

Introduction

This study of Beauvoir's fiction focuses on her writing practice, on her textual strategies. I examine *how* she tells the stories she tells and intend to demonstrate that madness is an intrinsic quality of the text, of the very telling of the stories. I use the term *madness* metaphorically to designate those qualities that unsettle meaning. Madness is a useful conceit that encompasses interalia excess, transgression, instability, disruption, and incoherence.¹ My centre of interest is not the theme of madness in the fiction. What interests me is the way textual strategies duplicate madness in the text, the way the text structures an experience of madness (for readers) that is not locatable in any one character but is an effect of the text as a whole. I read madness metaphorically as an intrinsic quality of the texts. This is not to say that the texts per se are 'mad.'²

I must also underline, given the historical connection between women and madness in our patriarchal culture, that I do not wish to suggest that Beauvoir was 'mad' or to seek to devalue her work by doing so. I do not believe that my locating signs of madness in the text need be interpreted in this way. It is widely recognised that throughout history, women who have resisted patriarchal authority have been defined as mad and silenced.³ This is pointed out by Alice Jardine, who argues that women writers are less willing to experiment in a radical way with existing literary conventions and relates women's 'respect for form' precisely to women's having been 'closer to all possible transgressions.' As she puts it, 'one fatal step

¹ Madness is one of a number of possible ways of approaching this cluster of qualities in Beauvoir's fiction. They have also been associated with the feminine and the *avant garde*.

² I do not intend to psychoanalyse the texts or Beauvoir or, for that matter, her characters.

³ See Phyllis Chesler, *Women and Madness*, New York: Avon, 1972. She describes the relationship between the female condition and madness, showing how both women who fully act out the conditioned female role and those who reject or are ambivalent about the female role are defined as mad (p. 56). 'The ethic of mental health is masculine in our culture,' she argues (p. 69). See also Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830–1980*, London: Virago, 1987; and Martha Noel Evans, *Fits and Starts: A Genealogy of Hysteria in Modern France*, New York: Cornell University Press, 1991. During a discussion about the antipsychiatry movement in an interview with Alice Jardine, Beauvoir said: 'Given masculine norms, it is clear that women are more likely to be considered crazy – I'm not saying to be crazy. [...] It's terrible this tendency to consider women something dangerous to society ... but, truthfully speaking they are dangerous, even those who aren't feminists, because there has always been a women's revolt.' Jardine, Alice, 'Interview with Beauvoir,' *Signs*, Winter, 1979, 224–36, p. 229.

outside of symbolic pre-scriptions and [they are] designated as mad.⁴ In a sense, in reading transgression and resistance in Beauvoir's fiction as signs of madness, I am reappropriating madness as a positive force within the text.⁵

On the whole, Beauvoir's fiction in general and her writing practice in particular have been neglected, a fact that has not gone unnoticed. The position has changed little since 1987, when Elaine Marks edited a collection of critical essays on Beauvoir's work. In the introduction to the collection, she tells us that 'during the forty-five years in which Beauvoir has been written about in newspapers, literary magazines, women's magazines, scholarly journals, and specifically feminist journals and books, the major emphasis has been on her autobiographical writings and on her substantial essays on women and old age.'⁶ She identifies a need for more work on close textual analyses (p. 11). Elizabeth Fallaize points out that 'the majority of the studies dealing with the fictional work have given at least as much attention to her essays and/or autobiographical writings.'⁷ She adds that studies that deal with the fiction tend to focus on theme and content, rather to the exclusion of a consideration of form (p. 3). Likewise, Toril Moi regrets that little attention has been paid to the style of Beauvoir's writing.⁸

This present study of Beauvoir is positioned precisely in this 'gap' where fiction and form intersect. My own readings, however, have not emerged in a vacuum. They are intended not to silence other interpretations but to exist in dialogue with them, for Beauvoir's complex and ambiguous texts generate multiple readings, none of which is definitive or exclusive. With this in mind, it will be useful to consider the current state of Beauvoir criticism before going on to examine the relationship between madness and the text in detail.

Toril Moi provides a useful overview of full-length studies on Beauvoir published in French and English from 1958 to 1992.⁹ She divides the studies into

⁴ Alice Jardine, 'Pre-texts for the Transatlantic Feminist,' *Yale French Studies*, 62, 1981, 220–36 (pp. 232–3).

