed, these women are certainly - on Beauvoir's own admission - the most depressive, negative characters in the novel : whereas the men fight between themselves for recognition and political power in the public sphere, holding, as Fallaize has noted, the "power of the *logos*,"² both Paule and Anne seem to inhabit disintegrating internal worlds of frustrated love, only reaching out to the external sphere when they are forced to do so.³ As with Tous Les Hommes sont mortels, there is no progression towards reconciliation and redemption. Love, as so often in Beauvoir's works, leads these women only

¹ Simone de Beauvoir, Les Mandarins, vol. 1, Paris : Gallimard, 1952, p. 155. All quotations are taken from this edition.

² Elizabeth Fallaize, The Novels of Simone de Beauvoir, p. 107.

³ Jane Heath has also pointed to the critic's tendency to divide the novel into two parts: the public world of post-war politics (a generally male domain) and the novelistic/fictional world of the female protagonists.

Although I admire her analysis of the way these two spheres in fact overlap and interact, for the purposes of the present study, as already stated, I will concentrate solely on the female characters and their psychological analysis, separating them from the political sphere inhabited by the men. See Heath, Simone de Beauvoir, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989, p. 88.

to emptiness, and Anne's final question of the novel - will happiness ever be within reach? - hints that a life conditioned by psychoanalysis points to no royal road to emotional fulfilment.

Les Mandarins, however, perhaps lends itself more easily to classical psychoanalytic theory than does Tous Les Hommes sont mortels, in that hypothetical diagnosis of the textual characters is actually possible. Firstly, I will analyse Paule's gradual descent into an intense delusional psychosis following the collapse of a love affair which has sustained her own parasitic personality for too long, and which she has fed with lies. In Lacanian terms, as I hope to prove, she is also trapped by the language we are condemned to misuse, misunderstand and misquote. Paule's obsession with Henri turns her into a madwoman in the red attic which she has tended obsessively as a shrine to a dying love affair. By investing so much of her self in her lover, she has totally depleted her own ego, and her character is eventually rewritten as a social stereotype by psychoanalysis. In many ways, Paule's tragedy seems only to be beginning when she finally returns to the scene, cured - or normalised - but also drained.

Similarly, Anne Dubreuilh also turns to a lover for validation, a doomed enterprise which does not succeed in obliterating her deep-seated fears of death and solitude. The void which has threatened her since childhood eventually overwhelms her following the dissolution of her own transatlantic love affair, and takes her to the brink of the suicide from which she saves Paule. Being an analyst herself she is excluded from the possibility of Paule's 'cure', but her own attempts at reinventing her self have failed utterly in the

face of her lover's disinterest. In the final pages of the novel she faces her inevitable return to the isolated despair of her former identity as a controlled character in the analytic drama.

As already stated, we have a third textual protagonist to analyse in this chapter, however. Perhaps most interestingly from our particular critical perspective, psychoanalysis itself is also very much on trial in Les Mandarins. Anne refers Paule to a colleague for treatment - the result is a cure which renders her unrecognisable, and helps to crystallise the vague questions Anne herself has been asking about her profession, questions which Beauvoir herself views as unanswerable by psychoanalysis. Is sanitised sanity preferable to a delirious and passionate madness? In a society which has only the horrors of both war and peace to offer, should not her patients stay cocooned in their blissful, albeit delusional ignorance? And who in fact needs the cure? The patient or the physician? By curing others, is she being infected herself? And, finally, is the reinvention of the psychic self really an attainable - and even ethical - goal?

Firstly, however, let us begin our analysis with the tragic figure of Paule, and an examination of the web of deceit and delusions she has spun from memories and ideals. This web is to protect herself from the painful recognition of the present, and has trapped Henri, who is floundering in a morass of manipulated cowardice.⁴ Freud, in his appallingly reductive essay

⁴ Although Paule is in many ways responsible for her own unhappiness through her incessant emotional manipulation and blackmail of Henri, and her exhausting attempts to live solely through him, he is certainly not blameless. While in this chapter I will concentrate on Paule's own psyche, and her failings which lead her to neurosis and psychosis, I agree with Rima Drell Reck's analysis of the situation : in her article on Les Mandarins ('Les Mandarins : Sensibility, Responsibility', Yale French Studies, 27-29, 1961-2, pp. 33-40), she refers to

'Femininity', writes of woman's "psychical rigidity and unchangeability. Her libido [takes] up final positions and seems incapable of exchanging them for others."⁵ While this controversial and misguided essay has been successfully criticised by many feminists,⁶ in the present context it could be claimed that Paule does in fact prove herself unable to move on from the libidinal position she has established ten years previously, when Henri first fell in love with the violet-clad vision she still feels herself to be in his eyes. Furthermore, Paule seems to be tragic literary evidence of Freud's further sexist hypothesis that "in young men the ambitious phantasies are the most prominent, in women, whose ambition is directed to success in love, the erotic ones."⁷

Such Freudian theories may seem far removed from Beauvoir's existential tenets, and her firm belief that femininity is no more than a social construct. However, it should be pointed out that in her chapter of Le Deuxième Sexe entitled 'L'Amoureuse', Beauvoir herself employs quasi-psychoanalytic terms when discussing various aspects of the woman in love. Although, unlike Freud, she does not see *l'amoureuse* as an essentialist figure, but as an example of a false strategy which women sometimes adopt in the face of male domination, Beauvoir's portrait of this doomed woman's psyche is as

Perron's "enormous cowardice in his relationship with his mistress [p. 37]", stating that while Henri is in many ways idealised by Beauvoir in the text,

this relationship in bad faith is Perron's greatest fault; by refusing to make an open gesture of rupture, he allows Paule to carry on the martyred role in which he cast her years earlier and which she readily accepted. The bad faith is on both sides - Paule is as unwilling to accept the end of the affair as Henri to state it [p. 39].

⁵ Sigmund Freud, 'Femininity', (1932), in New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, The Penguin Freud Library, vol. 2, London: Penguin, 1991, pp.145-169, p. 169.

⁶ See Slipp, The Freudian Mystique : Freud, Women and Feminism, New York: New York University Press, 1993, pp. 13-19.

tragically negative as Freud's (far more reductive) claims. I shall quote from 'L'amoureuse' at length below since the sociological stereotype so clearly mirrors the literary character of the hapless Paule, to whom we are about to turn. Beauvoir writes as follows :

l'amoureuse n'est pas seulement une narcissiste aliénée dans son moi : elle éprouve aussi un désir passionné de déborder ses propres limites et de devenir infinie, grâce au truchement d'un autre qui accède à l'infinie réalité. Elle s'abandonne à l'amour pour se sauver ; mais le paradoxe de l'amour idolâtre, c'est qu'afin de se sauver elle finit par se renier totalement. Son sentiment prend une dimension mystique; elle ne demande plus au dieu de l'admirer, de l'approuver; elle veut se fondre en lui, s'oublier dans ses bras [...].

[II] faut que tout ce qu'elle est, tout ce qu'elle a, tous les instants de sa vie soient dévoués et trouvent ainsi leur raison d'être ; elle ne veut rien posséder qu'en lui ; ce qui la rendrait malheureuse, c'est qu'il ne lui réclamât rien [...]. Elle a cherché d'abord dans l'amour une confirmation de ce qu'elle était, de son passé, de son personnage ; mais elle y engage aussi son avenir : pour le justifier, elle le destine à celui qui détient toutes les valeurs ; c'est ainsi qu'elle se délivre de sa transcendance : elle la subordonne à celle de l'autre essentiel [...]. C'est afin de se trouver, de se sauver qu'elle a commencé par se perdre en lui : le fait est que peu à peu elle s'y perd ; toute la réalité est en l'autre. L'amour qui se définissait au départ comme une apothéose narcissiste s'accomplit dans les joies âpres d'un dévouement qui conduit souvent à une automutilation.⁸

Trapped in such a mystical cult of love, Paule reveals throughout the text this fixation to her happier past, constantly, obsessively seeking "confirmation de ce qu'elle était, de son passé, de son personnage." Locked into the Lacanian Imaginary, hypnotised by her falsified vision of herself and Henri,

⁷ Sigmund Freud, 'Difficulties and First Approaches', (published 1916, written 1915-16), in Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, The Penguin Freud Library, vol. 1, London: Penguin, 1991, pp. 111-128, p. 128.

⁸ Simone de Beauvoir, Le Deuxième Sexe, 2 vols, Paris : Gallimard, 1949, vol. 2, pp. 556-8. As already stated in previous chapters, like her autobiographies, Le Deuxième Sexe is not an infallible interpretative code for her fiction, but laced with value judgments. Throughout this

she denies time and resists change, instead clinging to a dead love which has stagnated around her, and to a self-image which is as static and airbrushed as a glossy photograph. It is significant that at the beginning of the novel she seems disconnected from the idea of time altogether, asking Anne whether the past cannot be shunted forward into the present :

Son regard plongeait tout au fond de mes yeux et on aurait cru qu'il interrogeait par-delà mon visage une boule de verre : "Tu crois que le passé peut ressusciter?"

Je savais quelle réponse elle attendait de moi, et j'ai ri avec un peu de gêne : "Je ne suis pas un oracle.

- Il faut que Robert m'explique ce que c'est que le temps", dit-elle d'un ton méditatif.

Elle était prête à nier l'espace et le temps avant d'admettre que l'amour pût n'être pas éternel [vol. 1, p. 50] .

We note already Paule's desperate clinging to mystic terminology : glass balls and oracles are the currency of her discourse. She searches for reassurance about the status of her relationship with Henri everywhere : in the shimmering reflections in Anne's eyes and crystal spheres, and in the soothing words from Robert. Henri, on the other hand, is unable to obliterate their hollow present with a dazzling distortion of their romantic history, and so the couple are polarised in their differing approaches to and expectations of the dying relationship. As we will see, when she discovers the truth about her lover's present indifference, her fragile ego is unable to support her and she falls into a paralytic state of despair; for the present, however, she clings obstinately to her warped ghost of a love past.

thesis I use the work in order to illuminate Beauvoir's own personal stance on psychoanalytic theory, particularly with reference to Freud.

As Heath has also pointed out,⁹ and as has been hinted by the crystal balls and existential eye motifs of the above-quoted passage, like Régine of Tous Les Hommes sont mortels Paule relies on reflections to bolster her fictive identity. Staring at herself over and over again in the Lacanian mirror of *méconnaissance*, she becomes alienated from her body, which seems far less real to her than her mirrored image. Her lover, however, is unable to see this shimmering vision, since he has moved on from a past love to a present indifference :

Elle s'était plantée devant une des glaces, l'air désamparé; c'était tellement inutile! en vert ou en jaune, jamais il ne la retrouverait telle que dix ans plus tôt il l'avait désirée quand elle lui avait tendu d'un geste nonchalant ses longs gants violets [pp. 15-16].

Furthermore, Paule's incessant archiving of the flawless, essentialised - and, most importantly, controllable - moments of the past has also mummified her version of an idealised Henri himself, an image he rejects, feeling deadened, not protected, by such stagnation :

"Même sur tes photos d'enfant tu avais déjà ce sourire méfiant; comme tu te ressembles!" Il l'avait aidée autrefois à rassembler ces souvenirs; aujourd'hui ça lui semblait vain; il s'agaçait que Paule s'entêtât encore à l'exhumer, à l'embaumer [p. 193].

Although she is keen to wrap her memories of Henri in the protective tissues of photographic albums and boxed mementoes, all signals of the passage of time, Paule refuses truly to acknowledge this temporal flux and its destructive power - as well as its dynamic potential for change and reparation.

⁹ See Jane Heath, Simone de Beauvoir, pp. 101-102. Heath, however, does not equate the mirror with the Lacanian mirror stage, but with the power of fantasy and fairytale : "Mirror, Mirror on the wall..." [Heath, p. 102]."

This is particularly significant from our psychoanalytic perspective, for in his lecture on fixation Freud claims that

patients give us an impression of having been 'fixated' to a particular portion of their past, as though they could not manage to free themselves from it and were for that reason alienated from the present and the future. They then remain lodged in their illness in the sort of way in which in earlier days people retreated into a monastery in order to bear the burden there of their ill-fated lives.¹⁰

Retreating to her own religion of the couple, Paule is a self-appointed mystic in a fanatical cult of love, claiming to rely on visions, employing mythic discourse and histrionic postures reminiscent of a martyr-like adoration of a distant God who is beyond all temporal influence. She conducts her rites like "une calme pythie" [p. 38], like Monique of La Femme rompue believing herself to be protected by her own neurotic projection of a distant past onto the vivid screen of present wishes. The aim of this religious quest, of course, is the preservation of Paule at her happiest : during the honeymoon period of the first years of her relationship with a lover who is now indifferent to her passion. As Freud has written elsewhere, "neurotics are anchored [in] a period of their past in which their libido did not lack satisfaction, in which they were happy."¹¹ However, a happiness founded on a dangerous denial of time will lead Paule inevitably to neurosis, and the painful recognition that her present is only an illusory, orchestrated and hollow echo of the past.

For Lacan, the ego's primary function is deception and existential *mauvaise foi*. Throughout Les Mandarins, Paule's conscious readings of the messages

¹⁰ Sigmund Freud, 'Fixation to Traumas - the Unconscious', (1916-17), in Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, The Penguin Freud Library, vol. 1, London: Penguin, 1991, pp. 313-326, p. 313.

around her are through this blurring optic of desire and delusion. The resulting neurosis pulls her into a gradual downward spiral of misreadings, idealisation and, eventually, paranoia. She is unable to remain cloistered in her illness when Henri finally extricates himself from their shattered relationship, and she falls violently ill on total exile from her monastery. Until this final descent into a more immediately obvious madness, however, the strength of Paule's delusions is such that she is able to misread every sign Henri throws her way - as with the Lacanian signifier, she purloins his meaning and twists the message until it is fit to cloak her in the identity she is desperate to assume - that of cherished, adored mistress.¹² As Adam Phillips notes, lovers "are notoriously frantic epistemologists, second only to paranoiacs (and analysts) as readers of signs and wonders."¹³ Paule's increasingly frantic readings of, and into, the signs Henri throws her way will indeed bring her to the edge of a combinatorial paranoia. Let us now examine a few of these erroneous interpretations, which Paule uses to reinforce the fading strength of her delusions, until Henri finally forces her from the Imaginary into a horrific and overwhelming awareness of the Symbolic. Given the grip of Paule's illusions, this is no easy task; significantly from a Lacanian perspective, as we shall examine below, it is only with the delivery of his final

¹¹ Sigmund Freud, 'The Paths to the Formation of Symptoms', (1916-17), *ibid*, pp. 404-424, p. 412.

¹² As Jane Heath has noted, truth as the sliding signifier is a constant motif in Les Mandarins - the notion that a message has a fixed meaning intended by the person who produced it [...] comes under threat, opening up the possibility of plural interpretations.

See Heath, Simone de Beauvoir, p. 100.

¹³ Adam Phillips, On Flirtation, London: Faber and Faber, 1995, p. 41.

letter to her that Henri's meaning finally hits home, breaking through the protective mesh of misinterpretation with which Paule has surrounded herself.

Over the years, Paule has drugged herself on lies. As already stated, Henri is himself also caught in this web of deceit, in which he further enmeshes himself by repeatedly evading a truthful confrontation with his mistress. Seizing on any words of hope, she persuades herself that he still loves her, feeding her own delusions and strengthening the knots in their tangled discourse of false emotions. Henri himself notes his own contributions to this communicative misfiring, yet still manages to convince himself of Paule's unwilling lucidity :

c'était impossible de ne pas lui abandonner de temps à autre un lambeau de phrase, un sourire; elle embaumait ces reliques dans son coeur et elle leur extorquait des miracles quand par hasard sa foi vacillait. "Mais malgré tout, au fond, elle sait que je ne l'aime plus", se dit-il pour se rassurer. [...] Elle le savait, soit, mais ça n'avancait à rien tant qu'elle n'y consentait pas [p. 39].

At this stage in the text, it is clear that Paule is not really misreading Henri, since he is still contributing significantly to her dreams by weakly tossing her false but unequivocal words of affection : "Je suis à toi," he states unwillingly but clearly, "Je t'aime [p. 40]."

As their tale progresses and the relationship disintegrates beyond repair, however, the responsibility slowly shifts from Henri's own cowardice to Paule's evasive desperation. The strength of her delusions is too much for the reality around her, and her constant misinterpretations fit a natural logic of protection and preservation. Theirs is not the false discourse of subject to subject through the signifier, but the Lacanian linguistic of signifier to signifier,

via the medium of the subject. Paule and Henri are alienated by language - their communication only widens the chasm between them, and his eventual tentative confrontations with her only lead to a total impasse :

- Je m'intéresse à nous, dit-elle.
- Ça ne suffit pas.
- Ça me suffit depuis dix ans.

Il rassembla tout son courage :

- Écoute, Paule, tu sais bien que les choses ont changé entre nous, ça ne sert à rien de se mentir. Nous avons eu un grand et bel amour; avouons-nous qu'il est en train de se transformer en amitié. Ça ne signifie pas que nous nous verrons moins souvent, pas du tout, ajouta-t-il avec empressement; mais il faut que tu retrouves une indépendance.

Elle le regardait fixement : "Je n'aurai jamais d'amitié pour toi." Un petit sourire effleura ses lèvres : "Ni toi pour moi."

- Mais si, Paule...."

Elle l'interrompt : "Regarde, ce matin tu n'as pas pu attendre l'heure fixée; tu es arrivé vingt minutes en avance; et tu as frappé si fébrilement! tu appelles ça de l'amitié"[vol 1, p. 477].

There is of course much dramatic irony in this scene : as readers, we know that Henri has arrived early only as he is still elated from his lovemaking with Josette, and perversely wishes to share his happiness indirectly with his long-term lover : " J'arriverai en avance chez Paule, ça lui fera plaisir", se dit-il. Il avait envie ce matin de faire plaisir à tout le monde [p. 474]." When he enunciates something approaching the truth, however, Paule refuses to hear it, holding fast to the erroneous belief that Henri's actions always speak louder than his words. Her gaze is as fixed as her emotions, and she cuts Henri off, refusing to hear him. It should be stated at this point, however, that Paule's interpretations of the situation could be defended as valid, for throughout Les Mandarins Beauvoir points to Henri's weakness which - as we have seen - only serves to draw out the process of separation from Paule and exacerbate her pain.

The emotional stakes are much higher when their relationship is finally over, and Paule grows more and more desperate. Ironically, the more clearly Henri states his position, the less lucid she becomes. When he explains to her that he loves another woman, she merely uses it as proof of his undying devotion to herself :

- Il m'a expliqué gravement qu'il est amoureux de la petite Josette." Elle se mit à rire avec abandon. "Tu te rends compte?"

J'hésitai. "Il a une histoire avec elle, non?"

- Bien sûr. Mais il n'avait pas besoin de venir me raconter qu'il l'aimait. S'il l'aimait, il ne me l'aurait sûrement pas dit. Il m'a mise en observation, tu comprends. [...]

- Le plus amusant, dit-elle gaiement, c'est qu'en même temps il était d'une coquetterie inimaginable : il ne veut pas que je lui pèse, mais si je cessais de l'aimer je crois qu'il serait capable de me tuer. Tiens, il m'a parlé du Musée Grévin.

- A quel propos?

- Comme ça, à brûle-pourpoint. [...] En vérité, c'était une allusion à ce fameux après-midi où il est tombé amoureux de moi. Il veut que je me souviene [vol. 2, pp. 182-3].

Paule must repeat the unthinkable twice over to herself : "il n'avait pas besoin de venir me raconter qu'il l'aimait. S'il l'aimait, il ne me l'aurait sûrement pas dit." This is obvious negation : since she would prefer to repress the idea, she is forced to deny its validity, and substitute it for another, histrionic romantic ideal : "si je cessais de l'aimer [...] il serait capable de me tuer." And this reaction, of course, is clearly projection of her own feelings : without her love for Henri, Paule's only route is suicide.

Similarly, on receiving a farewell letter from Henri, she cannot see the words, reading between the harsh truthful lines and into them her own projected desire :

Cette lettre est d'une hypocrisie révoltante! Enfin, relis-la :
Essaie de ne plus penser à moi. Pourquoi ne dit-il pas

simplement : Ne pense plus à moi? Il se trahit, il veut que je me torture à essayer, mais non pas que je réussisse. Et au même moment, au lieu de m'appeler banalement : chère Paule, il écrit "Paule". Sa voix fléchit en prononçant son nom.

- Il a craint que le *chère* ne te semble hypocrite.
- Pas du tout. Tu sais bien qu'en amour, aux moments les plus bouleversants, on ne dit que le nom tout nu. Il a voulu me faire entendre sa voix d'alcôve, comprends-tu? [vol. 2, p. 194].

Naturally, the term of endearment "chère Paule" has not seemed banal to her in the past. Similarly, fixing upon Henri's unambiguous imperatives is her way of relieving herself of all responsibility for the self-inflicted torture to come. She cannot bear the thought of successfully obliterating Henri's image from her mind on her own account; she shies away from all thoughts of separating her ego from his, which she has internalised as her ideal. Her wish to sustain their affair at a burning level of intensity is projected firmly onto Henri himself.