⁵ In so doing, I do not wish to glamorise madness itself. As Elaine Showalter says, interpreting madness as a form of feminist protest comes 'dangerously close to romanticizing and endorsing madness as a desirable form of rebellion rather than seeing it as the desperate communication of the powerless' (*The Female Malady*, p. 5). Moreover, whilst my study does not specifically interrogate gender as a factor of the production of Beauvoir's texts, this nevertheless forms the context of the discussion.

⁶ Elaine Marks, 'Introduction,' in *Critical Essays on Simone de Beauvoir*, ed. by Elaine Marks, Boston, Massachusetts: G.K. Hall, 1987, p. 8. This book is a case in point. Only two of the contributions deal with the fiction. In 'Metaphysics and the Novel,' Maurice Merleau-Ponty offers a reading of *L'Invitée* (pp. 31–44) and in 'Psychiatry in the Postwar Fiction of Beauvoir,' Terry Keefe examines *Les Mandarins*, *La Femme rompue* and *Les Belles Images* (pp. 131–44).

⁷ Elizabeth Fallaize, *The Novels of Simone de Beauvoir*, London: Routledge, 1988, p. 2.

⁸ Toril Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1994. See, for example, footnote 16, p. 269.

⁹ Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, footnote 8, pp. 267–8.

'impressionistic' categories: catholic, existentialist/socialist, scholarly, popular, and feminist. Between 1980 (when Beauvoir studies shifted away from France) and 1992, twenty-one studies were published. Five of these were 'scholarly,' six were 'popular,' and ten were 'feminist.' Of these studies, only two were dedicated to Beauvoir's fiction, one 'scholarly' and one 'feminist.'¹⁰ Five books look at the fiction in the context of Beauvoir's writings as a whole.¹¹ Jane Heath's feminist study reads *L'Invitée*, *Les Mandarins*, and *Les Belles Images* together with the autobiographies, according to Toril Moi, in an attempt to 'rescue Beauvoir for poststructuralist feminism' (p. 77).¹² Other studies whose concerns are political or philosophical examine the fiction to a much lesser extent.¹³

Since 1992, just three of the major studies of Beauvoir that have been published focus exclusively on the fiction. Terry Keefe's book, *Simone de Beauvoir*, examines each of Beauvoir's novels and short stories in turn.¹⁴ Genevieve Shepherd rereads the whole of Beauvoir's fictional output using Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis as critical lenses.¹⁵ In *Simone de Beauvoir's Fiction: Women and Language*, each of the essays addresses the form of Beauvoir's fiction.¹⁶ The writers examine Beauvoir's use of language in her texts, especially the relationship between women and language. A number of other recent studies, written by philosophy specialists rather than by literary specialists, look at the fiction – to a greater or lesser extent – in the context of Beauvoir's philosophy. *Philosophy as Passion: The Thinking of Simone de Beauvoir*, focuses on Beauvoir's ethics and includes an analysis of *Les Mandarins* as well as an overview of the philosophical ideas in Beauvoir's fiction as a whole.¹⁷ Edward and Kate Fullbrook explore what they refer to as Beauvoir's

¹⁰ They are Françoise Arnaud Hibbs, *L'Espace dans les romans de Simone de Beauvoir: son expression et sa fonction*, Stanford French and Italian Studies 59, Saratoga, California: Anma Libri, 1989 ('scholarly'); Fallaize, *The Novels* ('feminist').

¹¹ They are Carol Ascher, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Life of Freedom*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1981, a feminist study described by Toril Moi as verging on the adulatory; Terry Keefe, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Study of her Writings*, London: Harrap, 1983; Elaine Marks, ed., *Critical Essays on Simone de Beauvoir*; Catherine Savage Brosman, *Simone de Beauvoir Revisited*, Twayne's World Authors Series 820, Boston: Twayne, 1991. Moi classifies these three studies as 'scholarly.' The fifth study, this one in Moi's 'popular' category, is Renée Winegarten, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Critical View*, Oxford: Berg, 1988.

¹² Jane Heath, *Simone de Beauvoir*, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989.

¹³ For example, Mary Evans, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Feminist Mandarin*, London: Tavistock, 1985; Judith Okely, *Simone de Beauvoir*, London: Virago, 1986. See also Margaret A. Simons, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Simone de Beauvoir*, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995.

¹⁴ Terry Keefe, *Simone de Beauvoir*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998.

¹⁵ Genevieve Shepherd, *Simone de Beauvoir's Fiction: A Psychoanalytic Rereading*, Oxford: Peter Lang, 2003.

¹⁶ Alison T. Holland and Louise Renée, eds., *Simone de Beauvoir's Fiction: Women and Language*, New York: Peter Lang, 2005.

¹⁷ Karen Vintges, *Philosophy as Passion: The Thinking of Simone de Beauvoir*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996. Vintges mistakenly asserts that there are two first-person narrators in *Les Mandarins* (p. 77).

literary-philosophical method in *Simone de Beauvoir: A Critical Introduction*.¹⁸ Eleanore Holveck's study, *Simone de Beauvoir's Philosophy of Lived Experience*, examines Beauvoir's philosophical thinking in her fiction, in particular in *Quand Prime le Spirituel*, *L'Invitée*, *Le Sang des autres*, and *Les Mandarins*.¹⁹ *The Bonds of Freedom: Simone de Beauvoir's Existentialist Ethics* by Kristana Arp includes readings of *Le Sang des autres* and *Tous les Hommes sont mortels*.²⁰ A number of other studies examine Beauvoir's fiction in the context of her other work: Toril Moi's 'personal genealogy' of Beauvoir, *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman*, provides an exciting reading of *L'Invitée* and certainly underlines the importance of her rhetorical strategies. The second part of Sarah Fishwick's study, *The Body in the Work of Simone de Beauvoir*, offers readings of Beauvoir's fictional representations of bodily being, in the light of theoretical accounts of corporeality elaborated by Beauvoir in *Le Deuxième Sexe*, by Luce Irigaray and by Judith Butler.²¹

A number of critics comment on the disappointed, not to say hostile, tone of much Beauvoir criticism. Elaine Marks notes that at least half of the critical essays included in the collection she edited are 'sarcastic' to some degree. She asserts: 'They present Beauvoir as a slightly ridiculous figure, naive in her passions, sloppy in her scholarship, inaccurate in her documentation, generally out of her depth and inferior as a writer' (p. 2). She is criticised for being 'too feminist' and, paradoxically, for being 'not feminist enough.' Elaine Marks argues that theoretical divergence between Beauvoir and contemporary feminists results in hostility and debate becoming conflated. Elizabeth Fallaize also comments on the disappointment of readers who seek in the fiction a confirmation of *Le Deuxième Sexe* or a reflection of contemporary feminist thought (p. 3). Toril Moi investigates the perception that Beauvoir is an undistinguished writer and devotes a chapter of her book to a close examination of recurring themes in hostile responses to Beauvoir's work, responses that are surprisingly common even among critics who profess to be well-intentioned and unbiased.²² She asserts that 'the hostile critics' favourite strategy is to personalize the issues, to reduce the book to the woman: their aim is clearly to discredit her as a speaker not to enter into debate with her' (p. 75). Certainly, it is not the case that Beauvoir should be above criticism. However, appraisal must be based on careful reading. When it comes to the fiction, dismissive comments as to the literary merits of Beauvoir's writing by critics who have barely engaged with the text are regrettable to say the least.

¹⁸ Edward Fullbrook and Kate Fullbrook, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Critical Introduction*, Cambridge: Polity, 1998

¹⁹ Eleanore Holveck, *Simone de Beauvoir's Philosophy of Lived Experience*, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002.

²⁰ Kristana Arp, *The Bonds of Freedom: Simone de Beauvoir's Existentialist Ethics*, Chicago: Open Court, 2001.

²¹ Sarah Fishwick, *The Body in the Work of Simone de Beauvoir*, Oxford: Peter Lang, 2002.

²² Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, Chapter 3, 'Politics and the Intellectual Woman: Clichés and Commonplaces in the reception of Simone de Beauvoir,' pp. 73–92.