Finally, it is when analysing the signals she herself has been sending to Henri that Paule borders on combinatory paranoia, and conjectures that Henri must have been seizing upon the unconscious psychoanalytic symbols in her discourse. This, she reasons, is why he has been backing away from her : he has been defending his own threatened love and nursing his hurt pride. Here, Beauvoir is letting her considerable reservations about psychoanalysis slip through the text by allowing the most deluded character in the novel to cling to these clues.¹⁴

¹⁴ It must be acknowledged that one of the claims made against psychoanalysis as a valid discipline is indeed its heavy reliance on symbols. See, for example, Freud's lecture entitled 'Symbolism in Dreams', in Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, The Penguin Freud Library, vol. 1, London: Penguin, 1991, pp. 182-203. One particular reductive concept is that for Freud, "weapons and tools always stand for what is male, while materials and things that are worked upon stand for what is female [p. 202]." Such comments understandably give feminist theorists considerable ammunition; however, as Freud himself also points out in the above-quoted lecture, it is worth remembering that certain symbols have not only resisted the

The reductive, deterministic power of the symbols Paule sees around her is shown to lead her even further towards the shattering abyss of delusion and the combinatory paranoia I have already mentioned.¹⁵ Proof of this paranoia can be seen in the following scene, which is narrated by Anne. Paule is now unable to accept anything at face value, however banal the scenario, desperately seeking meanings and floundering instead in a Lacanian vacuum:

on frappa doucement à la porte. Paule me regarda avec un tel visage que je me levai pour aller ouvrir. C'était une femme qui tenait à la main un panier.

- Pardon, excuse, dit-elle, je ne trouve pas la concierge. C'est pour couper un chat.

- La clinique est au rez-de-chaussée, dis-je, la porte à gauche.

- Je refermai la porte et mon rire se figea quand je rencontrai le regard égaré de Paule.

- Qu'est-ce que ça signifie? dit-elle.

- Que la concierge n'était pas là, dis-je gaiement, ça lui arrive.

- Mais pourquoi est-ce ici qu'on a frappé?

- C'est un hasard : il fallait bien frapper quelque part.

- Un hasard? dit Paule [vol. 2, p. 204].

Chance is no longer a concept in her twisted universe, for having placed meaning around her for so long - even when there has been nothing but emptiness - she cannot conceive of a hollow world which is devoid of signals and a concomitant plenitude. Since Henri is no longer there to read as a

passage of time, but are also multi-cultural. As Laplanche and Pontalis write in The Language of Psychoanalysis,

this constancy is found not only in the same individual and from one individual to the next, but also in the most varied spheres (myth, religion, folklore, language, etc.), and in the most widely separated cultures [p. 442].

However, while it is admittedly true that they may often be overvalued in his writings, Freud himself in fact points to their frequent unreliability :

one never knows whether a particular element of the dream is to be understood in its actual sense or as a symbol, since the things employed as symbols do not cease on that account to be themselves.

See Freud's 'Uncertainties and Criticisms', in Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, The Penguin Freud Library, vol. 1, London: Penguin, 1991, pp. 266-278, p. 267.

¹⁵ In Freud's lecture 'Parapraxes' (1915), (in Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, The Penguin Freud Library, vol. 1, London: Penguin, 1991, pp. 87-108, p. 94), he defines

romance, she eventually casts her mind back to her own actions and words, and produces misreadings of her own discourse, again projecting onto the distant Henri her own anguished introspection.

It is significant that Paule calls upon Anne, who is of course an analyst by profession, and to whom she wishes to explain her delusional rationalisations, as if her friend can validate them for her :

- je lui ai envoyé une première carte postale. Je lui parlais de mes occupations et j'ai écrit cette phrase malheureuse : Je fais de longues promenades dans ce pays qui dit-on me ressemble. Évidemment, il a tout de suite pensé que j'avais un amant.

- Je ne vois pas...

- *On*, dit-elle avec impatience. Le *on* était suspect. Quand on compare une femme à un paysage, c'est généralement qu'on est son amant. Et là-dessus, je lui expédie à Venise une autre carte qui représente le parc de Belzunce avec un bassin au milieu.

- Et alors?

- Tu m'as appris toi-même que les fontaines, les vasques, les bassins c'est un symbole psychanalytique. Henri a compris que je lui jetais au visage : j'ai pris un amant! [...] C'est clair comme deux et deux font quatre. A partir de là tout s'enchaîne [vol. 2, pp. 204-5].

The determinist views of psychoanalysis are parodied by Beauvoir here : in Paule's twisted emotional mathematics, two plus two have made four hundred signs and symbols, all of which have their secret message and have hit home in Henri's heart.¹⁶ "A partir de là tout s'enchaîne", Paule declares elatedly, rationalising that her well-linked chains of proof will set her and Henri free from further misunderstanding. She cannot see that they only bind her further

combinatory paranoia as "a mental disease [...] in which the exploitation of small indications [...] is carried to unlimited lengths."

¹⁶ From a thematic perspective, it is interesting to note that the same phrase, "deux et deux font quatre" recurs in 'La Femme rompue', the subject of my final chapter. In the same way, Monique - lost in an epic reconstruction of her romance - claims her husband still loves her.

to madness, and that she is captured and tortured by the defective network of language.

It is only when Paule has sent Henri an imploring letter following her misinterpretations of her own psychoanalytic messages that she is finally forced to face the rupture upon receipt of his unequivocal reply. Significantly, she now cannot even bring herself to read Henri's letter, and tellingly hands it over to Anne - who again seems to be cast as the authoritative analyst - to interpret correctly. Now, it is implied, even if the reality will be too much to bear, she is at least willing to accept the truth - and the error of her previous delusions : "Je ne comprends pas, gémit-elle. Je ne comprends plus rien [vol. 2, pp. 206-7]." All Henri's past meanings are ultimately understood retrospectively, but it is too late for Paule's sanity. With every former misreading, we have sensed her increasing desperation, and observed her losing her already tenuous grip on an unacceptable reality. When she eventually turns completely from this reality, she is truly neurotic, and loses all sense of self in a self-imposed nightmare of annihilative despair.

Jane Heath, in Simone de Beauvoir, claims that Paule is "in search of herself" in Les Mandarins.¹⁷ I disagree with her interpretation on this particular point, for to my mind Paule seems instead to be fleeing herself throughout the novel, wishing fervently to remain suspended in the flattering gleam of her image in the mirror, merged with that of Henri and viewed in the hyperbolic terms of absolutes, those flawed ideals which are a central theme of Les Mandarins :

¹⁷ Jane Heath, Simone de Beauvoir, p. 98.

“Je nous revois.”

[...] Ils étaient montés sur un socle au milieu du Palais des Mirages et partout autour d’eux leur couple s’était multiplié à l’infini parmi des forêts de colonnes : “Dis-moi que je suis la plus belle des femmes. - Tu es la plus belle des femmes. - Et tu seras l’homme le plus glorieux du monde [vol. 1, p. 16].

Paule relates her love story in epic terms : standing, significantly, on a pedestal in the nightclub of past memories, ironically entitled the *Palais des Mirages*, she bathes in Henri’s glory, a fitting consort. Since being thought beautiful by Henri is enough to constitute her life project, she does not pursue the promising singing career which, it is implied, is hers for the taking. Henri is her entire work : her main task seems to be archiving his photographs and letters; she harries him about his novel, and regards keeping him on track as her grand mission. There is never any mention of Paule’s project for her life beyond the construction of the great ‘we’, the temptation which runs throughout Beauvoir’s works. As with Françoise, Hélène, Anne and Monique, the couple is viewed by Paule as some safe sanctuary in which she can annihilate her own ego. It is here, Beauvoir implies, that her descent into madness begins, and which has as its peak the bizarre supper party she has planned for her friends. Before turning to the scene of this insanity, however, let us first briefly examine how Paule has annihilated her sense of self, overvaluing Henri and depleting her own ego in this long process.

In his lecture on ‘The Libido Theory and Narcissism’, Freud writes of ideal love as follows :

When someone is completely in love, [...] altruism converges with libidinal object-cathexis. As a rule the sexual object attracts a portion of the ego’s narcissism to itself, and this becomes noticeable as what is known as the ‘sexual overvaluation’ of the object. If in addition there is an altruistic transposition of egoism

on to the sexual object, the object becomes supremely powerful; it has, as it were, absorbed the ego.¹⁸

Paule metaphorically prostrates herself before Henri, the supremely powerful object, in whom she has invested too much for too long. She even offers to mutilate herself as proof of her love for him, echoing the figurative mutilation of the self :

Il n'y a que toi : moi je ne suis rien. J'accepte de n'être rien, et j'accepte tout de toi. [...] Tu ne me crois pas sincère? dit Paule; c'est ma faute; j'ai eu trop d'orgueil. C'est que le chemin du renoncement n'est pas facile. Mais maintenant je te le jure : je ne réclame plus rien pour moi-même. Toi seul existes, et tu peux tout exiger de moi. [...] Je te répète que je suis totalement à toi. Qu'est-ce que je peux faire pour te convaincre? Veux-tu que je me coupe une oreille ? [vol. 2, pp. 148-9]

Utterly abject, she has annihilated her own self; all libidinal energy has left her ego, and flooded into Henri's : she is nothing, on "le chemin du renoncement", she no longer expects anything for herself as she no longer belongs to herself. Only Henri exists; Paule has disappeared. Having internalised him for so many years, she now finds it impossible to accept this loss : for with his disappearance, she has also lost at least half her self. There is no longer any focus for her project, and no meaning in her universe. Freud writes of "this 'end of the world idea'" in his paper on narcissism, claiming that "the whole libidinal cathexis flows off to the loved object."¹⁹ Abandoned and without cathectic recourse, Paule's world is truly at an end, and the only path she can take is one of self-reinvention. Before this, however, she goes even further

¹⁸ Sigmund Freud, 'The Libido Theory and Narcissism' (1916-17), in Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, The Penguin Freud Library, vol. 1, London: Penguin, 1991, pp. 461-481, p. 467.

¹⁹ Sigmund Freud, 'On Narcissism : An Introduction' (1914), in On Metapsychology, The Penguin Freud Library, vol. 11, London: Penguin, 1991, pp. 61-97, p. 68.

down the road of despair towards a paranoid psychosis which brings her to the brink of suicide.

As Ascher has perceptively recognised,²⁰ Paule's paranoia is in fact a defence mechanism : she substitutes her false role of adored lover for that of victim of a great conspiracy. Since she is no longer important to Henri, she feels marginalised, an experience which is unbearable to her. She would far rather convince herself that she is at the centre of the universe as a despised object :

- Pourquoi Claudie a-t-elle posté sa dernière lettre rue Singer? pourquoi y avait-il un singe qui me faisait des grimaces dans la maison d'en face? pourquoi lorsque j'ai dit que je ne savais pas tenir un salon m'as-tu répondu : Au contraire? Vous m'accusez d'avoir singé Henri en essayant d'écrire, d'avoir singé Claudie, ses toilettes, sa vie mondaine. Vous me reprochez d'avoir accepté l'argent d'Henri et d'avoir nargué les pauvres. Vous vous êtes ligués pour me convaincre de mon abjection. [...] Était-ce pour me sauver, ou pour me détruire? [vol. 2, pp. 209-210].

In this warped universe, every facet of life includes Paule; every action is directed towards her, and every sign she sees includes her. It is at least preferable to solitude and despair : she substitutes hatred for the love she needs, as it is at least preferable to indifference. At the peak of her madness, death is the only way out of the abyss. She has religiously planned her final meal as her last supper, surrounded by the disciples/traitors for whom she has set twelve places, and now makes one final attempt to mythologise herself. With her suicide, she will be cast as a religious martyr, and responsibility will be shifted from her own choices onto those around her.

²⁰ See Carol Ascher, p. 169.

The psychotic despair she faces after Anne has left her alone with her brutal thoughts, however, brings Paule to a final, shocking confrontation with her illusions. Forced into an unwilling acceptance of the Symbolic, since she has had to recognise the true meaning of Henri's messages, she splinters all the mirrors in which she has imprisoned her self, understanding finally that the perfect couple has been no more than a glossy delusion :

tous les miroirs étaient brisés et la moquette jonchée d'esquilles de verre ; [...] "Voilà, dit Paule d'une voix solennelle, je voulais vous remercier." Elle vous désigna des sièges : "Je veux tous vous remercier : parce que maintenant j'ai compris." [...] - Je ne veux plus m'occuper de moi, dit-elle avec violence. Je n'ai que trop pensé à moi [...]. "C'est une comédie : je me suis vue [...]. Elle enfonça dans ses yeux ses poings fermés : "Je n'arrête pas de me voir!" [vol. 2, pp. 216-7].

These shattered mirrors are symbolic of the shattered Imaginary. Her broken, doll-like specular image horrifies Paule now - she can no longer view herself as she wishes to be : the dancing *imago* in Henri's arms, and is as yet unable to reconcile her real body with her self : she blocks off the image with a vicious action reminiscent of her threats of self-mutilation : "elle enfonça dans ses yeux ses poings fermés : "Je n'arrête pas de me voir!"" Desperate to help her friend, Anne sees conventional analysis as the only way forward and administers a sedative, knowing that this will be the first of many numbing drugs to come : Paule will be emotionally sedated by analysis until she is almost unrecognisable when she is reintroduced to the reader.

As with many extreme cases, following Paule's undoubted cure/normalisation via psychoanalysis and shock treatment, her psychological pendulum swings from the vital passion of her insanity to a superficial inanity. Her illness is explained away using the death of her younger brother; all

rationalisation is deterministic; as she has always wished, any responsibility is removed. Beauvoir uses Paule to demonstrate her views on the validity of psychoanalysis as a treatment; instead of the volatile, overemotional lover, she appears to Anne to be as hollow as her previous dreams, and even seems anaesthetised to her own sadness :

“tu ne peux pas imaginer comme je me sens heureuse!”

Les larmes traçaient de lourds sillons dans sa chair moite; elle les ignorait; peut-être en avait-elle tant versé que sa peau était devenue insensible. J'avais envie de pleurer avec elle sur cet amour qui avait été pendant dix ans le sens et l'orgueil de sa vie et qui venait de se changer en un chancre honteux [vol. 2, p. 356].

The tone of this paragraph is still one of illness and sadness - it is almost as if Paule is more diseased through her cure. While crying, she seems emotionally lobotomised, and Anne sees her as the martyr who has been crucified on the sedative cross of her own profession, complete with a bloody sore. Paule is, after all, still the mystic in many ways, making pronouncements about her future as if taking religious vows. Most poignantly, she seems to miss her former sense of identity :

tu ne peux pas imaginer comme le monde était riche, en ce temps-là; la moindre chose avait dix mille facettes. Je me serais interrogée sur le rouge de ta jupe; tiens, ce clochard, je l'aurais pris pour vingt personnes à la fois.” Il y avait une espèce de nostalgie dans sa voix [vol. 2, p. 350].

Anne herself, who, as we shall see, is becoming increasingly disillusioned about her profession, feels that Paule has been murdered to be cured :

je connaissais bien le genre d'explications dont avait usé Mardrus, je m'en servais aussi, à l'occasion, je les appréciais à leur prix. Oui, pour délivrer Paule il fallait ruiner son amour jusque dans le passé; mais je pensais à ces microbes qu'on ne peut exterminer qu'en détruisant l'organisme qu'ils dévorent.

Henri était mort pour Paule, mais elle était morte elle aussi [vol. 2, p. 353].

“Il y a guérison et guérison [p. 348],” states Anne. The conditioned, reinvented Paule is in many ways more alienated from the reader than her familiar specular image of desire. It cannot be denied that throughout her illness, her convincing character is granted resonant psychological depth by her vivid personality and desperate, misplaced passion.

In our final analysis, however, is Paule’s fate truly worse than her delusion? Much of her may have been erased with her madness, but, it could be speculated, the tone is not one of pure defeat and despair. She has, at least, been saved from suicide; she may even learn to be stably happy - or, in Freudian terms, ordinarily unhappy - in the anodyne world of society machinations. Admittedly, this is a grim, unstimulating future; with Paule, Beauvoir has successfully painted a fairly damning portrait of the psychoanalytic cure, a portrait which echoes her considerable reservations about the discipline, sketched seven years previously in Le Deuxième Sexe. An even less positive picture is offered to the reader with the psychoanalyst herself, Anne Dubreuilh, to whom we now turn, and who leads us into the Lacanian world of absence, loss and desire.

Anne is the second narrator, and the analyst/commentator, of Les Mandarins. She herself is not analysed by anyone, however, as there is no omniscient external narrative viewpoint. As a result we are presented with an introspective monologue which is similar to the discourse of the analysand - except that Anne’s is also the voice of an actual analyst. The reader is therefore presented with a disconcerting scenario : this physician suffers from

the same preoccupations as her patients, and yet is unable to heal herself. We could therefore claim that, as she does with Paule, Beauvoir seems to be using her protagonist to convey her opinions about the dubious efficacy of psychoanalysis. Anne's eventual depression leads her to the brink of the suicide Paule had planned, and although she does not act on her desire for self-annihilation either, the final, questioning tone of the novel is far from the redemptive one of Le Sang des autres, since this particular Beauvoirean heroine has not escaped from the emotional void which constantly threatens to engulf her throughout the work.

In Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, the subject is constituted by absence, of things either missing or lost, and which, the subject fondly fantasises, reside in the others around her/him. Throughout Les Mandarins Anne shivers at the centre of a void, which she later fills with her love for Lewis and is for a time restored to a sense of plenitude and sexual corporeality, before their inevitable separation and her return to a more serious suicidal depression. Lewis' loss is not the sole catalyst for Anne's suicidal death drive, however; this deep depression stalks Anne from her very first monologue, where we learn of a vivid childhood myth which has profoundly marked her : the fairytale of the little mermaid. As a child she connected the image with death and the terrifying infinite, and this infantile preoccupation has followed her into adulthood, motherhood and beyond. Anne seems completely submerged in the horror of this potential void, drowning in the bubbling sea foam which in

her personal mythology represents absence, death and, as Elizabeth Fallaize has pointed out,²¹ also the fatal lure of the romantic ideal :

Le silence de la mort, c'est avec horreur que je l'ai découvert.
Une sirène expirait au bord de la mer; pour l'amour d'un jeune
homme elle avait renoncé à son âme immortelle et il ne restait
d'elle qu'un peu d'écume blanche sans souvenir, sans voix. Je
me disais pour me rassurer : "C'est un conte!"
Ce n'était pas un conte. C'est moi la sirène [vol. 1, p. 41].

Anne is therefore aware of the danger of her own romantic absolutes, to which she will succumb during her affair with Lewis, and realises that - as we shall examine below - she, too, is both voiceless and faceless in her own way: "c'est moi la sirène."

It is significant that directly after this disturbing revelation she evokes Robert's image, as if the infant Anne is still comforting herself with thoughts of the protective parent who is working near her nursery, and on whom she can call through her nightmares :

Du moment où j'ai aimé Robert, je n'ai plus jamais eu peur, de rien. Je n'avais qu'à prononcer son nom et j'étais en sécurité. Il travaille dans la pièce voisine : je peux me lever et ouvrir la porte... [*ibid*].

Anne is still harbouring her infantile fears, but is reassured by Robert's presence, who is portrayed explicitly and formulaically in the novel as being the father-substitute she has married as a result of her unresolved Oedipus complex :

on m'a trouvé un complexe d'Oedipe assez prononcé qui
explique mon mariage avec un homme de vingt ans plus âgé

²¹ See Elizabeth Fallaize, The Novels of Simone de Beauvoir, p. 106.

que moi [et] une nette agressivité par rapport à ma mère [vol. 1, p. 48].²²

Although sketched rather than painted as a character by Beauvoir, Robert Dubreuilh is still a powerful presence in the novel, regarded by Anne as a God-like, omnipotent force of stability and authority : “il semble aussi naturel d’être aimée par l’homme qu’on aime,” she states, “que par des parents respectés ou par Dieu tout-puissant [vol. 1, p. 74].” As Françoise does with Pierre, and Hélène does with Jean, Anne collapses into his safe, strong identity : “Je n’avais qu’à prononcer son nom et j’étais en sécurité.” The Name of the Father - the fixed, unchangeable constant of Robert Dubreuilh, is Anne’s cardinal point, as Henri is Paule’s project.²³

This security, however, strangely seems to elude Anne through much of the text. She does not call out to her husband in the above passage, for example, but remains locked into her empty terror, isolated and aware only of endless absence, which later in the work is constantly polarised against Robert’s stronger presence :

Mais je reste couchée [...] La terre craque sous nos pieds; au-dessus de nos têtes, il y a un abîme, et je ne sais plus qui nous sommes, ni ce qui nous attend [vol. 1, pp, 41-2].

²² It is tempting to speculate that Beauvoir intended her readers to receive this confession as an unconvincing, simplistic explanation from an unconvinced and jaded psychoanalyst; the tone of the passage is more than slightly ironic.

²³ Paule is in many ways Anne’s shadow, and the two are connected throughout the novels by certain motifs, such as the histrionic phial of poison, with its Gothic love story connotations and its annihilatory promise similar to that of the mermaid’s sacrifice. Most significantly, Anne’s first thought on waking is of Paule :

J’aime bien Paule, et en même temps elle me fait un peu horreur. Souvent le matin, je sens sur moi l’ombre étouffante de tous les malheurs qui sont en train de se réveiller, et c’est à elle d’abord que je pense; j’ouvre les yeux, elle les ouvre [vol 1, p. 292].

The image is of a small child, too terrified of the empty *abîme* above the safety of her bed to call on her parent to rescue her from her dreams. Throughout Les Mandarins, Anne's words constantly evoke displacement ("la terre craque sous nos pieds"), the void and the abyss of the unknown. She cocoons herself in her home as she does in her bed, almost seeming agoraphobic - perhaps because any confrontation with open space will remind her of the void within her : "dès que je sors, je me sens perdue [vol. 1, p. 216]."

Most importantly, there is no human rescue from this solitude, nor is any sense of plenitude granted even by her own ego. Anne seems unable to connect either with those around her or with her own self, instead fleeing the projected shade received and reflected back by others : "quand je devine au fond d'une conscience étrangère ma propre image, j'ai toujours un moment de panique [vol. 1, p. 61]" she states, loathing the inevitable objectification of her social identity. Like Françoise Miquel, she prefers to remain faceless, safely suspended beyond the influence of others :

Je déteste cet instant où les visages se tournent vers moi et où d'un seul prompt regard on m'identifie et on me dépèce. Alors, je prends conscience de moi-même, et j'ai toujours mauvaise conscience [vol. 1, pp. 303-4].