In *Simone de Beauvoir: A Study of her Writings*, Terry Keefe regrets the fact that much of the work done on Beauvoir has centered on her feminism or her association with Jean-Paul Sartre, thus producing a distorted view of her as a writer.²³ He intends his study to be a balanced study of all her books, although his readings of the fiction centre on an interpretation of content, and character and little space is given to form. When form is addressed, it is generally narrative techniques that merit a brief mention. For example, he comments on shifting narrative viewpoints in *L'Invitée* but neglects other aspects of Beauvoir's writing. His relative neglect of form leads him to consider that the novel is somewhat long and repetitive and to find that this is justified only in so far as it reflects the shapelessness and texture of life itself (pp. 157–8). He does not consider the effect that recurring events may have (apart from inferring that it is boring) and neglects symbolic significance that accrues as the text gathers momentum. Just more than one page is allotted to a discussion of what Keefe refers to as the 'small scale stylistic devices' that Beauvoir uses in *Les Belles Images* to convey Laurence's state of mind (p. 211). His analysis leaves much room for development; for example, he alludes to the single viewpoint in the novel but fails to point out that there are in fact two narrative voices, a split between 'je' and 'elle' at the heart of the narrative. Likewise, Terry Keefe links the state of mind of Murielle, the narrator in 'Monologue,' the middle story in *La Femme rompue*, to the use of language in the story but does not develop the connection thoroughly, commenting only that erratic punctuation conveys the idea that words are whirling round in Murielle's head and that the intensity of her feelings is straining language to its limits (p. 216). There is no other mention of form in *La Femme rompue*. Despite this relative lack of analysis of form, Terry Keefe levels severe criticisms at Beauvoir's fiction and concludes that its aesthetic defects might make us 'disinclined even to consider whether they are accomplished works of art' (p. 229). Whilst acknowledging that *Les Belles Images* and 'Monologue' reveal her to be capable 'of the highest achievements on the artistic level,' he nevertheless attacks her fiction for its narrow range, for failure to make more use of conflicting perspectives, for lack of inventiveness, for Beauvoir's over-identification with its heroines, and for being limited and conventional (pp. 227–8). His praise can seem patronising and begrudging:

Whatever the flaws in her books, we can only be grateful for stories that not only entertain us, but project us so firmly into the mentalities of imaginary figures that our awareness of people and the real world is permanently enriched, over however narrow a range.²⁴ (*Simone de Beauvoir: A Study of her Writings*, p. 228)

²³ Keefe, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Study of her Writings*, Preface.

²⁴ Keefe appears to associate the lack of a broader perspective and more balanced treatment with the absence of male focalizers in the shorter fiction (p. 221). He also makes the following strange comment: 'There has been a tendency, perhaps because of her relationship with Sartre, to expect too much of Beauvoir's works [...]' (p. 228).

Terry Keefe's introductory guide to *Les Belles Images* and *La Femme rompue*, published in 1991, provides a more thoughtful appreciation of Beauvoir's later fiction.²⁵ A whole section is devoted to narrative technique and style in *Les Belles Images*. He touches on a whole range of stylistic devices (focalization, reliability, use of pronouns and tense, repetition, questioning, use of parentheses and suspension points, and ambiguity), concluding that 'the style of the novel would undoubtedly repay closer study' (p. 36). Less attention is paid to the form of the three stories in *La Femme rompue*. The 'broadly literary orientation of 'L'Age de discrétion' is noted, and Terry Keefe comments that 'the style itself has certain minor poetic qualities not entirely common in Beauvoir's fiction' (p. 44). These are not explored. The remainder of the paragraph dealing with style is given over to a brief consideration of the use of the 'diary' form in the story. The form of 'Monologue' is treated somewhat more thoroughly and is related to the mental illness of Murielle, the narrator, although his argument appears to be somewhat contradictory in that, whilst the story is considered to be 'a successful attempt to project us into the strange mentality of a tortured woman,' the monologue form is seen to hamper our efforts to judge Murielle (p. 52). Likewise, the diary form in 'La Femme rompue' is acknowledged to be well suited to the depiction of a character undergoing change but it, too, is perceived as a barrier to making 'a sound judgement' (p. 61). No other aspect of the form of 'La Femme rompue' is examined.²⁶

Terry Keefe's full-length study of Beauvoir's fiction published in 1998 is as dismissive of the formal qualities of Beauvoir's fiction as his study of 15 years earlier.²⁷ He concludes:

Approaching the works from a different angle, many readers will undoubtedly believe that Beauvoir paid far too little attention to the technical, stylistic, artistic aspects of novel-writing. [...] In general there is – except in *Les Belles Images* – relatively little that is genuinely innovative in her fictional techniques as such. (*Simone de Beauvoir*, p. 172)

He concedes that Beauvoir 'mostly reworked her drafts very carefully' and 'produced some memorably written sequences in her novels' but asserts that it

²⁵ Terry Keefe, *Simone de Beauvoir: Les Belles Images, La Femme rompue*, Glasgow Introductory Guides to French Literature 12, Glasgow: University of Glasgow French and German Publications, 1991.