Anne attempts to avoid any confrontation or connection with her own identity - although, by virtue of her profession, she claims ultimate self-knowledge : "je [...] connais [ma psychologie] dans les coins : je suis psychiatre [vol. 1, p. 60]." She quotes her own analytic case history with its comfortingly reductive classifications, but significantly also betrays her feeling that her ego still

remains tantalisingly beyond her grasp, and that she is no longer sure even who she should be portraying :

Je m'habille en noir, je parle peu, je n'écris pas et tout ça me compose une figure et les autres la voient. Je ne suis personne, c'est facile à dire : je suis moi. Qui est-ce? où me rencontrer? Il faudrait être de l'autre côté de toutes les portes, mais si c'est moi qui frappe, ils se tairont. J'ai senti soudain mon visage qui me brûlait, j'aurais voulu l'arracher [*ibid*].

The psychiatrist, hints Beauvoir, is no better placed than the layman to come to terms with herself, and in a gesture which is chillingly reminiscent of Paule's desire for self-mutilation, Anne's wish to claw at the social mask of her own face is also a wish for erasure and absence.

It is therefore significant from our critical perspective that her psychoanalytic training has not facilitated Anne's own social interaction, but seems instead to have sucked her into an emotional vacuum. Might this, as Beauvoir implies, be the result of her vocational choice? After all, Anne frequently professes her own disillusion with psychoanalysis, and, as we have already seen, mourns the loss of Paule's passion following her necessary stabilisation, numbing normalisation and reintegration into society. When Anne is under the literary critic's lens, psychoanalysis itself is on trial. While examining our analyst, let us therefore call into the dock with her the analytic procedure itself.

Firstly, it is important to note Anne's rather hazy reasons for her choice of vocation. As Françoise is with Pierre, she is dependent on Robert's opinions for validation of her chosen positions. Significantly, she discusses the value of psychoanalysis and her theoretical plans for the future solely through the lens of Robert's approval and his own personal ideologies :

Robert avait tiré du chaos un monde plein, ordonné, purifié par cet avenir qu'il produisait : ce monde était le mien. La seule question, c'était de m'y tailler ma place à moi. [...] Robert m'a encouragée; [...] il croit qu'il peut y avoir un usage valable de la psychanalyse dans la société bourgeoise et que peut-être elle aura encore un rôle à jouer dans une société sans classe; ça lui semblait même un travail passionnant, de repenser la psychanalyse classique à la lumière du marxisme. [...] C'est une grande chance à vingt ans de recevoir le monde de la main qu'on aime! [pp. 75-6]

It is therefore implicit that Anne herself is half-hearted about her profession, and that she has drifted into her role rather than assumed it with lasting enthusiasm. Her general disillusion with psychoanalysis infects the text, as her doubts about her own ability to help anyone - and the value of the psychoanalytic cure - become central thematic issues. We see, for example, her unwillingness to help her child patient forget the wartime horrors of his brief past by annihilating the painful memories of his father. As we have seen with Paule, coming to terms with loss, it is implied, is the swiftest way to dehumanisation :

il avait dessiné un homme qui donnait la main à un petit garçon. Voilà qu'aujourd'hui il avait encore peint une maison sans porte, entourée de barreaux noirs et acérés : nous n'avancions pas. Était-ce un cas particulièrement difficile, ou était-ce moi qui ne savais pas le traiter? [...] Je ne savais pas, ou je ne voulais pas? Peut-être la résistance de l'enfant traduisait-elle celle que je sentais en moi : cet inconnu qui était mort deux ans plus tôt à Dachau, ça me faisait horreur de le chasser du coeur de son fils. [...] guérir, c'est souvent mutiler [p. 94].

The child eventually draws more positive portraits, erasing the fence and permitting liberation and light to enter through symbolic doors and windows; but Anne's doubts about her profession do not dissipate.

Instead of becoming alive to the world, she is deadened to emotion. Speaking of Paule's emptiness after her cure, she likens herself to her

anaesthetised patients : complexes and neuroses, Anne feels, are a sign of humanity. Without them, her patients are emotional zombies. Through such outbursts Beauvoir hints at Anne's total loss of faith in her own theoretical positions, and thus in her portrait of an analyst gives her most effective and damning account of psychoanalysis :

je me dégoûtais de plus en plus de mon métier; souvent j'avais envie de dire à mes malades : "N'essayez donc pas de guérir, on guérit toujours assez." J'avais beaucoup de clients, [...] j'ai réussi quelques cures difficiles; mais le coeur n'y était pas. Décidément, je ne comprenais plus pourquoi il est bon que les gens dorment la nuit, qu'ils fassent l'amour avec facilité, qu'ils soient capables d'agir, de choisir, d'oublier, de vivre. [...] je ne faisais plus qu'obéir à de vieilles consignes quand j'essayais de les arracher à leurs obsessions : voilà que je m'étais mise à leur ressembler! Le monde était toujours aussi vaste : et je ne réussissais plus à m'y intéresser [p. 376].

In the final pages of the novel, Anne dismisses psychoanalysis as mere "plaisanterie [p. 495]." By categorically dismissing the project which has been her own for thirty years, she also invalidates all past endeavours and hints at all loss of faith in her future. How, we could ask, has she reached this point? How is the psychoanalytic procedure itself presented in Les Mandarins?

Throughout Les Mandarins Anne listens to her patient's accounts of their traumas, and yet cannot connect with anything beyond herself. Of course, this is the standard approach for the analyst, since certain boundaries are necessary for successful treatment. Lacan, in 'Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage en psychanalyse', writes as follows about this specific role in the analytic procedure :

il n'est pas de parole sans réponse, même si elle ne rencontre que le silence, pourvu qu'elle ait un auditeur, et que c'est là le coeur de sa fonction dans l'analyse.

Mais si le psychanalyste ignore qu'il en va ainsi de la fonction de la parole, il n'en subira que plus fortement l'appel, et si c'est le vide qui d'abord s'y fait entendre, c'est en lui-même qu'il éprouvera et c'est au-delà de la parole qu'il cherchera une réalité qui comble ce vide.²⁴

If, Lacan implies, the analyst takes into herself the patient's trauma - if she experiences their lack within her own ego - then she will be unable to help, instead condemned to self-depletion and paralysis by a few potent words of destruction. There is no interpretation when all meaning has been distilled into such a void, and to avoid such an impasse the analyst must stand outside the projected picture of null loss. The actual pain should remain with the patient for the delicate balance between interpretation and internalisation to be maintained and the analysis validated. Silence from the analyst is not condemnation, or helplessness, but a necessary response which preserves her need for neutrality while she is teetering on the dangerous emotional high ground of the inevitable transference.

Throughout Les Mandarins, however, Anne frequently seems unable to sidestep these signifiers hurled at her by her patients, patients who have been traumatised by a war which has witnessed so much horror, and in whom is invested the power to reinterpret the whole world. Their pictures of negativity, and her own traumas of loss, prove too potent to ignore : the signifier and the signified have been collapsed into one, and the boundaries between analysand and analyst blurred by their common experience. Unable to forget the war dead, she is haunted by the ghosts of Diégo, Rosa and others, and - like Jean in Le Sang des autres - feels that their deaths have

²⁴ Jacques Lacan, 'Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage en psychanalyse', in Écrits,

paid for her life : “tout ce qui m’est donné, je le leur vole. “On les a abattus” [vol. 1, p. 43].” With such senseless slaughter behind them, the universe itself is senseless : words have lost their fullness, and all Anne hears in the analytic procedure is the unbearable silence of the void :

avec ce passé derrière nous, comment se fier encore à l’avenir?
Diégo est mort, il y a eu trop de morts, le scandale est revenu
sur terre, le mot de bonheur n’a plus de sens : autour de moi,
c’est de nouveau le chaos [vol. 1, p. 77].

While communicating their own chaotic nightmares, Anne’s patients have successfully passed the nullity of all existence on to their own fragile physician :

dans mon cabinet je voyais apparaître des survivants qui, eux,
ne pouvaient pas se reposer dans le passé. “Je voudrais tant
dormir une nuit sans me souvenir”, suppliait cette grande fille
aux joues encore fraîches, mais dont les cheveux étaient
blancs. D’ordinaire, je savais me défendre; [...] mais devant ces
revenants, j’avais honte : honte de n’avoir pas assez souffert et
d’être là indemne, prête à les conseiller du haut de ma santé
[vol. 1, p. 270].

Her normal composure and silence ^{are} _^ not enough in the face of this trauma :
she feels the need to connect more directly, and carries within her the guilt for
her own relative peace of mind. And yet, being empty herself, she cannot
offer them much emotional sustenance, for if she has no ground beneath her,
how can she possibly hope to anchor her patients?

Que vont-ils faire de ce passé si lourd, si court, et de leur avenir
informe? Est-ce que je saurai les aider? [...] Et même si je
réussis à neutraliser leur passé, quel avenir ai-je à leur offrir?
J’estompe les peurs, je lime les rêves, je rogne les désirs,
j’adapte, j’adapte, mais à quoi les adapterai-je? Je ne vois plus
rien autour de moi qui tienne debout [vol. 1, p. 48].

As I have already claimed, therefore, even this overwhelming horror does not lead Anne to any form of connection with others. Like Paule, eventually numbed and anaesthetised by too much emotion, she is empty. Why should this be? It could be speculated that by constantly feeding her patients with pictures of plenitude Anne has depleted her own ego; she herself states, after all, that she is “facilement pathétique [vol. 1, p. 68].” Or, trained to treat trauma and transference with counter-transference, she may be trapped between the two evils of emptiness and emotive empathy, for she recognises that while existential separation is inevitable and absolute it is impossible for her to maintain. It could therefore be postulated that her defence is a voluntary retreat from this confusion into the *néant* within her. In either case, Anne the analyst seems to be in the same state as the analysand : overwhelmed by an internalised lack, she is searching for answers, which, however, she feels her profession can never provide: “j’étais incapable de suggérer un remède : je n’étais même pas sûre qu’il en existât [vol. 2, p. 79].”

If speech has been annihilated, and meaning obliterated, then discourse - the tool of her trade - is also invalidated. Voiceless, Anne becomes aware both of her prohibited desire and her inability to fill the void for her patients, and her stringent analyst’s rules of controlled reaction seem to have eventually sterilised all emotional interaction. The unwelcome effect of analytic training, Beauvoir seems to be implying, is the resulting loss of all true empathetic ability. Presented with a precise script she must follow, Anne is trapped in the void of her own counter-transference, and is aware of the hollowness of her own controlled emotions. As she herself states :

Je regardais les gens avec des yeux de médecin et ça me rendait difficile d'avoir avec eux des rapports humains. La colère, la rancune, j'en suis rarement capable; et les bons sentiments qu'on me porte ne me touchent guère : c'est mon métier d'en susciter. Je dois subir avec indifférence les conséquents des transferts que j'opère, et les liquider au moment voulu; même dans ma vie privée, je garde cette attitude. Le sujet atteint, je diagnostique aussitôt ses troubles infantiles, je me vois telle que j'apparais dans ses phantasmes : mère, grand-mère, soeur, enfant, idole. Je n'aime pas beaucoup les sorcelleries auxquelles on se livre sur mon image, mais il faut bien que je m'y résigne. Et je suppose que si jamais un individu normal avait le caprice de s'attacher à moi, je me demanderais aussitôt : Qui donc voit-il en moi? Quels désirs frustrés cherche-t-il à assouvir? et je serais incapable du moindre élan [vol. 1, p. 313].

Anne's self-analysis is wrong here, however. There is unadulterated emotion in store for her with Lewis Brogan, and when lying in his arms she does not in fact wonder whether she is his maternal substitute or fantasy figure. Their love affair, which we will now briefly examine, is in many ways the kernel of Anne's story, and temporarily reawakens her not only to the buried sexuality which smoulders within her, but also to a resurrected sense of self. No longer the faceless analyst, she feels newly born, reconnected and vibrantly alive :

Moi qui m'interroge toujours avec soupçon sur les sentiments que j'inspire, je ne me demandai jamais qui Lewis aimait en moi: j'étais sûre que c'était moi. Il ne connaissait ni mon pays, ni mon langage, ni mes amis, ni mes soucis : rien que ma voix, mes yeux, ma peau; mais je n'avais pas d'autre vérité que cette peau, cette voix, ces yeux [vol. 2, p. 56].

With him, she believes therefore that she is no longer voiceless and faceless, nor an ephemeral shade of a repressed, projected infantile desire. However, Anne's logic appears somewhat warped during this passage; as Lewis does not know her deeply (indeed, perhaps precisely because of this), it may well

be that he is unconsciously projecting his own romantic ideals onto her. Anne does not consider this possibility, however; to her it seems that she has finally escaped the solitude of her body and the conditioned coldness of countertransference, into a different universe of plenitude, where absence, separation and the yawning void are replaced by the warming presence of the couple : “l’absence ne nous séparerait plus: nous étions réunis pour toujours [vol. 2, p. 224].”

Anne’s passionate affair with Lewis also represents a return from sexual exile; she is *une jeune née* in his arms :

j’ai senti que ma vie me quittait, ma vieille vie avec ses soucis, ses fatigues, ses souvenirs usés. Lewis a serré contre lui une femme toute neuve. [...] Le passé, l’avenir, tout ce qui nous séparait mourait au pied de notre lit : rien ne nous séparait plus. Quelle victoire! Lewis était tout entier dans mes bras, moi dans les siens, nous ne désirions rien d’autre : nous possédions tout pour toujours [vol. 2, p. 55].

Reborn, she feels she has successfully jettisoned her old life with its internalised traumatic memories and their shattering fears. Echoing Jean Blomart she refers to the dissolution of barriers - “rien ne nous séparait plus”; “l’absence ne nous séparerait plus.” Having hidden behind the divisive boundaries erected for analytical purposes, Anne eventually finds relief in emotional and sexual contact with Lewis, and awakens to her own needs and desires which have been so long repressed. Having experienced herself only as a shapeless, faceless void, sex finally gives Anne form :

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 [vol. 2, p. 39].

Presence is therefore polarised against her former absence, and their sexual contact has released her from the void of her own isolation : “j’étais délivrée de moi [vol. 2, p. 223].”

However, while she feels delivered from her old self, Anne is now dangerously dependent on the identity Lewis confers on her, and which during their separation is literally delivered with his letter to her, as with the Lacanian letter. Until this moment, paralysed by absence, Anne is aware only of her lack of identity and an overwhelming sense of loss. The signifier will bestow a name on her - she will be Lewis’s signified lover, but until then is suspended helplessly in a void of deferred meaning :

Je n’étais plus sûre du sol sous mes pieds, ni du calendrier ni de mon propre nom. Lewis avait écrit, et les lettres arrivaient, donc sa lettre devait être ici : elle n’y était pas. [...] je n’étais certainement pas vivante. [...] rien ne manquait, nulle part, sinon sur une feuille jaune des signes noirs, et ils auraient été les signes d’une absence; l’absence d’une absence : ce n’est vraiment rien; elle dévorait tout [vol. 2, pp. 350-1].

As with her horrifying sense of the void at the beginning of her first monologue (“la terre craque sous nos pieds”), the ground opens up beneath her (“je n’étais plus sûre du sol sous mes pieds”), and uncertainty beckons. Time has stopped, death is stalking her again (“je n’étais certainement pas vivante”) and even her own name has been erased by absence.

The signifier still escapes Anne, however, when the letters do arrive, for how can she even be sure that Lewis speaks her language? Are their signifiers the same? As with Paule and Henri, the couple is caught in the crossfire of miscommunication, wrangling over the meaning of terms of endearment. Anne’s attempt at interpretation echoes Paule’s own misreading

of Henri's letter - indeed, significantly, both women refer to the words as "banal" :

Il y a eu d'autres lettres [...]; Lewis en envoyait une par semaine, comme autrefois; et comme autrefois elles s'achevaient toutes par ce mot : Love, qui veut tout dire et ne signifie rien. Était-ce encore un mot d'amour, ou la plus banale des formules? [vol. 2, p. 362].

The breakdown of her relationship with Lewis is therefore heralded by a lack of communication : ironically, the analyst cannot talk things through successfully with her lover when the couple eventually meet again. Somewhat extraordinarily bearing in mind that they are the tools of her profession, she states : "les mots, c'est dangereux, on risque de tout embrouiller [vol. 2, p. 229]." Their relationship is doomed, like Henri's and Paule's, to a vacuum of miscommunication and incompatibility, and when Anne finally hears Brogan's shattering words of rupture, she loses power over her own symbolisation, suspended in horrifyingly familiar silence :

- ce n'est plus de l'amour.
Voilà, il l'avait dit; j'avais entendu ces mots de mes oreilles, et rien ne pourrait les effacer, jamais. Je gardai le silence. Je ne savais plus que faire de moi. J'étais restée exactement la même; et le passé, l'avenir, le présent, tout chancelait. Il me semblait que ma voix même ne m'appartenait plus [vol. 2, p. 383].

The little mermaid - Anne - finally loses both her voice and her gamble on love : their fairytales both end on a note of tragedy. Having based her new freedom on the evasion of the self, and the collapse into the couple, Anne is doomed, like the storybook sea sprite. She has left her safe, natural environment, as has the heroine of the fairytale, to abandon herself to a

romantic ideal, only to watch her love mist into ephemeral foam as her new face and form disintegrates with it.

Les Mandarins centres on both the attractions and the dangers of this ideal of love : Anne and Paule are shattered by their attempts both to escape from and lose themselves in the ideal egos of Lewis and Henri. Finally, it is extremely significant that psychoanalysis itself has failed both women. If psychoanalysis' textual engagement with Tous Les Hommes sont mortels led to a suspended sentence, the outcome of psychoanalysis' textual trial in Les Mandarins thus appears to be a guilty verdict. Although Paule has been released from the prison of her mirror and is undoubtedly cured of her debilitating dependence on Henri, she is now drained, and seems more a fragmented doll than a living woman.

Significantly, Anne's own analytic training has hardly helped her : she has forgotten that evasion of the self and denial of the past is a doomed enterprise, for no one can escape her own face and history indefinitely. She has also failed to recognise that by investing everything in Lewis she has simply created another emotional exclusion zone: "Pour lui, pour moi, pour nous, rien n'existait que nous [vol. 2, p. 231]." When this *nous* is on the other side of the world, she is painfully aware of its absence, and the gaping void of solitude is replaced by the void of loss :

c'est fou combien il y a sur la surface de la terre d'hommes qui ne sont pas Lewis; c'est fou combien il y a des chemins qui ne reconduisent pas à ses bras et de mots d'amour qui ne s'adressent pas à moi [vol. 2, p. 77].

If anything, the agony of her isolation has now been intensified by the transient plenitude she has just experienced :

je n'étais ni ici ni là, ni moi-même ni une autre, rien qu'une machine à tuer le temps, le temps qui d'ordinaire meurt si vite et qui n'en finissait pas d'agoniser [vol. 2, p. 359].

As Lacan states, when demand is satiated, it must discover another *objet*, another focus for desire. Anne is both doomed to this Lacanian unsatisfied longing, and trapped in the Freudian cage of memory. Although she has tried to forget painful memories when lost in Lewis, she cannot lose her past. Damage, Beauvoir seems to be implying, cannot wholly be jettisoned : we are all products of our memories, even in our existential attempts at reinvention.

If this is then the case however, it could finally be speculated that Simone de Beauvoir in fact is unconsciously subscribing to certain psychoanalytic tenets, which at this stage of her life she is still so swift to dismiss. Furthermore, the themes of the novel once more revolve around Beauvoir's own psychological damage; in her own attempts at fictional reinvention, the same textual patterns emerge. The breakdowns by both women following their desperate attempts at union with their idealised lovers, and their paralysing battles with their resulting solitude are revealing fictional windows into Beauvoir's own insecurities.

There is, however, one important development in the intense relationship between Beauvoir and psychoanalysis which is revealed in Les Mandarins : her own implicit engagement with the themes of infantile experience, psychical construction and emotional dependence - all themes which have been prevalent in her former fiction - are now far more explicit with the introduction of the analytic procedure as protagonist. Although Beauvoir is keen to portray psychoanalysis as an invalid procedure (which, we could

argue, she does successfully), it could even be speculated that through its central status in the text there is evidence that her repression of its importance and relevance to her own experience is in fact losing hold. Beauvoir's favourite text therefore may be telling her readers the story of her own burgeoning acknowledgement of psychoanalysis.

There would be a long gap between Les Mandarins and her next novel, yet psychoanalysis would again be a central issue in the work. As stated in the first chapter, Simone de Beauvoir's attitude changed significantly in the intervening period, during which her autobiographies were written. Let us therefore now turn to her penultimate fictional text. Bearing in mind the author's altered opinions, how can we read the novel psychoanalytically? Is it vastly different from her earlier fiction? Or are the psychoanalytic themes, while perhaps more explicit, revealingly the same? What will Beauvoir's textual repetition compulsion tell us as Lacanian readers of Les Belles Images?

CHAPTER SEVEN

LES BELLES IMAGES

Twelve years elapsed between the publication of Les Mandarins in 1954, and the appearance of Beauvoir's next novel Les Belles Images in 1966. As already stated in my introductory chapter, these years were filled with the painstaking excavation of Beauvoir's own childhood, adolescence and adult life, crystallising in literary form in the five autobiographical works which provide an invaluable window onto her movements and motivations.¹ Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée was published in 1958; two years later La Force de l'âge followed, and the third volume of the autobiographical series appeared in 1963 - the year which also saw the loss of Beauvoir's mother. It took Françoise de Beauvoir a month to die from the cancer which rotted her body, and this traumatic and significant period in her daughter's life also became a published emotional memoir after a gruelling revaluation of Beauvoir's past. A year later she began work on her penultimate work of fiction, Les Belles Images.