²⁶ In 1991 Keefe continues to regret the fact that Beauvoir's stories are narrated exclusively from the woman's point of view. As regards the upbringing of children in *Les Belles Images* and *La Femme rompue*, he argues, we are prevented from 'seeing things through the father's eyes, and therefore from making a balanced judgement on the father's contribution to the upbringing process' (p. 72). (This seems especially to concern Keefe in light of the fact that the stories in *La Femme rompue* 'are cautionary tales, warning against the unreliability of certain women's testimony.')

²⁷ *Simone de Beauvoir*, Macmillan Modern Novelists, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998.

is ultimately the dominance of conversation or dialogue in her stories and her use of spoken language that preclude her from being considered as a (great) stylist (p. 172).

Renee Winegarten's declared aim is to 'assess the value of Beauvoir's activity and writings in the spheres of feminism, politics and literature.'²⁸ Her starting point is that 'basically, [Beauvoir] was not an inventive or highly imaginative writer' (p. 3). There is no careful evaluation of Beauvoir's writing in her book; instead, she concentrates on philosophical and autobiographical aspects of the fiction, concluding that Beauvoir's lack of inventive powers led her to write *romans à clef* and *romans à thèse* (p. 105). Her comments are consistently dismissive and unfounded. One page is allotted to *Les Belles Images*; she considers this to be Beauvoir's 'most accomplished work of fiction in the formal sense' (p. 114) but restricts herself to summarising the plot. Her verdict is that 'skilfully and smoothly constructed as it is, the novel seems thin and the plot mechanism artificial' (p. 115).²⁹ *La Femme rompue* is summed up and dismissed in 10 lines (p. 115). My argument here is that if critics claim to evaluate Beauvoir's fiction and her contribution to literature, then the least they owe is a careful reading of the texts.³⁰

Catherine Savage Brosman looks at Beauvoir's fiction in the context of her work as a whole in *Simone de Beauvoir Revisited*. One chapter deals with the early fiction and drama and another with the later fiction. The Publisher's Note promises 'an objective consideration of Beauvoir's lasting contribution to literature and philosophy.' Indeed, Catherine Brosman's study is intended to fill the gap left by studies she considers to be overspecialised or 'unbalanced,' arguing that 'this is the case particularly with the numerous studies done from the feminist viewpoint.'³¹ Although she claims to treat Beauvoir's fictional technique in detail, little space is actually given over to it. For instance, barely more than one page is devoted to the form of *L'Invitée*, and one paragraph of this is concerned with showing that autobiographical considerations weigh more heavily than questions of style (p. 55). Likewise, just one page deals with the form of *Les Belles Images* (p. 88), and there is one paragraph given over to the consideration of form in each of the stories in *La Femme rompue* (pp. 94, 95, 98). When technique is dealt with, concentration is on focalization. The tone of Catherine Brosman's study is hostile, begrudging, and dismissive. Her estimate of the portrait of Xavière in *L'Invitée*, for example, is that 'she may be the book's most successful portrait, and credit is due to Beauvoir, even though she had a live model' (p. 52). As for Beauvoir's technique, Catherine Brosman writes: 'The progress the author had made in storytelling since her early

²⁸ Winegarten, p. 6.

²⁹ She adds the following, rather odd remark: 'All is weighted against the majority of Laurence's circle, and the battle seems won in advance' (p. 115).

³⁰ I have not included Carol Ascher's book in this review. Her aim is 'to render the character, preoccupations, and main themes of de Beauvoir's life – as [she] see[s] them' (p. 3).

³¹ Brosman, *Simone de Beauvoir Revisited*, Preface, p. ix.

attempts is visible in *L'Invitée*. Thanks perhaps to Sartre's influence, Beauvoir had a sense of what technique could contribute to her fiction. [...] The fact that two initial chapters had to be excised, on an editor's advice, suggests that the craftsmanship in the manuscript was not perfect' (p. 55).³² Such comments recur throughout the study, which, though it can provide insights, also contains curious, unsubstantiated readings and misreadings of the texts.³³ Some of these will be dealt with during the course of my study. In particular, I want to show that her assertion that the tone of *Les Belles Images* is detached is untenable.³⁴

It is not true to imply that all Beauvoir criticism is antagonistic or dismissive. A number of more balanced, well-founded studies have been published in the last 20 years. My study builds on the insights of a number of writers in particular. In her study of Beauvoir's fiction, Elizabeth Fallaize concentrates on Beauvoir as a writer and intends to make up for the relative lack of attention that has been paid to the formal literary qualities of her work until now.³⁵ She is especially interested in the narrative strategies Beauvoir uses in her novels and short stories and wishes to relate these both to the meaning of her texts and to the sexual politics of her writing (p. 1). She points out in the introduction to her book that narrative strategies will figure much more prominently in her discussion of certain texts where language is foregrounded than in others where philosophical, political, and personal concerns are dominant (p. 4).