As Beauvoir had spent so long reliving her emotional past and examining it under an autobiographical lens before once more turning to the fictional form,

¹ Beauvoir's autobiographies are not of course infallible historical inscriptions. Like Le Deuxième Sexe, they are littered with subjective reinterpretations, and are in many ways as richly novelistic as her fiction. When she was conferring with Claude Francis and Fernande Gontier on her biography, they were confronted with the inconsistency of her revelations :

We were aware of twilight zones and topics that were taboo. We had discovered that she had wilfully blurred some parts of her life or reconstructed the circumstances surrounding people who were dear to her. [...] According to de Beauvoir's mood, we heard different versions of events.

it is in many ways inevitable that the central themes of the novel we are to examine below include childhood, identity and language. As does Tous Les Hommes sont mortels, Les Belles Images represents a significant break with Beauvoir's earlier fictional experiments, not only in stylistic terms, but also perhaps because of her altered opinions regarding the importance of childhood in the formation of the individual. During the intervening period between Les Mandarins and Les Belles Images Beauvoir's views on psychoanalysis evolved considerably. In her interview with Francis Jeanson, she openly acknowledges the profound influence her childhood has had on her later life :

cette importance accordée aux premiers moments, c'est tout à fait freudien, n'est-ce pas... Mais je me demande si tout ne s'est pas joué, entre treize et dix-huit ans, *précisément* sur le fond que j'avais déjà acquis dans mes premières années, dans ma *toute petite* enfance [...]. Je pense qu'il y a un début, qui d'une certaine manière est irrattrapable.

Furthermore, she describes her infancy and adolescence in specifically Freudian terms :

Je crois que j'ai eu une enfance, une adolescence absolument classiques, avec la fixation sur la mère, d'abord, toute petite; avec ensuite, très nettement, un complexe d'Oedipe et une fixation sur le père, accompagnée d'une grand jalousie par rapport à la mère.²

Beauvoir therefore finally fits her own childhood experience into the Freudian template of infantile development, a template which she had so firmly rejected

See Simone de Beauvoir (London: Minerva, 1992), pp. xii-xiii. (I quote in English here as the introduction to the English edition from which this quotation is taken is not included in the original French version.)

² See Francis Jeanson, Simone de Beauvoir, ou l'entreprise de vivre, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966, pp. 251 and 253.

in Le Deuxième Sexe. Freud, she thus publicly acknowledges twenty years later, was not entirely wrong after all.

As a result of this acknowledgement, although the character of the child psychologist is not drawn particularly warmly in Les Belles Images, it could be suggested that Beauvoir is generally more sympathetic towards her psychoanalytic subject matter than she had been previously. Perhaps more definitely than in any other of Beauvoir's novels, in Les Belles Images childhood circumstances are recognised as having a strong conditioning effect, and societal structures are represented as a framework which act upon the existential subject. We therefore see far more explicitly in the novel Beauvoir's own acceptance of psychoanalysis, as well as the obsessive return of her themes - themes which simmer so intensely and insistently under the fictional surface of all her earlier works.

There exist many ways in which to read Les Belles Images from a psychoanalytic perspective, ways which are by now familiar to us as readers since, as I hope to have shown in the previous chapters, Beauvoir's textual repetition compulsion constantly drives these themes into the familiar territory of neurosis, the breakdown of identity, and the dangers of idealised love. Similarly, notes of neurotic madness echo throughout Les Belles Images. For example, the Oedipal triangle is once more firmly in evidence, and the intense emotional consequences of an unresolved Oedipus complex must be faced. Yet again the central female protagonist suffers a major identity crisis. Neurotic physical symptoms appear : as with Jean Blomart, Laurence's refusal to eat mirrors a refusal to introject the values which saturate the

society which has formed her. Her intense period of introspection is, again, similar to Blomart's. For in Le Sang des autres Jean spends one night reliving his past in an attempt to progress beyond past patterns into a new future. In the same way, following the shattering news that her father is to return to her mother's bed, Laurence remains alone in her room for three days, reviewing and analysing the damaged ideals of her past relationships and attempting to come to terms with her rapidly disintegrating idealisation of her father. She is finally brought to an intense peak of hysteria which culminates in a breakthrough of sorts in the form of brief but impassioned communication with her husband. In terms of general resolution, the novel ends on a bittersweet note of regret for Laurence's past, lingering alienation from her present, but tenuous hope for her daughter's future.

In this chapter, however, I will not be returning to my approach using the classical Freudian theories of the convoluted Oedipal relationship and its resulting neurosis, since Les Belles Images has already been read productively in explicitly Freudian terms.³ Instead, I will turn to Jacques Lacan's theories of language and identity in a linguistic excavation of the layers of fractured meaning in the novel. As Les Belles Images represents a major departure from Beauvoir's former literary style, being a far more self-conscious text than her earlier works, it is apposite to concentrate specifically on the representation of language in the text.⁴ The novel is a lens both onto

³ See, for example, Fallaize, pp. 132-136, and also Terry Keefe, Les Belles Images La Femme rompue, Exeter: University of Glasgow French and German Publications, 1991, pp. 23-24.

⁴ Language in the novel is one of Beauvoir's primary themes. The work was for her a definite departure in stylistic terms; although she did not admit to being a partisan of the *nouveau*

Laurence's self and onto her disintegrating relationship with language. As I hope to show in this chapter, the fragmentation of this self is in many ways also mirrored by the fragmentation of its own text.

Throughout Les Belles Images Laurence appears to be in a radical state of alienation from her society, from her self and from her own language. As an advertising copywriter she is an expert manipulator of images and a wielder of words, and yet this world of words serves only to create cuts in the fragile fabric of her existence. She has an exceptionally problematic relationship both with the Symbolic linguistic, societal and familial structures in which she is enmeshed and with her own body. The Imaginary realm offers her no shelter either, since she is painfully aware of the dizzying gap between the *belles images* projected and valued by her culture, and the true insecurities of those around her. Far from being the realms of misplaced but comforting plenitude or true knowledge, for Laurence both Lacanian orders of the Imaginary and the Symbolic initially constitute only death, absence and loss. She sees images as illusions, objects as *objets petit a*, empty substitutes, and language as lack. The third order of the Real splits the narrative, sending the disturbing echoes of a borderline psychosis shivering through the text.⁵ The

roman, she was keen to exploit the innovative technical possibilities of formal literary experimentation.

⁵ As Dylan Evans notes in his Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis (London: Routledge, 1997), Lacan's interest in the psychoses in fact predates his interest in Freudian psychoanalysis (see p. 154). Evans states

whereas Freud's first approach to the unconscious is by way of neurosis, Lacan's first approach is by psychosis. It has also been common to compare Lacan's tortured and at times almost incomprehensible style of writing and speaking to the discourse of psychotic patients. Whatever one makes of such comparisons, it is clear that Lacan's discussions of psychosis are among the most significant and original aspects of his work.

Lacan's most detailed discussion of psychosis appears in his seminar of 1955-6, entitled simply *The Psychoses*. It is here that he expounds what

final tone, however, is one of a sudden but positive resolution as Laurence transcends the Imaginary realm of stasis and to some extent redefines the Symbolic order. Herself saturated with empty *belles images*, she refuses to mould her daughter in the social stereotype of perfection, finally vocalising her emotions in an outburst which communicates her intentions far more clearly than any previous statement in the text.

Firstly, however, I will briefly examine the myth of the unified ego. As already stated above, Laurence's self is extremely fragmented - and we will later analyse her representation as split subject in the Symbolic order. Dominique Langlois, Laurence's mother, on the other hand, is trapped in an Imaginary alienated projection of her self as she wishes to remain : the smooth, unwrinkled and unrippled surface of youth and control must be maintained in the superficiality of her particular social circles. Dominique is a desperate symbol of Lacan's theory of the controlled ego as a fiction. The unity of the personality is mere myth; the ego mere mirrored *méconnaissance*. She may have created herself and her daughters in the images of her own desire, but her flawless surface is unmasked by Beauvoir as a fragile veneer, and her self-possession crumbles into the dust of disillusion and dependence. Alienation is endemic to the subject, and while

come to be the main tenets of the Lacanian approach to madness. [An
Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis, pp. 154-155.

In the current chapter I will analyse Laurence and Dominique through the optic of the psychotic, not the neurotic, referring in particular to this third volume of Lacan's seminars. Although the psychoses are distinct from the neuroses in the severity of their symptoms and the inaccessibility of their sufferers, from our current theoretical perspective an analysis using the psychotic parallel is particularly relevant. Like Laurence, psychotics have a particularly problematic relationship with language, and - as with Dominique - they are imprisoned in the Imaginary.

Laurence recognises this, feeling the *aphanisis*⁶ of the split subject particularly keenly and voicing these concerns through her two-tiered narrative, her mother ultimately remains in the comforting existential order of the Imaginary, creating a new image of and for herself, incapable of assuming her social role alone.⁷

Let us therefore now briefly examine Dominique through a Lacanian lens before our more comprehensive analysis of her daughter, concentrating on the image of perfection Dominique relays which is fractured when her lover leaves her. According to Lacan the ego is not a smooth, solid psychical construction, but flawed, warped and skewed - a fact, he states, which is conveniently forgotten by many contemporary analysts :

Si on oublie le relief, le ressort essentiel de la psychanalyse, on en revient - ce qui est naturellement le penchant constant, quotidiennement constaté, des psychanalystes - à toutes sortes de mythes [...] mythes de l'unité de la personnalité, mythe de la synthèse, [qui] montrent à tout instant le craquement, l'écartèlement, la déchirure, la négation des faits, la méconnaissance de l'expérience la plus immédiate.⁸

Dominique, beautiful, stylish, admirably successful in her own right, mistress of one of the richest men in France (and therefore highly socially desirable in

⁶ 'Aphanisis' is a term coined by the analyst Ernest Jones to denote 'the disappearance of sexual desire'. Lacan modified the term, using it to denote the disappearance of the subject. Dylan Evans defines it as "the fading of the subject, the fundamental division of the subject [.] Fading [...] refers to the disappearance of the subject in the process of alienation." See Evans, p. 12.

⁷ The concept of the image is central to any analysis of Les Belles Images. In this chapter I wish to respond briefly to Terry Keefe's challenge in his own analysis of the work to analyse this central theme more fully :

much of the book revolves around puzzling questions concerning the difference between appearance and reality, conduct and feelings, image and substance.

For 'image', as the title suggests, is of course a key word and concept in the novel. Examining its ramifications would take a study in its own right.

See Keefe, p. 35.

her particular milieu) is obsessed with papering over all emotional cracks, tears and rents. As Laurence states, she initially succeeds in this projection :
“On la prend pour une femme de tête, maîtresse de soi, efficace... [p. 125].”⁹

Maintaining her image of smooth control, she has also imposed this ideal of glossy, icy perfection on her two daughters during their childhood, manipulating and moulding them like tiny shop mannequins :

[Laurence] a toujours été une image. Dominique y a veillé, fascinée dans son enfance par des images si différentes de sa vie, tout entière butée - de toute son intelligence et son énorme énergie - à combler ce fossé [p. 21].

It is significant from our Lacanian perspective that Beauvoir stresses “ce fossé” since by shaping her daughters Dominique is vainly attempting to smooth over an unbridgeable gap between her own projected ego ideal (how she wishes to appear through her daughters) and reality : a project which is admirably resisted by Laurence with regard to her own daughter. Dominique, however, is lost in the erroneous belief that a flawless surface can be created and maintained indefinitely. Constantly gazing at herself in the mirrors of her mansion, she tries to cover her whole life with a smooth glacial gloss. She projects herself outwards to her acquaintances (they are never classed as friends) as would an actress, switching roles to suit her temperament and the current fashion : ‘Dominique imite toujours quelqu’un [p. 34].’ Even before her own daughter she paints herself with the glowing colours of success and

⁸ Jacques Lacan, Le Séminaire livre III : Les Psychoses, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1981, ‘Introduction à la question des psychoses’, pp. 9-24, p. 16.

⁹ Simone de Beauvoir, Les Belles Images, Paris: Gallimard, 1966. All quotations are taken from this edition.

enviable self-possession : “Je n’ai connu Dominique que triomphante [p. 72],” Laurence states tellingly.

This cool self-possession is however undermined by Beauvoir throughout Les Belles Images. We notice, for example, her horror of ageing : “l’idéale image d’une femme qui vieillit bien. [...] Cette image-là, Dominique la refuse. Elle flanche, pour la première fois [p. 16],” and when the shocking news of Gilbert’s intended marriage arrives, the glossy surface of her self-created image is cracked, seemingly beyond repair. Beauvoir shows how her ego has been a fragile fiction, bolstered by hollow images, describing her existence as “cette vie si acharnée d’ordinaire à se déguiser [p. 115].” When she goes to help her mother following her letter to Gilbert’s fiancée and the resulting fracas, Laurence is shocked by the splintered, gaping gap between the picture of despair before her and Dominique’s former self-possession :

Laurence a la tête en feu. Dans le désordre du lit défait, du peignoir déchiré, des fleurs renversées [...] l’horreur prend Laurence à la gorge, l’horreur de ce qui s’est passé en Dominique pendant ces quelques instants, de ce qui se passe en ce moment. Ah! toutes les images ont volé en éclats, et il ne sera jamais possible de les raccommoder [p. 124].

It is significant that Laurence interprets the breakdown of her mother’s life as the shattering of an image : “toutes les images ont volé en éclats.” The social façade, the seemingly controlled ego which is Dominique as career woman, successful mother, adored mistress, is split; instead she is portrayed as hysterically sinking into the holes of depression left by the endless tears and rents of the unconscious horrors she has refused to acknowledge. Her fear of ageing, for example, is intensified, as she feels she must now face an uncertain future alone.

However, Dominique refuses to leave the Imaginary realm, and following her breakdown she retreats once more into the realm of static fixations, creating another series of images for herself. She is firstly the glamorous grandmother (“vêtue en “jeune grand-mère””[p. 142]), next the reconciled wife (“une femme [...] qui [...] préfère des joies plus secrètes, plus difficiles, plus intimes [p. 178]”) and finally takes her place as central matriarch in the grinning family of the oatmeal ideal : “Jean-Charles, papa, Dominique, souriants comme sur une affiche [...]. Réconciliés, s’abandonnant ensemble aux gaietés de la vie de famille [p. 175].” Trapped in the Imaginary, Dominique is unable to transcend this captivating category. Furthermore, since she is afraid of the unflattering connotations of the term *une femme plaquée*, she will be forever dependent on the Symbolic signifiers of her society. Her daughter, on the other hand, attempts throughout Les Belles Images to resist both the illusory order of the Imaginary and the social order of the Symbolic. This leads her to a psychic conflict which, as I hope to show, is in a sense resolved by Laurence, and brings the text to a conclusion which hints at hope for Catherine.

Let us now begin our textual analysis of Beauvoir’s central protagonist Laurence, and the spiked networks of language which, far from forming a stable cradle for the subject, heighten the sense of alienation and split the self. According to Lacan, psychological equilibrium (in so far as it can ever be attained and maintained) depends absolutely on a mastery of the Symbolic. In Les Psychoses he speaks at length of the psychotic’s relation to this order, concluding that “pour que nous soyons dans la psychose, il y faut des

troubles du langage.”¹⁰ The psychotic subject is all too easily alienated both by and from their own linguistic medium, which appears fractured and Other to them :

dans la psychose, l'inconscient est en surface [...] l'inconscient, c'est un langage. Qu'il soit articulé, n'implique pas pour autant qu'il soit reconnu. La preuve, c'est que tout se passe comme si Freud traduisait une langue étrangère, et même la reconstituait par découpage. Le sujet est tout simplement, à l'endroit de son langage, dans le même rapport que Freud.¹¹

Constantly questioning her own perceptions and interpretations throughout the novel, Laurence appears unable to identify fully with the accepted discourse and the social structures around her. As with the alienating echo of an endlessly repeated word, or the disconcerting first contact with a foreign language, meaning seems tenuous and unstable and words sound hollow.

The very first paragraph of Les Belles Images is reminiscent of an almost unrelenting stream of confused consciousness. Interspersed with snippets of superficial social platitudes which further complicate the semantic layers, an invasive interior monologue of madness splinters Laurence's apparently objective description of the social scene around her :

“C'est un mois d'octobre... exceptionnel”, dit Gisèle Dufrène; ils acquiescent, ils sourient, une chaleur d'été tombe du ciel gris-bleu - Qu'est-ce que les autres ont que je n'ai pas? - ils caressent leurs regards à l'image parfaite [...] les roses contre le mur de pierre, les chrysanthèmes, les asters, les dahlias “les plus beaux de toute l'Ile-de-France”, dit Dominique; le paravent et les fauteuils bleus et violets - c'est d'une audace! - tranchent sur le vert de la pelouse, la glace tinte dans les verres [...]. (Juste en ce moment, dans un autre jardin, tout à fait différent, exactement pareil, quelqu'un dit des mots et le même sourire se

¹⁰ Lacan, Le Séminaire livre III : Les Psychoses, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1981, ‘La Dissolution imaginaire’, pp. 103-116, p. 106.

¹¹ Jacques Lacan, ‘Introduction à la question des psychoses’, *ibid*, pp. 9-24, p. 20.

pose sur un autre visage : “Quel merveilleux dimanche!”
Pourquoi est-ce que je pense ça?) [pp 7-8].

If we begin our analysis on the descriptive level, the text appears at times to be almost suffocating under its glorious profusion of nouns and hyperbolic description : “les roses [,] les chrysanthèmes, les asters, les dahlias “les plus beaux de toute l’Ile-de-France” [,] le paravent et les fauteuils bleus et violets [...]” Laurence is apparently objectively describing the exquisite perfection of the *belles images* before her, but the infrequency of the punctuation means that the nouns build up insidiously both in terms of weight and ranting rhythmic momentum, thus obscuring the potential sense of the passage by endless detail and description.¹²

It could be speculated at this point that Beauvoir continues to use this particular narrative technique throughout Les Belles Images in order to drain the words of meaning, and to portray Laurence’s initial grasp of the Symbolic as a tenuous one. For later in the novel she again hurls words at the reader, threatening to engulf the work in its own textual exuberance : an overwhelming endless catalogue of nouns, which here describe the glittering visions of Christmas luxury on the faubourg Saint-Honoré, may create an appropriate carnival atmosphere, yet they also seem disturbingly manic :

Lentement défilent les vitrines. Écharpes, clips, gourmettes, bijoux pour milliardaires - collerette de brillants avec pampilles de rubis, sautoir de perles noires, saphirs, émeraudes, bracelets d’or et de pierres précieuses -, fantaisies plus modestes, pierres

¹² Alison Holland has also drawn attention to the neurotic nature of the text, claiming that it appears to be on the breaking point of disintegration, stifled as it is beneath endless lists of nouns reminiscent of the empty advertising slogans which are Laurence’s vocational currency. As Holland has also perceptively recognised, the text itself embodies the Freudian repetition compulsion. Alison Holland’s lecture, ‘Simone de Beauvoir’s Writing Practice : Madness, Enumeration and Repetition in Les Belles Images’, was given on October 7th 1996, at Trinity College, Dublin, as part of the conference Simone de Beauvoir, Ten Years On.

du Tyrol, jade, pierres du Rhin, bulles de verre où dansent au gré de la lumière des rubans brillants, miroir au cœur d'un soleil de paille dorée, bouteilles en verre soufflé, vases d'épais cristal pour une seule rose, pots d'opaline blanche et bleue, flacons en porcelaine, en laque de Chine, poudriers en or, d'autres incrustés de pierreries, parfums, lotions, atomizers, gilets en plume d'oiseau, cachemires, pull blond en laine et poil de chameau, fraîcheur mousseuse des lingerie, le moelleux, le duveteux des robes d'intérieur aux tons pastels, [.....]. Et tous les yeux brillent de convoitise, ceux de hommes comme ceux de femmes [pp. 137-8].

In fact, far from painting a mouthwatering portrait of covetable perfection, these lists which vomit endless nouns apparently serve only to question the importance of their apparently superfluous objects, devalorising them. Similarly, in several other descriptive passages of the novel, Beauvoir uses hyperbole, frequently employing a tightly tressed trio of adjectives. For example, a suede jacket is described by Laurence - slipping easily into her role of copywriter - as "couleur de brume, couleur du temps, couleur des robes de Peau-d'Ane [p. 139]"; she refers to Jean-Charles and herself in terms of the radiantly healthy couple of a Hollywood love story, "vêtus, hâlés, polis [p. 22]" in which she becomes "chair et sang, désir, plaisir [*ibid*]." It is as if language is not enough to cover the scene - Laurence must heap more and more references together to fill the threatening emptiness with an illusory poetic plenitude. The result of this, however, is equally threatening. Far from being a smooth chain of meaning, the swarm of symbols create a labyrinth of alienating language, in which the subject - utterly anaesthetised to hyperbole - loses her thread of sense.

To return to the first paragraph of Les Belles Images, significantly in terms of our current emphasis on the psychotic subject we detect represented in

textual form the divided self. We are immediately alerted to a split between two levels of language as Laurence's interior monologue - her *je* which could be read as representing her 'true' voice (or, in Freudian terms, her unconscious) - filters through the pages, undermining the apparently objective description of the (conscious) *elle* and creating fissures of insecurity in the textual surface. In the above-quoted passage, for example, we come across her disquieting repeated refrain of alienation : "Qu'est-ce que les autres ont que je n'ai pas? [p. 7]." Lacan specifically locates such a sense of strangeness within the ego which feels split into two :

Quand le sentiment d'étrangeté porte quelque part, [...] c'est toujours le moi qui ne se retrouve plus, [...] c'est le moi qui se croit à l'état de double¹³

Laurence's wistful phrase is the first signal of this presence of the split subject, and hints at an intense conflict between Laurence as subject/enunciator and Laurence as object/enunciatee.

Dylan Evans refers to Lacan's definition of the linguistic concept of *énonciation* as follows. It is a definition I quote at length since it is particularly relevant for our current discussion of the split levels of Laurence's unstable narrative :

When Lacan comes to use the term 'enunciation' in 1946, it is first of all to describe strange characteristics of psychotic language, with its 'duplicity of the enunciation' [...]. Later, in the 1950s, the term is used to locate the subject of the unconscious. In the graph of desire, the lower chain is the statement, which is speech in its conscious dimension, while the upper chain is 'the unconscious enunciation' [...]. In designating the enunciation as unconscious, Lacan affirms that the source of speech is not the ego, nor consciousness, but the unconscious; language comes

¹³ Jacques Lacan, Le Séminaire livre III : Les Psychoses, Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1981, 'Tu es celui qui me suivras', pp. 307-320, p. 313.

from the Other, and the idea that 'I' am master of my discourse is only an illusion. The very word 'I' (*Je*) is ambiguous; as shifter, it is both a signifier acting as subject of the statement, and an index which designates, but does not signify, the subject of the enunciation [...]. The subject is thus split between these two levels, divided in the very act of articulating the / that presents the illusion of unity [p. 55].¹⁴

Laurence's split between the *je* and the *elle* may thus represent these differing unconscious/conscious levels of an enunciation which further splits the subject, wrapped in the 'psychotic [...] duplicity' mentioned by Evans. That this split upsets the narrative is unquestionable. The psychotic conflict is often played out by Beauvoir in the same sentence - and almost the same phrase - which adds both to the density of the signifiatory confusion and the fragility of the psychological subject matter : "Elle s'est beaucoup dépensée, c'est pour ça que maintenant elle se sent déprimée, je suis cyclique [p. 8]." Laurence's *je* is therefore both troubled and troubling; it challenges the illusion of unity projected by the more rational description when the *elle* is the central focus of the text, introducing a sharp note of disquieting instability.¹⁵ Identity, as Lacan states, "se réalise comme disjoignante du sujet."¹⁶ Laurence is not one single ego, but an irrecoverably split subject.

Malcolm Bowie defines Freud's and Lacan's differing concepts of splitting as follows :

[Freudian] *Ichspaltung* or 'splitting of the ego' was the mechanism, of particular note in the theory of [...] the psychoses, whereby the ego could maintain in uneasy co-

¹⁴ Evans, p. 55.

¹⁵ Elizabeth Fallaize also recognises that the textual security is "disturbed by the questioning 'I'." See Fallaize, pp. 123-125.

¹⁶ Jacques Lacan, 'Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage en psychanalyse', in *Écrits*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966, p. 292.

existence two distinct attitudes towards the external world - those of acceptance and disavowal.

Lacan's *Spaltung* [...] is the primal condition of the human subject. [It is] a separation visited upon the speaking subject by the very language he uses.¹⁷

Although our current perspective is Lacanian, it should be noted that Laurence in fact embodies both Freudian and Lacanian concepts of the *Spaltung* in Les Belles Images. Not only is she split by the language which surrounds her, both revolted by and dependent upon the stereotypical inanities of social exchange, but she is also torn between the "two distinct attitudes towards the external world" mentioned by Bowie. Outwardly she may accept the social norms of her consumerist society and even sustain them through her successful advertising slogans, but at the same time she battles against the concomitant values of neutralising normalisation and conspicuous consumption. While she observes and describes her world in the opening pages, she is swift to question the depth of her apparent conformity, aware of a fundamental alienation from her peers : "Qu'est-ce que les autres ont que je n'ai pas?" She also questions the true specificity of this *milieu* which arrogantly assumes itself to be unique :

Juste en ce moment, dans un autre jardin, tout à fait différent, exactement pareil, quelqu'un dit des mots et le même sourire se pose sur un autre visage : "Quel merveilleux dimanche! [pp. 7-8]."

It is as if Laurence needs to upset the picture before her and challenge its claim to unique perfection. Although she herself is part of this picture, she questions it and rejects it, her disavowal prompted by the language she hears

¹⁷ Malcolm Bowie, Lacan, London: Fontana, 1991, pp. 139-40.

and which she is also condemned to use in order to communicate.¹⁸ In his seminar entitled 'Des signifiants primordiaux, et du manque d'un', Lacan discusses these pre-established networks of social intercourse, acknowledging that the script of platitudes is vital for all satisfactory forms of interaction, and that we are all afraid of our own destabilising potential for improvisation :

Nous [...] sommes réduits à rester très peureusement dans le conformisme, nous craignons de devenir un petit peu fous dès que nous ne disons pas exactement la même chose que tout le monde. C'est ça, la situation de l'homme moderne.¹⁹

Laurence's *je* and her *elle* could therefore also represent the brittle nature of the speaking subject, which is exploded into the social order and dispersed in the uncomfortable, jagged forms of a language to which it must conform in order to stay sane, and yet which it has had no part in shaping. The hollowness of the linguistic cliché "Quel merveilleux dimanche!" - used by countless other guests at countless other Sunday parties - is enough to shatter the already questionable peace of Laurence's passive reflection, and also heightens her awareness of her own split between acceptance of the picture before her and ultimate contempt for its inadequacy. She hears the necessary cliché only in terms of its intrinsic emptiness - as Lacan defines it - "appris par coeur, [...] répété avec une absence totale de sens, au seul titre de ritournelle."²⁰

¹⁸ Elizabeth Fallaize, in her comprehensive and detailed analysis of the narrative strategies in Les Belles Images, concludes that Laurence is ultimately unable to escape from the net of clichés which surround her. See The Novels of Simone de Beauvoir, pp. 125-127.

¹⁹ Jacques Lacan, Le Séminaire livre III : Les Psychoses, Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1981, 'Des signifiants primordiaux et du manque d'un', pp. 221-231, p. 226.

²⁰ Jacques Lacan, 'La Dissolution imaginaire', *ibid*, pp. 103-116, p. 115.

Apparently troubled by her own challenging attitude - a fear which is further evidence of the depth of the split between Laurence as *je* and Laurence as *elle* - she is forced to ask herself “pourquoi est-ce que je pense ça?” This, however, is a nagging question she remains unable to answer throughout the work, and which ricochets through the novel again and again, as she wonders “qu’ont-ils que je n’ai pas non plus? [p. 14]”; “qu’ont-ils que je n’ai pas? [p. 19].” She finally inverts the question before the emotional crescendo of the last chapter, still doubting her ability to conform to this world in which she feels ineradicably alien and Other : “Est-ce moi qui suis anormale? une anxieuse, une angoissée : qu’est-ce que j’ai qu’ils n’ont pas? [p. 150].” Again, the only real reply is emptiness as even her own motivations are unclear to her, and reflecting on her situation causes a further gap between her enunciator (herself) and her subject matter (also herself). She is trapped in the Sartrean void of her own mercurially elusive consciousness. As Evans states,

the split or divided subject [is confronted with] the impossibility of the ideal of a fully present self-consciousness; the subject will never know himself completely, but will always be cut off from his own knowledge. [The split] indicates the presence of the unconscious, and is an effect of the signifier. The subject is split by the very fact that he is a speaking being [...], since speech divides the subject of the enunciation from the subject of the statement.²¹

Although as a split subject Laurence may “never know [her]self completely”, Beauvoir hints at a possible reply to Laurence’s thread of questions “qu’ont-ils que je n’ai pas non plus? [p. 14]”, “qu’ont-ils que je n’ai pas? [p. 19]”, “qu’est-ce que j’ai qu’ils n’ont pas? [p. 150].” It is in fact

because she deals exclusively with fictions every day in her copywriting capacity that Laurence is able to recognise them for what they are : hollow, empty words which to serve their prompting purpose must be Lacanian temporary substitutes. A significant parallel can be drawn between the realm of the Imaginary, to which we now turn, and the advertising world which Laurence inhabits : both are kingdoms “of image and imagination, deception and lure.”²² Laurence recognises that the illusive images she manipulates merely serve to trigger acknowledgement of desire and lack, as Lacanian *objets petit a*. As a result she is far more sensitively attuned than her peers to the gap between their *belles images* and their desire, but is also more alienated from their common universe as a result. When speaking of her immersion in the world of luxury she recognises this alienation as deriving specifically from her constant manipulation of language and images. Split by the Symbolic, she is trapped in it :

j'adorais entrer dans les boutiques [...]. C'est parce qu'elle aimait ces paradis, au sol tapissé d'étoffes luxueuses, aux arbres chargés d'escarboucles, qu'elle a su tout de suite en parler. Et *maintenant elle est victime des slogans qu'elle a fabriqués*. Déformation professionnelle : dès que m'attire un décor, un objet, je me demande à quelle motivation j'obéis [p. 138, my emphasis].

It is significant that Laurence herself recognises that her vocation has required a constant deconstruction of both the Symbolic order and the Imaginary realm, to which we now turn. As already stated, this deconstruction renders problematic any normal interaction with her environment since she sees only the vertiginous gap between the images and

²¹ Dylan Evans, p. 192.

the plenitude they strive to attain. Her own self-perception also suffers, for - as Régine of Tous Les Hommes sont mortels also realises with horror - she sees the image in the mirror as disjunctive of the fragmented reality of the split subject. Far from jubilantly assuming the specular image in the mirror or in the adoring eyes of her lover and husband, Laurence instead sees it as false and alienating :

Dans la glace elle se jette un coup d'oeil. Une jolie femme délicatement gaie, un peu capricieuse, un peu mystérieuse, c'est ainsi que Lucien me voit. [...] Pour Jean-Charles elle est efficace, loyale, limpide. C'est faux aussi [p. 108]."

Such an attitude would, of course, be a positive assumption of a lucidity lacking in many other Beauvoirean heroines (Paule, Régine, Chantal, for example), but Laurence seems unable to assume this existential *authenticité* with ease. For what could fill her lack? Objects themselves - the recognised emotional currency of her social milieu and the tools of her own vocation - are *objets petit a* - unattainable, deficient substitutes which cannot quench desire.

Following Laurence's argument with Jean-Charles, he sends her red roses and buys her a glittering necklace, thus subscribing to romantic stereotype. She views the flowers as an attempt to bridge the gap between subjects : "Un bouquet, c'est toujours autre chose que des fleurs : c'est de l'amitié, de l'espoir, de la gratitude, de la gaieté [p. 136]." Under her gaze Jean-Charles' gesture is reduced ^{to} no more than an existential *geste* based on rigid romantic rules as opposed to an authentic *acte*; it cannot stand up to analysis, and Laurence reduces the words of his message, once more, to cliché. She is able to see only the emptiness behind the symbols :

²² *ibid*, p. 82.

Des roses rouges : amour ardent. Justement non. Même pas un sincère remords, elle en est sûre; simple déférence aux conventions conjugales : pas de mésentente pendant les fêtes de fin d'année. [...] on les a chargés d'un message mensonger [*ibid*].

When they stroll down the faubourg Saint-Honoré, scene of so much overwhelming festive luxury, Laurence lucidly realises that it is the gossamer dream spun around the objects which causes the juices of desire to flow, and not, in fact, the objects themselves. As Lacan recognises, drives are set in motion by a primary lack and a shimmering illusion which promises to fill the void; there is in fact no material end which can satisfy them. Contemplating the suede jacket, Laurence realises that it is nothing without the whole fantasy woven around it - a fantasy which, significantly, can never be bought :

Déjà l'envie l'a quittée; cette veste n'aurait plus la même nuance ni le même velouté, séparée du trois-quarts feuille morte, des manteaux en cuir lisse, des écharpes brillantes qui l'encadrent dans la vitrine; c'est celle-ci tout entière qu'on convoite à travers chacun des objets qui y sont exposés [p. 139].

According to Lacan, desire - in this case, specifically the desire of the consumer - does not aspire to fulfilment, but instead circles endlessly around the *objet petit a*, which is defined by Lacan as

l'objet du désir, c'est la cause du désir, et cet objet cause du désir, c'est l'objet de la pulsion - c'est à dire l'objet autour de quoi tourne la pulsion. [...] Ce n'est pas que le désir s'accroche à l'objet de la pulsion - le désir en fait la tour, en tant qu'il est agi dans la pulsion.²³

Buying a camera for Catherine - a gift itself designed to produce further glossy images - Laurence is aware of the inadequacy of those objects around

²³ Jacques Lacan, Le Séminaire livre XI : Les Quatre Concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1973, 'Du sujet supposé savoir, de la dyade première, et du bien', pp. 209-220, p. 220.

her, which she must exalt through her work and worship with her peers. They are objects which can never be attained in their fullness, and yet which spark the desire which constantly drives her consumerist society. The camera she buys as a Christmas present for her daughter is meant to symbolise more than it is capable of meaning : happiness, love. However, it will only be a substitute :

c'est autre chose que je voudrais lui donner : la sécurité, la gaieté, le plaisir d'être au monde. C'est tout ça que je prétends vendre quand je lance un produit. Mensonge. Dans les vitrines, les objets gardent encore l'aura qui les nimait sur l'image en papier glacé. Mais quand on les tient dans sa main, on ne voit plus rien d'autre qu'une lampe, un parapluie, un appareil photographique. Inerte, froid [p. 139].

Even more significantly, the extravagant necklace which Jean-Charles buys her is only a representation of an absence, an empty substitute like the camera : "C'est une compensation, un symbole, un succédané [p. 140]." As a prop in their act of reconciliation the necklace is only a hollow protagonist, and its jagged glitter serves to define even more sharply the gaping void behind its physical presence :

Est-ce qu'il ne sent pas entre nous le poids des choses non dites? non pas du silence, mais des phrases vaines; ne sent-il pas la distance, l'absence, sous la courtoisie des rites?

Elle ôte le bijou avec une espèce de rage : comme si elle se délivrait d'un mensonge.

[...] Il achète la paix conjugale, les joies du foyer, l'entente, l'amour, et la fierté de soi [pp. 140-141].

As with the flowers ("on les a chargés d'un message mensonger") and the glittering *vitrines* ("la sécurité, la gaieté, le plaisir d'être au monde. C'est tout ça que je prétends vendre quand je lance un produit. Mensonge."), the necklace is a fiction, a falsehood : "elle ôte le bijou [:] elle se délivrait d'un

mensonge.” Her world is a studio, objects props and feelings faked by protagonists who have to follow the pre-ordained Symbolic script.

To develop this concept of Laurence’s universe as studio setting, it should also be noted that while contemplating the scene in a glamorous nightclub Laurence sees it in terms of its potential for the soft-focus lens of the camera, and for the slogans which come all too quickly and easily to her lips. All is facile adjective and illusory image, and she recognises that what she has termed her “déformation professionnelle” has meant that *les belles images* are no more than hollow objects, Imaginary mirages : “Un des inconvénients du métier : elle sait trop comment se fabrique un décor, il se décompose sous son regard [p. 108].” Like Fosca of Tous Les Hommes sont mortels, she can no longer admire beauty, since it disintegrates under her gaze. While Beauvoir’s immortal hero has seen too many exquisite scenes over the centuries, Laurence has created and described too many advertising campaigns to be touched by the world of symbols. Fosca feels that he cannot touch anything without it seeming alien to him; Laurence feels that, Midas-like, she transforms everything into the rigid stasis of the Imaginary dimension. Far from breathing life into images, she only creates death/immanence :

l’harmonie des noirs, des rouges et des jaunes si bien assortis (heureux hasard) aux rouges et aux jaunes des dahlias. Tout à l’heure, quand je les ai cueillis, c’était des fleurs vivantes. Laurence pense à ce roi qui changeait en or tout ce qu’il touchait et sa petite fille était devenue une magnifique poupée de métal. Tout ce qu’elle touche se change en image [p. 21].

Lacan’s view is that the only way for the subject to break free from the Imaginary was through the Symbolic door, which would aid in dissolving these

rigid, imprisoning Imaginary fixations. Laurence, however, as we have seen, is similarly imprisoned in the Symbolic, thus trapped between the orders as the split subject. Immune to the glow of the Imaginary, she still remains unable to mend this split with the glue of comforting description or meaningless discourse since she is alienated by and from language. The third Lacanian order of the Real - that inexpressible realm beyond symbolisation which expresses itself via symptoms and sickness despite our feeble attempts at control - bubbles beneath the narrative, occasionally spitting through it at unexpected moments in the form of Laurence's fears, her internal voice and her anorexia. As Bowie writes,

The network of signifiers in which we have our being is not all that there is, and the rest of what is may chance to break in upon us at any moment.²⁴

It is worth first briefly analysing the Real via Laurence's intensely problematic relationship with her own body, since it is highly significant from our current theoretical perspective that Laurence is an anorectic. This condition is the bodily symptom of her own particular neurosis, resulting from a knotted nucleus of the Symbolic order of language and traumatising childhood memories of concentration camps, memories which perhaps contribute to her emotional intensity (which Jean-Charles insensitively dismisses as "tes scrupules, ta sensiblerie [p. 133]"). It could also be speculated that it is Laurence's only effective way of symbolising her internal

²⁴ Malcolm Bowie, Lacan, p. 103.

distress, since language has proved to be inadequate for the articulation of her needs.²⁵

Echoing Freud, Lacan states that unconscious fears and desires not only inscribe themselves upon the body and through language, but are also stored in the vaults of childhood memory :

L'inconscient est ce chapitre de mon histoire qui est marqué par un blanc ou occupé par un mensonge : c'est le chapitre censuré. Mais la vérité peut être retrouvée; le plus souvent déjà elle est écrite ailleurs. A savoir :

- dans les monuments : et ceci est mon corps, c'est-à-dire le noyau hystérique de la névrose où le symptôme hystérique montre la structure d'un langage [...].

- dans les documents d'archive aussi : et ce sont les souvenirs de mon enfance [...].

- dans l'évolution sémantique : et ceci répond au stock et aux acceptions du vocabulaire qui m'est particulier, comme au style de ma vie et à mon caractère [my emphasis].²⁶

Laurence's anorexia is a sign of her own personal unconscious damage, frequently described by her directly as a blank, a lack, a void : "ce creux, ce vide, qui glace le sang, qui est pire que la mort [p. 85]." In Les Quatre Concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse, Lacan discusses anorexia nervosa, stating that it is directly connected to the child's sense of lack and loss, since what the child eats is the nothing she feels : "ce que l'enfant

²⁵ Efrat Tseëlon, in her article 'The Little Mermaid : An Icon of Woman's Condition in Patriarchy, and the Human Condition of Castration', points out that

the female body [is an] arena for the power struggle between men and women. Suppressed by patriarchal domination, women made use of legitimate vocabularies as subversive strategies of expressing distress or dissent. This is one explanation for the epidemic levels of hysteria in the second half of the nineteenth century. (Similarly, anorexia nervosa sprang to the public scene in the second half of the twentieth century [...].) [...] the vocabulary of anorexia contains unexpressed anger turned [into] depression.

See The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis, 76 (1995) part 5, pp. 1017-1030, pp. 1022-23. See also Fallaize, p. 135.

²⁶ Jacques Lacan, 'Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage en psychanalyse, in Écrits, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, pp. 237-322, p. 259.

mange, c'est le rien."²⁷ He also views it as the child's phantasy of her own death/disappearance, triggered by the uncontainable spectre of the adult's desire. This unknowable desire - interpreted by the child as an eternally unsatisfiable void - is answered by the potential loss of and hence lack of the subject : "un manque recouvre l'autre."²⁸ The loss felt by the child is thus internalised by a literal void within them, setting off a self-perpetuating chain of lack.

Laurence's former breakdown of five years ago, and her current crisis, both displayed by her anorexia, appear to have as their catalysts specific confrontations with these various voids of loss and lack. We read, for example, of her infantile loss of ignorance/innocence (the child's contact with the Symbolic order of history via the horror of the concentration camps as a post-war child), a later loss of stability for similar reasons (the story of the woman tortured to death understandably horrifies her [p. 133]), the loss of her lover (which precipitates her nausea [p. 65]) and the loss of her own sense of identity during her long-term *crise* five years ago (connected to her sudden marriage and maternity [p. 43]).

Her current severe nausea and the recurrence of her latent anorexia is precipitated initially by Dominique's uncontrollable, hysterical desire for Gilbert and the letter she sends his fiancée, a letter which in typical Lacanian fashion swiftly escapes her possession and ascribes a meaning to her she has never

²⁷ Jacques Lacan, Le Séminaire livre XI : Les Quatre Concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1973, 'Du regard comme *objet petit a*', pp. 63-111, p. 96.

²⁸ Jacques Lacan, 'Le Champ de l'autre, et retour sur le transfert', *ibid*, pp. 183-234, p. 195.

intended. This gesture, signifying her mother's unforeseen loss of control, sends Laurence spinning into a sickened spiral of empty horror :

un spasme lui déchire l'estomac, elle vomit tout le thé qu'elle vient d'absorber; ça ne lui était pas arrivé depuis des années, de vomir d'émotion. L'estomac vide, des spasmes le tordent encore. Elle n'a pas d'imagination, [...] rien. Mais elle a peur. Une peur panique [p. 121].

This emptiness and her resulting refusal to eat is compounded by the news of her parents' reconciliation. This reconciliation symbolises the loss of her father, both in terms of the introjected ideal of him, and his return to her mother and resulting separation from Laurence. These losses cause another hysterical bout of nausea, and act as a further reminder of the emptiness inside her :

son coeur se met à battre, elle se couvre de sueur. Juste le temps de se précipiter à la salle de bains et de vomir; comme avant-hier et le jour d'avant. Quel soulagement! Elle voudrait se vider plus entièrement encore, se vomir toute entière. [...] - je ne peux pas manger [p. 169].

Finally, it is the threatened loss of her own daughter to the normalising values of the society she despises which exacerbates her anorexia even more strongly. Having seen Catherine subjected to what Laurence views as the anodyne machinations of the child psychologist and separated from a friend, she feels that both she and her daughter are pawns in the rigid hierarchical social structure of the family :

Laurence s'est obligée à manger, mais c'est alors qu'elle a eu le premier spasme. Elle se savait vaincue. On n'a pas raison contre tout le monde [...]. L'estomac de Laurence se crispe. Elle ne pourra peut-être pas manger avant longtemps. [...] Tous. Parce que tous sont contre elle [p. 175].

Lying in her room, the twin orders of words and images which hold her captive - the Symbolic and the Imaginary - threaten to overwhelm her in a battle for supremacy : “terrassée par une galopade d’images et de mots qui défilaient dans sa tête, se battant entre eux comme des kriss malais dans un tiroir fermé [p. 179].”

It is at this point that her revolt spills out into the Symbolic, the order which seems to win in this battle of the Orders. Fiercely protective of Catherine, Laurence has no desire to see her installed in society as an anodyne image of infantile perfection. “Élever un enfant, ce n’est pas en faire une belle image... [p. 182],” she states, resisting the temptation to form her daughter like the clay Laurence once was in her own mother’s hands. It could be claimed, therefore, the words and not the images which triumph in Les Belles Images - but this is a script written by Laurence herself, and not coined in the accepted terms of cliché (it is significant that Jean-Charles does not at first understand her). Following her three days of solitude in her room, Laurence does finally release her feelings in the form of words which are crystalline in their calm lucidity :

C’est vous qui me rendez malade, et je me guérirai toute seule parce que je ne vous céderai pas. Sur Catherine je ne céderai pas. Moi, c’est foutu, j’ai été eue, j’y suis, j’y reste. Mais elle, on ne la mutilera pas. Je ne veux pas qu’on la prive de son amie; je veux qu’elle passe ses vacances chez Brigitte. Et elle ne verra plus cette psychologue [p. 181].

By seizing the word, she stops vomiting. As Elizabeth Fallaize has noted,

Laurence does find her voice for Catherine, does express her decision with a new power and authority which stun Jean-Charles to the point that he is unable to comprehend [...]. There is no more vomiting as Laurence finds the power to say

no. [She] achieves a strength which, however limited, does not appear to be present at earlier moments.²⁹

Silence has been broken as she calmly states “je dis ce que je pense [*ibid*].” Saying no thus definitely empowers her. Her uncomfortable relationship with her own language has changed, in that she now uses the Symbolic to overpower the others around her :

la voix de Laurence se monte, elle parle, elle parle, elle ne sait pas exactement ce qu'elle dit, peu importe, l'important c'est de crier plus fort que Jean-Charles et que tous les autres, de les réduire au silence [p. 182].

As a final victory it could be claimed that Laurence's stance is superficially sudden, but I must disagree with Terry Keefe's view that the final tone of Les Belles Images is a purely hollow one.³⁰ Laurence has progressed, if only because through her intense self-analysis she is made aware of her weaknesses, her sense of loss and her ability - ironic given her vocation - to prevent images being all. Having overcome her sense of her own alienation through a necessary furious protection of her daughter, she regains a certain vivacity which has previously eluded her in the text. Having herself been emotionally corseted by the confines of her own childhood, Laurence will make sure that Catherine is to have hers untouched by constraint.

Les Belles Images is therefore a textual reflection of Beauvoir's altered stance on the influence of childhood experience, and of her concomitant public acknowledgement of Freudian theory. For the first time in her works, she both explicitly admits that infantile experience forms the woman, and

²⁹ Elizabeth Fallaize, p. 136.

³⁰ See Keefe, p. 28.

grants a child the privileged position of her central textual focus. To conclude, we could also ask whether the notes of Beauvoir's own unconscious preoccupations still echo throughout the text. It cannot be denied that the Lacanian reading of Les Belles Images has produced a different type of psychoanalytic engagement with the text when compared with former Freudian textual interpretation. However, although the focus of this chapter has been on the linguistic levels of the split subject and its insistence on loss and absence, the insistent murmurings of Beauvoir's own unconscious fears are still remarkably resonant within the novel. The idealisation of the father is still a central theme, the hazy mirage of identity is still grasped only tenuously by her central character, and her physical neurosis and violent breakdown highlights her sense of loss.

In Les Belles Images, as in Lacan's theory of the Symbolic, language attempts to cover a lack. A central claim of this thesis is that Beauvoir's fictional surfaces in fact uncover her own insistent preoccupations of love, loss and longing. At this stage of her writing career Beauvoir's latent preoccupations may no longer be repressed following her intense autobiographical introspection and the resulting recognition of her own fears. Yet in her penultimate novel, as with her earlier narratives, the personal pulsations still return as the emotional motor of the text. It now finally remains to be seen whether in Simone de Beauvoir's next work of fiction the newly-acknowledged influence of infantile experience on the child is again firmly in evidence, and whether her themes once more conform to our psychoanalytic expectations. As I claim in the pages which follow, Beauvoir's fascination

with psychoanalysis is once more particularly explicit, for not only does the text treat the analytic procedure as a theme, but the marginalised madwoman is also granted her own monologue. Let us therefore move on to the last chapter of this thesis with a psychoanalytic reading of Simone de Beauvoir's final fictional work, La Femme rompue.

CHAPTER EIGHT

LA FEMME ROMPUE

As I have argued in the preceding chapters of this thesis, many psychoanalytic thematic parallels can be drawn between Beauvoir's fictional texts - love triangles often form the structural dynamics, the central female characters suffer huge crises of confidence and identity which inevitably lead to a sense of annihilation and solitude, and they experience painful separations from couples they had posited as ideal symbiotic unions. Beauvoir's last work of fiction, unsurprisingly, also shares these themes - if anything, as I hope to show, the buried unconscious resonances are intensified. For example, the Oedipal relationship is again the catalyst for psychological disturbance, and the spectre of the mother looms far more darkly than in her previous fiction with the dangerously unbalanced figure of Murielle. Both Murielle and Monique suffer from intense mental illness and breakdown respectively, and both emphasise their dangerous dependence on men.

However, any psychoanalytic reading of La Femme rompue will differ from her previous texts in two important ways, both of which involve Beauvoir's narrative strategies. Firstly, the trio of narrative voices in La Femme rompue are exclusively the solitary tones of women who hold the stage alone, and are not always reliable witnesses to the events they relate. What is thus striking about the three monologues is that the only version of events to which we are granted analytical access is that of the protagonists themselves. There are of course hints and clues at external viewpoints in the text but, unlike the previous fictional characters¹ examined so far, Monique, Murielle and the

¹ In L'Invitée, for example, Elisabeth and Gerbert are each granted a narrating voice. Le Sang des autres is split between Hélène's and Jean's viewpoints; Tous Les Hommes sont mortels also shares the narrative power between its male and female protagonists. Anne's

woman narrator of 'L'Age de Discretion' shape their own stories. These stories, like those of Françoise, Hélène, Anne and Laurence, centre around crises of confidence and self-image, thus lending themselves easily to the current psychoanalytic treatment. Secondly, as I have stated, there is a far more explicit focus on the voice of the madwoman, whose anger ricochets through her 'Monologue', bringing Beauvoir's formerly implicit theme even more brutally to the textual surface. The explicit psychoanalytic thematic thread which has begun to run through the textual weave since Les Mandarins and Les Belles Images is therefore strengthened : Monique does see a psychiatrist and Murielle, it is hinted, certainly should see one.

It is these two characters upon whom I wish to focus in the following chapter, for although the first story, 'L'Age de Discretion', certainly has themes which are ripe for psychoanalytical exploration, it is a tale with a different emphasis. Furthermore, as Fallaize has pointed out,

'The Age of Discretion' demands rather less of the reader than the other two stories in the sense that the narrator herself eventually begins to admit some of her own errors - and the reader is clearly invited by her doubts and admissions to seek out further flaws in her analyses.²

Fundamental to our analysis of Beauvoir's texts 'Monologue' and 'La Femme rompue' is this invitation which we accept as readers. We don the mantle of the analyst/detective since, like Dupin, we observe our two patients/criminals and attempt to move into the realm of the Symbolic by diagnosing/discovering their Imaginary delusions of control.³ These delusions are revealed to us by

monologue, while it may be similar in scope to that of the characters of La Femme rompue, is balanced by Henri's account.

² Elizabeth Fallaize, The Novels of Simone de Beauvoir, p. 156.

³ Peter Brooks, in his chapter 'Fictions of the Wolf Man : Freud and Narrative Understanding', (in Reading for the Plot : Design and Intention in Narrative, New York: A. A. Knopf, 1984) writes of the detective role as follows :

Freud apparently was fully aware of the analogies between psychoanalytic investigation and detective work. Faced with fragmentary evidence, clues scattered within present reality, he who would explain must reach back to a story in the past which accounts for how the present took on its configuration. The detective story exhibits a reality structured as a set of ambiguous signs

gaps and flaws in their narrative; like the analyst, we unravel the knotted clues in their tangled web of self-justifying discourse. As both Murielle's and Monique's accounts are monologues, we have fundamentally the account the patient gives the analyst, warped as it is. To return to Fallaize,

the struggle with words [is] without the presence of an external narrative voice. Each woman produces a monologue, each of a different type but each performing essentially the same function, which is to provide her with an erroneous and self-justified reading of her situation.⁴

She goes on to describe Murielle's 'Monologue' as proceeding "by the logic of associations and transitions dependent on the flow of consciousness."⁵ Does the psychoanalyst have much more upon which to work?

Let us now attempt to work upon the account of the Beauvoirean character who seems to me to come closest to actual insanity, and would therefore seem to lend herself particularly well to the classical Freudian literary approach of diagnosing certain textual characters' mental disorders. Murielle's 'Monologue' is in many ways similar to the mutterings of a mental patient - her denunciation moves in an ever-increasing spiral of hatred, engulfing in turn her family, her neighbours, France and the entire universe, both earthly and spiritual; throughout the text are spattered the words of a paranoid neurotic. This latter term may appear highly categorical, but if we consult Laplanche and Pontalis it does in fact describe Murielle's symptoms fairly accurately :

[Paranoia can be defined as] chronic psychosis characterised by more or less systematised delusion, with a predominance of

which gain their meaning from a past history that must be uncovered so as to order the production of these signs as a chain of events, eventually with a clear origin, intention, and solution, and with strong causal connections between each link. [...]

Working to trace the etiology of neurosis, Freud occupies this same ground. [...] he almost explicitly assumes a Holmesian posture, pressing his patients for the symptomatic clues, reaching back to uncover a moment of trauma, a scene of crime that makes sense of all subsequent events [p. 270].

⁴ Elizabeth Fallaize, The Novels of Simone de Beauvoir, p. 154.

⁵ *ibid*, p. 161.

ideas of reference [...]

As well as delusions of persecution, Freud places erotomania, delusional jealousy and delusions of grandeur under the heading of paranoia.⁶

Furthermore, as we shall see below, certain symptoms of "erotomania, delusional jealousy and delusions of grandeur" are revealed by Murielle at various stages in her text.

In defence of such a diagnostic interpretation of Murielle's evident twisted hatred, I turn to Freud's 'Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's Gradiva', in which he writes as follows :

the author has presented us with a perfectly correct psychiatric study, on which we may measure our understandings of workings of the mind - a case history [...] which might have been designed to emphasize certain fundamental theories of medical psychology. [...] But how if, on being questioned, he were completely to deny any such purpose? It is so easy to draw analogies and to read meanings into things. Is it not rather we who have slipped into this [...] story a secret meaning very far from its author's intentions? [...]

Perhaps too, in most people's eyes we are doing our author a poor service in declaring his work to be a psychiatric study. An author, we hear them say, should keep out of the way of any contact with psychiatry and should leave the description of pathological mental states to the doctors. The truth is that no truly creative writer has ever obeyed this injunction. The description of the human mind is indeed the domain which is most his own; he has from time immemorial been the precursor of science, and so too of scientific psychology. [...] Thus the creative writer cannot evade the psychiatrist nor the psychiatrist the creative writer, and the poetic treatment of a psychiatric theme can turn out to be correct.⁷

In his analysis of Jensen's Gradiva, Freud describes the gradual bringing to light of repressed memories buried in the hero's psyche. He would probably employ the same method in psychoanalysing Murielle, who alludes obliquely to a certain incident in her childhood with dark sexual overtones :

⁶ Laplanche and Pontalis, The Language of Psychoanalysis, p. 296.

⁷ Sigmund Freud, 'Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's Gradiva' (1907 [1906]), in The Penguin Freud Library, vol. 14, pp. 27-118, pp. 68-9.

Papa perchait Nanard sur son épaule pour qu'il voie le feu d'artifice et moi la grande je restais par terre pressée entre leur corps juste à la hauteur de leur sexe dans l'odeur de sexe de cette foule en chaleur.⁸

This incident is of vital importance when reading the text from a psychoanalytic literary perspective. As we shall see, Murielle displays overt signs of neurosis - she is obsessional about cleanliness, screams hysterically at her ex-husband and her mother, is phobic about contamination and contact with others. Terry Eagleton writes on psychoanalysis as follows :

Where the unconscious is most damagingly at work [...] is in psychological disturbances of one form or another. We may have certain unconscious desires which will not be denied, but which dare not find practical outlet either; in this situation, the desire forces its way in from the unconscious, the ego blocks it off defensively, and the result of this internal conflict is what we call neurosis. The patient begins to develop symptoms which, in compromising fashion, at once protect against the unconscious desire and covertly express it. *Such neuroses may be obsessional [...], hysterical [...], or phobic [...]. Behind these neuroses, psychoanalysis discerns unresolved conflicts whose origins run back to the individual's early development .*⁹

There is little doubt that the mysterious July 14th incident is of intense relevance to Murielle's present position, and offers further thematic proof of Beauvoir's increased explicit textual emphasis on the influence of infantile experience on adult behaviour. It is unclear whether the sexual dimension of this particular incident traumatised Murielle as a child, or whether it is Nanard's elevation at the expense of her own pride and comfort which she finds so difficult to bear.¹⁰ Either way, the resulting disgust with sexuality as a

⁸ Simone de Beauvoir, La Femme rompue, Paris: Gallimard, 1968, p. 88. All quotations are from this edition.

⁹ Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory, p. 158, my emphasis.

¹⁰ Bearing in mind Murielle's dubious narratorial reliability, it is interesting to note Freud's own observations about remembered infantile trauma. In his lecture on 'The Paths to the Formation of Symptoms', he states that

By means of analysis, [...] starting from the symptoms, we arrive at a knowledge of the infantile experiences to which the libido is fixated and out of

whole dominates the passage, and much of the monologue, bearing witness to her sexual frustration and warped libidinal fixation - clear evidence of which follows :

Je les vois d'ici c'est trop dégueux ils se frottent l'un contre l'autre sexe à sexe ça les fait mouiller les bonnes femmes elles se rengorgent parce que le type a la queue en l'air. Et chacun se prépare à cocufier son meilleur ami sa très chère amie ils le feront cette nuit même dans la salle de bains même pas allongés la robe retroussée sur les fesses suantes quand on ira pisser on marchera dans le foutre [p. 91].

C'est le moment où on baise dans les plumards sur les divans par terre dans les autos l'heure des grands dégueulis où on recrache la dinde et le caviar c'est immonde j'ai l'impression que ça sent le vomi je vais brûler un bâton d'encens [p. 104].

Moi je trouve que dès cinquante ans il faut avoir la décence de renoncer; j'ai renoncé bien avant depuis mon deuil. Ça ne m'intéresse plus je suis barrée je ne pense plus jamais à ces choses-là pas même en rêve, Cette momie ça donne frisson d'imaginer son entre-jambes elle dégouline de parfums mais par en dessous elle sent elle se maquillait elle se pomponnait elle ne se lavait pas pas ce que j'appelle se laver quand elle faisait semblant de se doucher c'était pour montrer son cul à Nanard [p. 106].

Caught up with Murielle's idea of sex are images of filth, infidelity, incest and sickness. It is true that Freud's attitude towards women's sexuality was notoriously unidimensional, but in 'Monologue' Murielle's obscene imagery does tend to correlate with "a general revulsion from sexuality"¹¹ he described as being the "nonfeminine" outcome of an unresolved Oedipus complex. Murielle's intense hatred of her mother and unrequited adoration for a father who appeared to prefer Nanard over his daughter and then died, seemingly abandoning her entirely, offers much scope for psychoanalysis.¹² As

which the symptoms are made. [These] scenes from infancy are not always true [and] in a few of them they are the direct opposite of the historical truth.

See The Penguin Freud Library, vol. 1, Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, pp. 404-424, p. 414.

¹¹ Nancy J. Chodorow, Freud on Women, p. 230.

¹² Bearing in mind our interest in Beauvoir's unconscious textual projections of her own experience, it is worth noting Beauvoir's own admission in her interview with Jeanson :

Chodorow writes in her article 'Freud on Women', in cases of "nonfeminine outcomes" of the Oedipal situation, the girl "does not recognize her mother and remains object-sexually, if not autoerotically, virginal."¹³ As I am wary of falling into Freud's reductive traps of classification, it is important to point out that there also exists in the text a hint at Murielle's former promiscuity :

Le petit Bordelais. On n'attendait rien l'un de l'autre on ne se posait pas de questions on ne se faisait pas de promesses on se mettait au pieu et on s'aimait [p. 109].

Her sexuality, therefore, is clearly an unresolved issue.

Another central theme of Murielle's 'Monologue' is that of her hatred and also her need of men, hinting at the unreliability of her account of their calculated mistreatment of her. Both needing and fearing male attention (perhaps as a result of her father's death in her childhood and her subsequent hatred of her mother), her relationships with men have ended in tears and a self-imposed isolation, during which she fantasises about her sexual power :

Je raurais un tas d'hommes à mes pieds [...]. Peut-être j'en rencontrerais un qui saurait m'aimer
Mon père m'aimait. Personne d'autre [p. 90, *sic*].

It is clear to the reader/analyst that Murielle wants a husband and children to use them for her own advantage, to feel protected, to be envied by others : "à mon âge de quoi on a l'air sur les plages, dans les casinos si on n'a pas un homme avec soi? [p. 107]." And, in a fit of delusional jealousy, she cries "Toutes ces pouffiasses elles ont un homme *pour les protéger* des gosses

j'ai eu [...] un complexe d'Oedipe et une fixation sur le père, [...] puis une *très* grande déception dans l'âge ingrat, quand mon père, au fond, m'a 'lâchée'. [...] c'était vraiment une espèce de dépit amoureux, une espèce de rupture qu'il y a eu entre mon père et moi, et qui m'a été extrêmement pénible: c'est même la seule manière dont je m'explique pourquoi j'étais si malheureuse à dix-huit ans [p. 253].

She continues :

Papa ne m'aime plus! Ce qui avait disparu c'est l'espèce de réciprocité, d'intimité, de préférence, qui faisait que je me sentais presque *en couple* avec mon père quand j'avais onze ans: quand il m'emmenait au théâtre, quand on était tous les deux seuls, quand il me faisait lire un livre, etc. Ça, c'était perdu [p. 255].

¹³ Nancy J. Chodorow, 'Freud on Women', p. 230.

pour les servir et moi zéro [p. 93, my emphasis]." She may state later that "on ne peut pas toujours prendre il faut aussi savoir donner [p. 98]", and yet she has no real desire to give, only to control. She values her daughter as a project, a reflection of her self rather than as an individual in her own right. Instead of remorse and grief at Sylvie's tragic suicide, she can only ask furiously, "Sylvie Sylvie pourquoi m'as-tu fait ça?" This is why her view of the sad "petite Jeanne [p. 103]" is so superficially tender - this child is a toy, not an irrepressible Other in the form of a daughter who, like Françoise in L'Invitée, can only resolve her struggle with a gesture of ultimate violence.

Murielle, who forms her vengeful monologue with white-hot vituperative invective and not maternal affection, can be described in terms of the oppressive, engulfing mother, a Freudian figure of destruction. As Chodorow has pointed out,

in Freud's Pantheon [...] the masculine images of the mother seem to oscillate between Aphrodite, all mature heterosexual love and global eroticized giving, perhaps with a touch of narcissism, in love with her son and his penis, and, someone like Hera, more vengeful, strong, and insistent, resentful of men and their betrayals. This mother is not only herself castrated, she castrates, or threatens to castrate, both her son and her daughter. In contrast to Jungian writing, Demeter, the mother who loves the daughter and mourns her loss, is nowhere to be found.¹⁴

Not only does Murielle drive her daughter to suicide, she also threatens to kill herself in front of her young son. Images of death and threatened violence thus permeate her account :

je ne suis pas malade je vis seule parce que ton salaud de père m'a laissée tomber il m'a embobinée et puis torturée il a été jusqu'à lever la main sur moi. Piquer une crise de nerfs devant le petit m'ouvrir les veines sur leur paillason ça ou autre chose j'ai des armes je m'en servirai il me reviendra [p. 93].

¹⁴ Nancy J. Chodorow, 'Freud on Women', p. 242.

Derrière la porte ils trouveront une charogne je puerai j'aurai chié sous moi des rats m'auront bouffé le nez [...] saloperie de monde ils crient ils rient et moi je suis là je sèche sur pied [p. 96].

Soudain il s'est mis à souffler en tornade que j'aimerais un grand cataclysme qui balaierait tout et moi avec un typhon un cyclone mourir me reposerait s'il ne restait personne pour penser à moi; leur abandonner mon cadavre ma pauvre vie non! Mais plonger tous ensemble dans le néant ce serait bien [pp. 100-101].

The 'castrating' force of the mother could be unleashed by an unbalanced hatred of her surroundings. A solipsistic nihilist, she desires destruction on a universal level, leaving only herself and her children alive to laugh at those who have 'persecuted' her. She is irrational in the extreme, twisting an accepted social logic - the mother who is permitted anything - to fit her own warped view of a reality she perceives as unforgiving and diseased, a threat to herself, a "pauvre merle blanc [p. 106]."

This image of the white blackbird, pure and alone in a hostile world, merits further analysis. We have already seen that Murielle's view of sexuality is tinged with images of dirt and squalor. Obsessive-compulsive disorder is a name given to the psychological illness which drives individuals to perform a particular act repeatedly, often connected with a Sisyphean drive towards constant, pure cleanliness. Laplanche and Pontalis define the psychoanalytic term "obsessional neurosis" as follows :

[A class] of neurosis identified by Freud and constituting one of the major frames of reference of psycho-analytic clinical practice.

In the most typical form of obsessional neurosis, the psychical conflict is expressed through *symptoms* which are described as compulsive-obsessive ideas, compulsions towards undesirable acts, struggles against these thoughts and tendencies, exorcistic rituals, etc.¹⁵

¹⁵ Laplanche and Pontalis, The Language of Psychoanalysis, p. 281.

Murielle struggles against her conflicting desire for and loathing of men and sex, and appears obsessed by cleanliness. In the following extracts we can clearly see a deep fear of contamination from others outside her tiny microcosmic existence :

Ils me rendent malade j'ai la bouche pâteuse et ça m'épouvante ces deux petits boutons sur ma cuisse. Je fais attention je ne mange que des produits de régime mais il y a tout de même des gens qui les tripotent avec des mains plus ou moins propres ça n'existe pas l'hygiène sur cette terre l'air est pollué pas seulement à cause des autos et des usines mais à cause de ces millions de bouches sales qui l'avalent et le recrachent du matin au soir; quand je pense que je baigne dans leur haleine j'ai envie de fuir au fond du désert; comment se garder un corps propre dans un monde aussi dégueux on est contaminé par tous les pores de la peau et pourtant j'étais saine nette je ne veux pas qu'ils m'infectent [p. 95].

Il est impeccable en ce moment ce salon net lustré brillant comme la lune d'autrefois. Demain soir à sept heures tout sera salopé je devrai me taper un grand nettoyage lessivée comme je le serai [p. 101].

And finally, the horrific imagery of filth and disease is extended from the limited world of a second-rate boarding house to include the rest of humanity :

Des draps douteux des nappes sales dormir dans la sueur des autres dans leur crasse manger avec des couverts mal lavés il y a de quoi attraper des morpions ou la vérole et les odeurs me font vomir; sans compter que je me constipe à mort parce que les chiottes où tout le monde chie ça me bloque net; la fraternité de la merde très peu pour moi [p. 107].

Spitting with rage in her self-imposed isolation, Murielle therefore actually appears to be trapped by her own fear of contamination and a gnawing, vicious suspicion of others. We have returned to the psychoanalytic term "paranoid" :

Ils se sont tous ligués pour m'enfoncer [...] Ça les arrangerait que je disparaisse ils ont beau m'avoir reléguée je suis un chardon dans leur slip [p. 99].

Il me semblait que tout le monde avait entendu le cri de ma mère je n'osais plus sortir de chez moi je me faufilais le long des murs le soleil me clouait au pilori je croyais que les gens me regardaient qu'ils chuchotaient qu'on me montrait du doigt [p. 113].

Sept ans que je croupis toute seule comme une maudite et la sale clique ricane tu me dois bien une revanche laisse-moi parler tu as beaucoup de dettes envers moi sais-tu parce que ce n'est tout de même propre la manière dont tu t'es conduit [p. 116].

Murielle's "delusions of persecution" are therefore firmly in evidence. Having already discussed her "erotomania" and briefly pointed to her "delusions of jealousy" let us now finally turn to the "delusions of grandeur" also mentioned in the formal definition of the term "paranoia."

As I have noted earlier, while Murielle fears rejection and has an aversion to sex, she also appears to need men. They represent for her a passport to social power and render her a sparkling object of envy in the eyes of other women. Her memories of a former glamorous life are tinged with delusions of an Imaginary status resting purely on her male companions and transitory status symbols :

La grande vie j'étais faite pour : le cabriolet l'appartement les robes et tout. Il casquait Florent et pas de comédie - sauf un peu au lit il faut ce qu'il faut - il voulait juste coucher avec moi et m'exhiber dans les boîtes chics j'étais belle ma plus belle époque toutes mes amies crevaient de dépit [p. 96].

It is highly significant that directly after this evocation comes Murielle's disturbing descent into a manic frenzy ("j'en ai marre marre marre marre marre" [*ibid*]) - proof of her general mental instability and the intensity of her fury at her abandonment "là à me faire chier [*ibid*]." Furthermore, one of the very first sentences of the 'Monologue' contrasts Murielle's intense envy of the aspiring bourgeois' "cabriolets blancs [p. 87]" with her own glamorous vehicles of a (dubious) and faraway past :

Un cabriolet blanc avec des coussins noirs c'est chouette et les types sifflaient quand je passais des lunettes obliques sur le nez un foulard d'Hermès sur la tête [*ibid*].¹⁶

According to Murielle, a man would bring her the social status denied to a single woman. However, we suspect that ultimately what is at stake for Murielle is her self-image. Like Garcin of Huis Clos, like Françoise of L'Invitée, and, as we shall see, like Monique of 'La Femme rompue', she cannot bear to imagine others' opinions of her as conflicting with her own. With a man beside her, she can bathe in the radiant virile glimmer of a masculine Lacanian mirror and the illusion of an absolute, fixed identity : that of envied, socially accepted consort to a powerful man. Murielle's words in fact represent a verbal web of delusion and wish combined. As Fallaize writes, the monologue

derives from the same need to impose an image of herself, to use words to impose herself on others [...] like Monique of the last story, Murielle uses words to create herself.¹⁷

Monique, diarist of 'La Femme rompue', the text which we now open, is however a very different type of textual patient. Ultimately she analyses herself via her diary, since, like Beauvoir's own experience with the implosive love triangle of L'Invitée, setting her experiences down on paper proves to be the most effective way of coping with and exorcising unforeseen changes in her personal circumstances. Monique is a literary example of the view posited by Chodorow : "one knows - even as one doesn't know - oneself best."¹⁸ Freud himself claimed that he could analyse himself "only with the

¹⁶ The passage seems to be a direct literary representation of free association. This mental process is defined by Laplanche and Pontalis as

[the] method according to which voice must be given to all thoughts without exception which enter the mind, whether such thoughts are based upon a specific element (word, number, dream-image or any kind of idea at all) or produced spontaneously [p. 169].

We see in Murielle's speech how her thoughts link the two white sports cars: firstly we are presented with her rage at the cars around her, and then this leads to a link with her past.

¹⁷ Elizabeth Fallaize, The Novels of Simone de Beauvoir, p. 165.

¹⁸ Nancy J. Chodorow, 'Freud on Women', p. 245.

help of knowledge obtained objectively (like an outsider)",¹⁹ and it is only upon reading back her diary as would an outsider that Monique is finally able to grasp and absorb a truth she has not wanted to understand. She plays with words, and yet what she writes is not what she knows. There is much dramatic irony in the following statement, which is an obvious attempt at self-justification : "Il faut que je m'avoue la vérité; j'ai toujours voulu la vérité, si je l'ai obtenue, c'est que je la voulais [p. 127]", for the following pages of the opening section are only an attempt to hide from this desired vérité : Monique's distorted diary demonstrates that the determining power of desire indeed clouds language. There are thus two levels of language - the said and the unsaid. What she hides, she fears; what she states, she hopes. Central to her breakdown is a naïve wish to deny time, and a constant misrepresentation of a painful and destructive truth.

Monique's diary therefore functions as an analyst, reflecting back to its writer the disguised version of events she has created, and yet through which glint the menacing shards of self-delusion. Moving on from the Freudian quasi-psychiatric approach we have used so far to diagnose Murielle's delusional state in her 'Monologue', we can also analyse 'La Femme rompue' by reading the work through a Lacanian lens. We could postulate that the text functions as the Imaginary mirror, granting what Eagleton terms "a whole and unblemished identity"²⁰ to its writer; the sub-text, however, is the solitude of the realm of language, a hollow substitute for lack. As Eagleton states, eventually

the child must [...] resign itself to the fact that it can never have any *direct* access to reality [...] It has been banished from [...] 'full', imaginary possession into the 'empty' world of language.²¹

One of Monique's final despairing entries is her cry that

¹⁹ Freud's letter to Fliess, S.E. I, p. 271.

²⁰ Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory, p. 166.

²¹ *ibid*, p. 167.

Je réalise seulement maintenant quelle estime au fond j'avais pour moi. Mais tous les mots par lesquels j'essaierais de la justifier, Maurice les a assassinés; le code d'après lequel je jugeais autrui et moi-même, il l'a renié. Je n'avais jamais songé à le contester - c'est-à-dire à me contester. [...] Je ne sais plus rien. Non seulement pas qui je suis mais comment il faudrait être. Le noir et le blanc se confondent, le monde est un magma et je n'ai plus de contours. Comment vivre sans croire à rien ni à moi-même? [p. 251].

This is highly reminiscent of Françoise's sense of dissolution - both characters share a nihilistic opinion of the worthlessness of their past, the futility of their future and the despair of their present. There no longer exists a stark delineated boundary between their constructed egos and the outside world : Monique pays for her entry into symbolic awareness with her horror at the "magma" which is the universe of the split subject ("je n'ai plus de contours"). Like Françoise, she has falsified her life by attaching herself to her partner in a vain attempt at identification with, and internalisation of, an Other - an Other who, like Pierre's polishing, refractive influence on Françoise's confessions, takes her vision of her self and renders it flawless :

En présence de Maurice, je ne peux plus m'empêcher de me sentir devant un juge. [...] Je me voyais si tranquillement dans ses yeux. Je ne me voyais même que par ses yeux : une image trop flatteuse peut-être mais où en gros je me reconnaissais [p. 180].

Once again, Beauvoir is obsessively positing the tempting, vicarious folly of attempting an impossible fusion of personalities. Monique slowly begins to recognise her own inevitable subjection to a relentless contingency: "quelque chose a changé puisque j'écris sur lui, sur moi, derrière son dos", she writes. "S'il l'avait fait, je me serais sentie trahie. Nous étions l'un pour l'autre une absolue transparence [pp. 128-129]." And later in the text she states "pour la première fois, je réalise qu'une distance s'est creusée entre nous [p. 168]." As Eagleton writes, Monique has been deluding herself with

a satisfyingly unified image of selfhood by identifying with an object which reflects this image back to it in a closed, narcissistic circle [...] this image involves a *misrecognition*, since it idealizes the subject's real situation.²²

I have stated above that Monique's discourse is based on her own misrepresentation of her "real situation", and a wish to deny the destructive power of time. On first hearing of Maurice's affair, her first impulse is to evoke the remembrance of a love past and claim that it is as real as the present, expressing herself in words which echo Paule's :

Il y a quinze ans. Déjà? Qu'est-ce que quinze ans? Deux et deux font quatre. Je t'aime. Je n'aime que toi. La vérité est indestructible, le temps n'y change rien [p. 131].

According to Lacan, the unconscious is the motive force of language. Sebastian Gardner writes as follows :

the dynamic unconscious is a source of motivation, specifically motivation that is actually or potentially a cause of mental conflict [...] it is closely related to, as *a failure and cause of disturbance of, the faculty of memory* [...] the behavior of its elements is characterized by a set of largely semiological or syntactically characterizable features, including [...] *indifference to time* [...]

Knowledge of the unconscious is fixed [...] by reference to [...] the motive that caused the analysand to *forget x*, to *misrepresent y*, etc.²³

Our analysand is in fact unconsciously aware of her own distortive, misrepresentative powers - at the beginning of her diary she writes : "Curieuse chose qu'un journal : ce qu'on y tait est plus important que ce qu'on y note" [p. 128]. The unflattering truth is passed over in an attempt to write her self into a script which correlates with the identity she wishes to project. Chodorow, in her article 'Freud on Women', writes of woman as "object to a self that constructs and reconstructs her subjectivity."²⁴ Monique's

²² *ibid*, p. 173.

²³ Sebastian Gardner, 'The Unconscious', in The Cambridge Companion to Freud, pp. 136-160, pp. 137-8, my emphasis.

²⁴ Nancy J. Chodorow, 'Freud on Women', p. 233.

reconstructs her own subjectivity as the girl Maurice loved years before - she is independent, glad to be alone :

Je pensais que les ravissements de Colette, les exigences de Lucienne allaient me manquer. Et voilà que m'est rendue une qualité de joie oublié. Ma liberté me rajeunit de vingt ans. Au point que, le livre fermé, je me suis mise à écrire pour moi-même, comme à vingt ans [p. 122].

It is significant that this declaration occurs in the very first entry of her diary: like the character description at the beginning of a script, Monique is "reconstructing her subjectivity" as she wishes to appear.

And yet the sub-text of the first few entries hint tellingly at a constant fear of solitude, and a parasitic emotional reliance on her husband and daughters. She is constantly referring things back to Maurice : "Jamais je ne quitte Maurice d'un coeur léger" [p. 122]; "Une des choses qui charmaient Maurice, c'est l'intensité de ce qu'il appelait 'mon attention à la vie'" [p. 123]. Furthermore, following her claim that she is full of "joie oublié" appears repeated evidence of a deep-seated fear: "Surtout je me tourmente, à cause de Colette" [p. 125]; "je m'inquiète. Impossible de lire" [p. 126]; "J'ai peur, et Maurice n'est pas là" [p. 127]; "je ne peux pas lire ni écouter de disque, parce que j'ai peur" [p. 129]. It is significant that Maurice's confession of his liaison with Noëllie occurs directly after this latter entry - was Monique's underlying fear perhaps an unconscious fear of this impending revelation? The reader becomes the detective/analyst as we begin to see the fraying threads of the seemingly smooth skein of Monique's life.

Following Maurice's admission of infidelity, the epic romance Monique has attempted to create from the remnants of a passion of twenty years ago (as has Paule) is rewritten as an exploded, irreparable myth. Her power over the signifier of her own identity diminishes with the shattering of the Imaginary mirror, for reflected in the unflattering fragments she sees herself in a role she has no desire to play : "je suis dans leur idylle un problème, un obstacle [p.

148].” Like Françoise, she is horrified by the purloinment of her identity and the unsolicited displacement of her self, wondering

Ont-ils pitié de moi? ricanent-ils? Je suis peut-être mesquine mais je voudrais qu'ils meurent tous pour que s'anéantisse la lamentable image qu'ils se font à présent de moi [p. 166].

Lacan writes of the evasive powers of identity as follows :

Si ce que Freud a découvert et redécouvre [...] a un sens, c'est que le déplacement du signifiant détermine les sujets dans leur actes, dans leur destin, dans leurs refus, dans leurs aveuglements, dans leur succès et dans leur sort, [...] sans égard pour le caractère ou le sexe, et que bon gré mal gré suivra le train du signifiant comme armes et bagages, tout ce qui est du donné psychologique.²⁵

Monique's identity, it seems, has indeed depended purely on the signifying power of external relationships : she relies upon comforting social classifications - those of good mother, gracious wife, giving person. Above all, she is needed. As the reader discovers, it is in fact Monique who needs others, admitting that

une des raisons - la principale - pour lesquelles je n'ai aucune envie de m'astreindre à un métier : je supporterais mal de n'être pas totalement à la disposition des gens qui ont besoin de moi [p. 125].

It appears that this desperate reliance on the reliance of others is founded on an insecurity - if she is not needed, then she is dispensable. She soon finds, however, that as time passes, so needs change :

Il me parlait de ses malades, il me signalait des cas intéressants, j'essayais de les aider. Maintenant je suis exclue de ses recherches et les clients de la polyclinique n'ont pas besoin de moi [p. 138].

In many ways, therefore, Monique can be seen to share Freud's (utterly reductive) view that “a marriage is not made secure until the wife has succeeded in making her husband her child as well and in acting as a mother

²⁵ Jacques Lacan, 'Le séminaire sur 'La Lettre volée', in Écrits, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966, pp. 11-61, p. 30.

to him."²⁶ When Monique turns to a graphologist for guidance, his (accurate) analysis makes her question this overpowering intensity :

il a noté [...] une sorte d'avidité affective qui risque de me rendre un peu pesante à mon entourage. Ça concorde avec ce que me reproche Maurice : d'être envahissante, possessive. Je sais bien qu'il y a cette tendance en moi : mais je l'ai si énergiquement combattue! J'ai fait un tel effort pour laisser libres Colette et Lucienne, ne pas les accabler de questions, respecter leurs secrets. Et Maurice : si souvent j'ai réprimé ma sollicitude, contenu mes élans, évité d'entrer dans son bureau malgré mon envie ou de le couvrir des yeux quand il lisait à côté de moi! [p. 200].

This questioning is part of Monique's inevitable reevaluation of herself. She has ignored the danger signals : amongst them Maurice's constant advice to find employment ("Tu vas t'ennuyer. Tu devrais prendre un travail", m'a dit Maurice [...] il a insisté [p. 123]) and even his tactlessly unequivocal comments regarding her physical appearance ("Achète-toi donc un maillot d'une pièce [p. 191]"). She has been caught in the Imaginary delusion of a woman who remains convinced that affections will not change. The past has been used to construct her identity, but then that past disappears, swallowed into the horror of an unacceptable present and uncertain future :

Y a-t-il [des] épisodes que j'ai enterrés? Je m'imaginais avoir toujours été de bonne foi. C'est horrible de penser que ma propre histoire n'est plus derrière moi que ténèbres [p. 225].

However, having constructed an elaborate lie in the form of her diary to bolster her faltering sense of identity, Monique slips into a depressive illness which leads, surprisingly, to a shattering, dazzling lucidity. "Où est la vérité? existe-t-elle encore? [p. 184]" she asks herself ... and then finds it has been within reach every time she has picked up her diary.

²⁶ Sigmund Freud, New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, S.E. XXII, pp. 133-4.

Monique tries too hard to "[make] her husband her child" - it is highly significant from the psychoanalytic perspective that Maurice, in his furious outburst, calls Monique "une castratrice [p 186 - my emphasis]."

Before moving finally to Monique's realisation of her own self-deception, it is necessary to discuss the role played in the text by the psychoanalytic procedure itself, given that Beauvoir once more grants it a central thematic focus. Marie Lambert, Monique's analyst, plays a vital part in revealing Monique's textual discrepancies. As already stated, the diary form grants the reader a unilateral vision of the truth; it is up to us to seize on the various clues scattered in between her persuasively pleading words of hope. Among the various external perspectives mentioned (and usually revealingly dismissed by Monique) are those of her graphologist, her friends, her daughters - and her psychiatrist, who, as reported by her patient, asks questions of a disconcertingly disclosing nature :

Elle voudrait savoir qui, de Maurice ou de moi, a été responsable de ma première grossesse. Tous les deux. Enfin moi dans la mesure où j'ai trop fait confiance au calendrier, mais ce n'est pas de ma faute s'il m'a trahie. Ai-je insisté pour garder l'enfant? Non. Pour ne pas le garder? Non. La décision s'est prise d'elle-même. Elle a semblé sceptique. Son idée c'est que Maurice nourrit à mon égard une sérieuse rancune. Je lui ai opposé l'argument d'Isabelle : les débuts de notre mariage n'aurait pas été si heureux s'il ne l'avait pas désiré. Je trouve sa réponse bien alambiquée : pour ne pas s'avouer ses regrets, Maurice a misé sur l'amour, il a voulu le bonheur avec frénésie; une fois celle-ci tombée, il a retrouvé la rancune qu'il avait refoulée[...].

A vrai dire, Marie Lambert m'irrite un peu [p. 212].

By opposing her views to those of the misguided Monique, Beauvoir appears to be granting far more validity to Marie Lambert's interpretations than she has to Anne Dubreuilh's half-hearted diagnoses in Les Mandarins. Monique of course finds it impossible to believe that Maurice staked his all on a desperate happiness which was in fact merely a projection of his guilt and fear - emotions far removed from her own ideal of a pure and tender romantic love. What is also revealing about the above extract is its betrayal of Monique's manipulative techniques specifically through the medium of the

psychoanalyst, who throws into question Monique's projected image of giving wife and mother.

It is true that it is extremely easy to sympathise with Monique following Maurice's betrayal, and so in a sense her manipulative tactics, designed to increase Maurice's guilt and to see if she still has the power to influence his emotions, are understandable :

Il m'a prise dans ses bras d'un air un peu égaré. Il avait téléphoné plusieurs fois chez Colette et personne n'avait répondu ([...] j'avais bloqué la sonnerie). Il était fou d'inquiétude.

- Tu n'imaginais tout de même pas que j'allais me descendre?
- J'ai tout imaginé [pp. 133-134].

Décidément il ne pourra pas quitter Paris ce week-end. Ça signifie que Noëllie s'y oppose. Je me suis insurgée; pour la première fois j'ai pleuré devant lui. Il a eu l'air consterné : "Oh! ne pleure pas. Je tâcherai de trouver un remplaçant!" Il a fini par me promettre qu'il se débrouillerait: lui aussi il a envie de ce week-end. C'est vrai ou non. Mais ce qui est certain c'est que mes larmes l'ont bouleversé [p. 160].

On the other hand, if we return to the very beginning of the text we see that this is a behavioural pattern upon which Monique seems to have relied for some time; her emotional appeal revolves around a fulcrum of guilt inducement. For example :

je suis en colère contre lui. "J'ai besoin de toi, et tu n'es pas là!"
J'ai envie d'écrire ces mots sur un papier que je laisserai en évidence dans le vestibule avant d'aller me coucher [p. 127].

Monique also emotionally manipulates her daughters into conceding to her wishes : "Pourquoi ai-je accompagné Colette à la montagne? elle n'y tenait même pas tellement, c'est moi qui ai insisté [p. 133]."

It would seem, therefore, that the passage which reveals to us the true foundations of Monique's marriage to Maurice is that of the psychoanalyst's appraisal of the situation, and offers further proof of Beauvoir's own altered attitude. Yet, as I have stated, it is ultimately the whole interwoven text of the

diary itself which discloses the truth to its own writer. On January 15th, reading her account back to herself, with the added benefit of a retrospective and hence more objective viewpoint, Monique's devastating recognition of her complicitous self-deception completes her painful separation from an Imaginary morass of bad faith and deceit. Her realisation has been gradual ("je sais qu'en effet j'attends beaucoup des gens; je leur demande peut-être trop [p. 202]"), but it soon builds up momentum :

J'ai eu ce matin une illumination : tout est de ma faute. Mon erreur le plus grave a été de ne pas comprendre que *le temps passe*. Il passait et j'étais figée dans l'attitude de l'idéale épouse d'un mari idéal. [...] J'ai laissé mon intelligence s'atrophier; je ne me cultivais plus, je me disais : plus tard, quand les petites m'auront quittée. (Peut-être la mort de mon père n'est-elle pas étrangère à ce laisser-aller. Quelque chose s'est brisé. J'ai arrêté le temps à partir de ce moment-là.) Oui, la jeune étudiante que Maurice a épousée qui se passionnait pour les événements, les idées, les livres était bien différente de la femme d'aujourd'hui dont l'univers tient entre ces quatre murs. C'est vrai que j'avais tendance à y enfermer Maurice. Je croyais que son foyer lui suffisait, je croyais l'avoir tout à moi [p. 211].

Je n'ai rien d'autre que mon passé. Mais il n'est plus bonheur ni fierté : une énigme, une angoisse. Je voudrais lui arracher sa vérité. Mais peut-on se fier à la mémoire? J'ai beaucoup oublié, et il semble que parfois même j'ai déformé les faits. (Qui a dit : "Il n'y a rien de changé"? Maurice ou moi? Sur ce journal j'ai écrit que c'était lui. Peut-être parce que je souhaitais le croire...) [p. 213].

And then, finally, Monique reaches her most lucid state. As Fallaize writes, she finds herself the unwilling protagonist of her own psychoanalytic account :

She re-reads her diary. At a stroke, Monique is able to perceive herself not only as producer, as narrator, but as actor in what has gradually become a story with characters and a plot (*récit*). Monique as reader is stunned by the evidence of the flagrant self-deception of her narrated self.²⁷

Monique describes the revelation as follows :

²⁷ Elizabeth Fallaize, The Novels of Simone de Beauvoir, p. 166.

Pendant deux semaines je n'ai rien écrit sur ce cahier parce que je me suis relue. Et j'ai vu que les mots ne disent rien. Les rages, les cauchemars, l'horreur, ça échappe aux mots. Je mets des choses sur le papier quand je reprends des forces, dans le désespoir ou l'espoir. Mais la déconfiture, l'abrutissement, la décomposition, ce n'est pas marqué sur ces pages. Et puis elles mentent tant, elles se trompent tant. Comme j'ai été manoeuvrée! [...] Il n'y a pas une ligne de ce journal qui n'appelle une correction ou un démenti [...] Oui, tout au long de ces pages je pensais ce que j'écrivais et je pensais le contraire; et en les relisant je me sens complètement perdue. Il y a des phrases qui me font rougir de honte... "J'ai toujours voulu la vérité, si je l'ai obtenue, c'est que je la voulais." Peut-on se gourrer à ce point là sur sa vie! [...] Je me mentais. Comme je me suis menti! [...] J'ai repris mon stylo non pour revenir en arrière mais parce que le vide était si immense en moi, autour de moi, qu'il fallait ce geste de ma main pour m'assurer que j'étais encore vivante [pp. 222-223].

Finally, therefore, we can state that Monique attains the domain of the Lacanian Symbolic. She recognises that words are an inadequate cloak to cover a void, a lack, instead of denoting a fullness, a possession. All monopoly on language is impossible since the Real defies any attempt at definition - "ça échappe aux mots." Furthermore, the postulation of all identity is also dependent on a signifier which is forever slipping away from the net of language. Paradoxically, as Laplanche and Pontalis write,

to attempt to contain the meaning of 'Symbolic' within strict boundaries - to define it - would amount to a contradiction of Lacan's thought, since he refuses to acknowledge that the signifier can be permanently bound to the signified.²⁸

The signifier who is Monique finally acknowledges this separation, which in her case is from the signified social categorisations to which she has resolutely clung in an attempt at self-definition and recognition. And with this painful separation comes an admittedly alienating but also emancipatory freedom.

²⁸ Laplanche and Pontalis, The Language of Psychoanalysis, p. 440.

Bearing in mind the diagnostic tone of this chapter, we could ask as readers whether Monique's crisis of identity is eventually resolved. Is she 'cured'? Perhaps, in a sense, she is. Throughout the text of 'La Femme rompue', Monique asks herself, her diary and others about her self-image. She enquires of her friend Isabelle :

Je lui ai demandé de faire un effort, de me dire comment elle me voyait, ce qu'elle pensait de moi. Elle a souri:

- En vérité je ne te vois pas. Tu es mon amie, tu es là [p. 203].

An Other, therefore, fails to define her. She asks herself "Je croyais savoir qui j'étais, qui il était : et soudain je ne nous reconnais plus, ni lui ni moi [p. 192]." Self-definition, like the signifier, slips away from her too. When in New York with Lucienne, the viscous nature of her own existence overwhelms her in a horrifying burst of alienation and again, she wonders who she is :

Mon Dieu! c'est si lisse une vie, c'est clair, ça coule de source, quand tout va bien. Et il suffit d'un accrochage. On découvre que c'est opaque, qu'on ne sait rien sur personne, ni sur soi ni sur les autres: ce qu'ils sont, ce qu'ils pensent, ce qu'ils font, comment ils vous voient [p. 248].

And yet this awareness of solitude and non-existence is, paradoxically, Monique's own resolution of her identity. Let us examine this notion in detail. 'La Femme rompue' is a highly self-conscious text. It deconstructs itself - Monique's final rereading reveals the erroneous nature of our belief in a single, fixed meaning. And as the text deconstructs itself, it also deconstructs a self, the subject who is writing both a diary and an identity into existence.²⁹ Monique deconstructs herself to reconstruct an ego which, I posit hopefully, will no longer be based on the opinions of others, or a comforting social

²⁹ There are certain parallels between Monique's autobiography and her cure, and Freud's case of the Wolf Man, analysed by Peter Brooks. He writes as follows :

categorisation. This process is in many ways the aim of the psychoanalyst. "*Je me suis relue* [p. 222, my emphasis]", states Monique. Although she is dismayed by her failure at truthful depiction, and although fear is the final tone of the text, she still knows that "la porte s'ouvrira lentement et que je verrai ce qu'il y a derrière la porte. C'est l'avenir. La porte de l'avenir va s'ouvrir [p. 252]."

Throughout her writings, as did Freud and Lacan, Simone de Beauvoir stresses the regenerative power of the word.³⁰ "J'ai toujours voulu la vérité [p. 127]", states Monique at the start of her text. It is a claim to which she returns at the point where her text diverges from self-deception towards self-examination and a tentative liberation. "En toute objectivité, qui suis-je? [p. 201]" Monique asks herself. And then, unwittingly, she answers her own question : "Pour connaître ses limites, il faudrait pouvoir les dépasser : c'est sauter par-dessus son ombre [*ibid*]." 'La Femme rompue' is arguably the history of a woman who painfully redefines her own limits. Like Françoise in L'Invitée, she jumps over her own shadow of alienation and fear into a future which, far from being a stagnant and pre-written text, has instead all the dynamic potential of the blank first page of a new diary. As with Freud's hysterics, therefore, who discovered their own potential for painful storytelling and relief in this expression, the analysand of La Femme rompue finally recognises her own power to write her future script. By rereading a tale of

the shape of the individual and his biography becomes uncontrollable: their etiology and evolution are assigned to an unspecifiable network of event, fiction, and interpretation [p 278].

³⁰ In 'Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage', for example, Lacan writes that "Si [un] événement fut reconnu pour être la cause du symptôme, c'est que la mise en paroles de l'un

which she was only unconsciously aware, Monique is also able to reread - and perhaps rewrite - her identity. Psychoanalysis, both in terms of Marie Lambert's intervention and the interpretation performed by Monique, is therefore finally granted the power by Beauvoir to change the stories of the self.

In conclusion, it is my belief that in Simone de Beauvoir's final work of fiction the implicit theme of psychoanalysis itself has become extremely explicit, both in terms of the subject matter of mental illness and the central focus of the analytic procedure itself. Beauvoir places psychoanalysis in a far kinder light than she has in earlier texts such as Les Mandarins, thus emphasising her own altered attitude towards its claims. Her unconscious is still intensely at work in the narratives in terms of her thematic patterning : the return of the Beauvoirean repressed can once more be glimpsed through the Oedipal echoes, the tenuous grasp on identity and the breakdown experienced by both Murielle and Monique. The voice of the personal, however, appears to be at a slightly less repressed level in the text. Having therefore offered separate psychoanalytic readings of Beauvoir's entire fictional corpus, I now wish to view her body of work as a whole. What does a psychoanalytic overview of her fictional writings have to say about her own neuroses, buried in all her fiction? How does the emerging theme of psychoanalysis itself interact with these resonances of her own painful experience? In the conclusion which follows, I will answer these questions, in

(dans les "stories" de la malade) déterminait la levée de l'autre." See *Écrits*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966, p. 254.

the hope of bringing this thesis to a formal psychoanalytic closure of its own textual diagnoses.

CONCLUSION

ANALYSIS TERMINABLE AND INTERMINABLE

“Applications of analysis”, states Freud optimistically, “are always confirmations of it as well.”¹ Bearing in mind the three parallel planes on which the current study has been conducted - namely the examination of the psychopathology of Simone de Beauvoir’s fiction via the obsessional insistence of its thematic textual patternings, the view of her own developing engagement with psychoanalysis, and the differing psychoanalytic readings of her fictional works themselves - has my own application of psychoanalysis to Beauvoir’s fiction been confirmed? How do these three planes of interpretation mesh together? And precisely what do these readings reveal about psychoanalytic literary theory itself?

Firstly, as many of Beauvoir’s critics - among them Moi, Fallaize, Hughes, Heath and Ascher - have also recognised, it is clear that Beauvoir’s unconscious repressed fears of Oedipal desire, infantile abandonment, desperate love and the fragility of identity in the face of breakdown are projected onto every screen of her fictional texts in an eternal textual return of her own repressed. In Quand prime le spirituel, for example, the spectre of the mother throws a menacing shadow into Anne’s life, and a disappointing infantile relationship with the father leads Marcelle to an intense emotional investment in an idealised man. Oedipal triangles, in every possible

¹ Sigmund Freud, ‘Explanations, Applications and Orientations’, (1933 [1932]), in The Penguin Freud Library vol. 2, New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, London: Penguin, 1991, pp. 170-192, pp. 180-181.

permutation, represent the central emotional dynamics of L'Invitée, leading Françoise to a nervous breakdown which threatens the psychological and emotional symbiosis in which she has painstakingly submerged her own sense of self. Le Sang des autres again sees its heroine facing the ontological void of her wavering identity in the face of emotional abandonment by her lover, and an Oedipal crisis and its resulting neurosis - revealingly triggered by a traumatic episode lived by Beauvoir herself - trap Jean Blomart in a jagged cage of guilt and fear. Tous Les Hommes sont mortels, although a text which in certain ways escapes the critical framework of psychoanalysis, still portrays its protagonist as caught in an impossible desire for recognition by a man posited as absolute, and Les Mandarins turns on the themes - by now familiar - of obsessively idealised love and the resulting crises of self-confidence in the face of its disintegration.

Even following Beauvoir's probable recognition of the source of these obsessions while writing her autobiographies, Les Belles Images still returns - now more explicitly - to the Oedipal relationship, and Laurence's disappointment with her father again echoes the disillusion of Beauvoir's own adolescence. Finally, La Femme rompue portrays Monique as isolated and fearful, having lost all she staked on love, and Murielle as seething in her psychotic ramblings of destruction, desire and an obsessive-compulsive projection, in the gruesome grip of a mental illness which may have as its nucleus the haunting echoes of an explicitly Oedipal neurosis. All these emotional breakdowns suffered by Beauvoir's fictional characters result either from the consequences of an overactive superego (Anne Vignon, Jean

Blomart), from the repression of their own desires (Françoise Miquel, Anne Dubreuilh, Laurence), or from the trauma of emotional abandonment (Hélène Bertrand, Régine, Paule Mareuil, Monique).

The shattering of emotional boundaries around the fragile self thus sends splinters of despair through every Beauvoirean fictional work in a vicious compulsive cycle of textual repetition, hinting at the projected fears of the author and perhaps leading us to speculate as to her own repressed spectres of desire. Burying these fears as an anxiety symptom in her texts may have been Beauvoir's own defensive manoeuvre, yet having acknowledged these themes following her autobiographical introspection which perhaps resulted from a deeper understanding of her own unconscious motivations and a liberation from her repression, the life reemerges, and - significantly - she returns to her past patterns. In fact, the emerging voice of the madwoman in Laurence's fractured discourse, Murielle's vituperative mutterings and Monique's deluded diary may be a clearer, louder expression of Beauvoir's own fears, for her depressive themes seem to be if anything more insistent, and the spectre of the mother becomes even more Gorgon-like in the psychotic madness of Murielle of La Femme rompue.²

It is however these very obsessions and their rippling emotional energy which lend her texts their resonant strength; the symbolic manifestation of Beauvoir's unconscious wishes, passions and conflicts also bind her fictional corpus together into a cohesive entity which is the fictional facet of the author

² As Toril Moi writes, Les Belles Images and La Femme rompue read "as if she has finally decided to write her depression and her rage against evil and intrusive mothers out of her body once and for all." See Moi, Simone de Beauvoir, p. 243.

herself. The writings under analysis therefore present her readers with a lens onto Beauvoir the woman and her own failed attempts at evading her painful truths while ostensibly uncovering them for her novelistic purposes. Beauvoir's texts, with their half-buried projections, represent her own fictional forms of Freudian slips : in trying to rewrite her life into her novels, she uncovers more than she perhaps had ever wished to reveal.

Moving onto our second plane of interpretation, where Simone de Beauvoir's intense engagement with psychoanalysis as a discipline is in question, we can also chart a progressive development throughout her fictional writings : implicit/unconscious denial in Quand prime le spirituel, L'Invitée, and Le Sang des autres becomes emerging/preconscious acknowledgement in Les Mandarins, and finally explicit/conscious acceptance in Les Belles Images and La Femme rompue. Her weakening resistance thus results in a recognition of the validity of psychoanalytic theory following, it could be speculated, the overt articulation of her own neuroses in her autobiographies. Having told her own Freudian story, Beauvoir can finally openly admit to interviewers such as Jeanson that

il y a des *chances* ou des *malchances* qui ne vous quitteront jamais. Vous pourrez peut-être les dominer, mais elles seront les vôtres parce que vous les aurez eues pendant les tout premiers mois, peut-être, et en tout cas pendant les deux premières années.³

That she is in denial about this theory at the beginning of her writing career is clear however, for although there is evidence in Quand prime le spirituel of the importance of childhood influences on the adults in question, in her first

published novel L'Invitée the chapters on childhood are erased⁴ : instead, Françoise's childhood experience is buried in the text like her *grouillements confus*. Again, the childhood chapters are removed in Le Sang des autres, hinting at Beauvoir's own repression of her painful infantile and adolescent experience at this early stage of her career. In Les Mandarins,⁵ there are hints at a burgeoning reconciliation with psychoanalysis as a discipline : Beauvoir grants it a central status in the novel both as a theme and through the narrative voice of Anne Dubreuilh, proving that it is an increasingly intense preoccupation. This psychoanalytic thread which has been gradually laced into her texts is further strengthened in her two final fictional works : as with Les Mandarins, analysts again figure in the works : the first may be cold and clinical, but Laurence herself realises that childhood conditioning is all. The second, Marie Lambert of La Femme rompue, as we have seen in the preceding chapter, is finally portrayed by Beauvoir as both lucid and perceptive, contributing to her analysand's recognition and acceptance of a painful truth.

Despite Beauvoir's initial professed resistance to psychoanalysis, I therefore conclude that as a theme it spans each of her fictional texts. Admittedly, it is more obvious and explicit in her two final works, in which the voice of the madwoman is harsher and louder, dripping with vitriol, and in

³ Francis Jeanson, Simone de Beauvoir ou l'entreprise de vivre, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966, p. 252.

⁴ Although, as already stated in the above study, these chapters were erased at the insistence of Beauvoir's publishers, it could be speculated that she cut her account of Hélène Bertrand's in a wish to deny the importance of her own painful infantile and adolescent experience.

⁵ As already stated, Tous Les Hommes sont mortels is a more marginal text in Beauvoir's fictional corpus : I therefore do not include it in the above schemata of Beauvoir's developing thematic engagements with psychoanalysis.

which more weight is granted to infantile experience and preoccupations following the author's own self-examination. However, even in her earliest, pre-autobiographical works she revealingly writes chapters on childhood, some of which - in a move which parallels her own denial of her unconscious self at this stage - she cuts, instead burying psychoanalysis as an implicit internal theme deeply into her texts. Improbably, for a writer who claims vehemently to be anti-Freudian, steeped as she is in the language of German metaphysics, when writing her early fiction Beauvoir is already far closer to psychoanalysis than one might have guessed.

It would seem, therefore, that by employing psychoanalysis as a critical tool Beauvoir's personal implicit engagements with the discipline can be excavated and brought to the light of the textual surface for examination and interpretation. By importing the psychoanalytic problematic back into the Beauvoir text, we also see a set of thematic threads between her novels which psychoanalysis helps us to elicit. Let us thus now turn the tables in our final question, and ask what in fact Beauvoir's fictional corpus reveals about psychoanalysis itself as a literary approach, for these chosen texts themselves intervene in the psychoanalytic debates, perhaps refining our understanding of possible psychoanalytic approaches to literature.

Having used a multitude of Freudian and Lacanian theories of personality and textuality throughout this study, I hope to have proved not only that Beauvoir's fiction can be read extremely productively in psychoanalytic terms, but that this approach in fact opens up her works into multiple meanings, rather than obsessively categorising them in a mechanical imprinting of

predigested theory. After all, psychoanalysis also offers the reader an effective road into what I believe is perhaps Beauvoir's most marginal text : Tous Les Hommes sont mortels, although it may at first glance escape history, does not completely escape theory. Even this text is far from being pinned down lifelessly by the chosen theoretical approach - although it revealingly exposes the limits of classical Freudian theory, it still lends itself productively to other optics. Similarly, Les Belles Images, perhaps Beauvoir's second most marginal work in terms of her *oeuvre*, is also opened out by a Lacanian analysis of linguistic levels of meaning.

Finally, however, I must recognise that in all these conclusions about Beauvoir's textual unconscious, and in the psychoanalytic examinations of her fictional characters which have preceded these final pages, the danger exists that my own unconscious is at work. As Freud writes of his own psychopathological explanations of Jensen's Gradiva,

the author has presented us with a perfectly correct psychiatric study, on which we may measure our understandings of workings of the mind - a case history [...] which might have been designed to emphasize certain fundamental theories of medical psychology. [...] But how if, on being questioned, he were completely to deny any such purpose? It is so easy to draw analogies and to read meanings into things. Is it not rather we who have slipped into this [...] story a secret meaning very far from its author's intentions?⁶

It is very probable that, as Freud warns, I have found many things in her fiction and autobiographies which Simone de Beauvoir never intended to express and would be swift to deny. And yet, as Lacan reminds us, such revision and reinterpretation of another's discourse is inevitable. No text is

read in a vacuum, and I have read in her fictional texts (or perhaps read into them) my personal belief in the validity of psychoanalysis as a critical method for interpreting the works. It is my belief that the differing types of psychoanalytic frameworks employed in this thesis do not impose static grids on the novels, for these works in any case will always escape the framework of theory, thus confirming Simone de Beauvoir's superior novelistic art.

The multiplicity of triadic permutations in L'Invitée, for example, suggest that no reading can exhaust this Beauvoirean text. I agree with Jane Heath's view that the novel is of such "complexity and ambiguity that it has generated a diversity of interpretations, [...] none of which, including the present contribution, reduces or contains it."⁷ Not only does this say something about Beauvoir's skill as a writer, but it also makes a point about theory itself. Such a multiplicity of meanings which have arisen from critical readings of Beauvoir show that theory is uncontainable, and meanings irreducible. They unfold into a Lacanian horizontal continuum of personal translation of meaning and interpretation.

To conclude this personal translation of Beauvoir's fictional corpus, I remind the reader that in her interview with Alice Schwarzer, she confesses that "il y a une [...] chose que j'aimerais beaucoup faire si j'avais aujourd'hui 30 ou 40 ans : c'est un travail sur la psychanalyse."⁸ Beauvoir made this statement in 1976, ten years before her death, proving that her interest in psychoanalysis grew steadily in intensity throughout her life. Psychoanalysis

⁶ Sigmund Freud, 'Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's Gradiva' (1907 [1906]), in The Penguin Freud Library vol. 14, Art and Literature, London: Penguin, 1991, pp. 27-118, p. 68.

⁷ Jane Heath, Simone de Beauvoir, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989, p. 17.

⁸ Alice Schwarzer, Simone de Beauvoir aujourd'hui, Paris: Mercure de France, 1984, p. 94.

involves the reopening of the past to new interpretations. This, in my final analysis, is what I hope to have achieved with Simone de Beauvoir's fiction.

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