In Beauvoir's fiction as a whole, Elizabeth Fallaize identifies an overall reduction in plurality and a loss of authority conceded to the female voice, which, however, becomes the dominant voice. She notes that gradually the narrative voice is taken over by negative, mad women and asks the crucial question as to how the connection between women and folly and the abuse of words can be accounted for (p. 179). Interesting autobiographical and historical points are advanced to explain developments in Beauvoir's narrative strategies. My readings

³² Brosman neglects to mention that these chapters were 'excised' from an early draft of the first hundred pages of what would be *L'Invitée*. Beauvoir discusses the genesis of her novel in *La Force de l'âge*, p. 346. (The two chapters appear in *Les Écrits*, pp. 275–316.)

³³ For example, Brosman writes that in *L'Invitée* Françoise and Pierre bring Xavière to Paris to pursue her philosophical studies (p. 51). In fact, Pierre's first idea is that she should learn shorthand (I, p. 27). Brosman offers a strange interpretation of the ending of *Les Belles Images*: 'Laurence's task is enormous: to bring all her intimates to a common recognition of freedom and creation of an authentic self. There is some hope that she can do so for and with Catherine' (p. 92). It is hard to reconcile this with the tentative, personal 'resolution' reached in the final sentences of the novel: 'Mais les enfants auront leur chance. Quelle chance? elle ne le sait même pas' (BI, p. 183); 'But the children will have their chance. What chance? she doesn't even know' (LBI p. 222 ta). Brosman does not provide textual evidence that Monique in 'La Femme rompue' 'was indeed an oppressive mother' (p. 99). Certainly Monique expresses doubts about the way she brought up her children in the light of Maurice's criticism (pp. 186 and 219) but for conflicting evidence see pp. 188 and 250.

³⁴ Brosman, p. 86.

³⁵ Fallaize, *The Novels*, p. 3.

of Beauvoir develop Fallaize's insights into Beauvoir's narrative strategies by addressing the connections between madness and language in the text. I explore the textual strategies that call into question the meaningfulness of language and the nature of truth.

Jane Heath's study of three of Beauvoir's fictional works and her autobiographies focuses 'on textuality not personality.'³⁶ By placing emphasis on the process of the fictional texts, she seeks to examine the way in which the feminine in the texts, defined as a site of resistance, represents a challenge to the patriarchal order (pp. 8, 13, 14). She argues that Beauvoir is inscribed on the side of the masculine, speaking 'predominantly the discourse of repression' and allowing the man in her to speak (p. 9). However, in spite of repression of the feminine, Jane Heath tells us, the feminine returns in the texts. She offers interesting psychoanalytical readings of the fiction, but I share Toril Moi's disquiet at her use of the notions femininity and masculinity.³⁷ Many of the qualities she reads as the feminine my readings will identify as excess and transgression and reinterpret as madness in the text.

Toril Moi's book *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman* offers a close reading of 'the textual Beauvoir.' She makes no methodological distinction between 'life' and 'text'; 'Beauvoir' is a construction, the effect of the fictional, philosophical, autobiographical, and epistolary texts that she herself wrote and of all the texts that have been written about her (p. 4). For Toril Moi, all these texts participate in the same discursive network, and she aims 'to read them all with and against each other in order to bring out their points of tension, contradictions, and similarities' (p. 5).³⁸ She focuses on *L'Invitée*, *Le Deuxième Sexe*, and the memoirs, and her book is a dazzling combination not only of biography and literary criticism but also 'reception studies, sociology of culture, philosophical analysis, psychoanalytic inquiry and feminist theory' (p. 7). Attention is paid to Beauvoir's rhetorical strategies; *L'Invitée* is read as an existential melodrama, and its powerful imagery is analysed; the use of metaphor and metonymy in Beauvoir's account of subjectivity and sexuality in *Le Deuxième Sexe* is investigated; shifts in tone and style in the memoirs are read as effects of anxiety and depression. On balance, the emphasis in Toril Moi's study falls on psychoanalytic and philosophical readings of the texts.

This review of major critical studies of Beauvoir's fiction reveals that there is a place for further analysis. It confirms that the form of her novels and short stories remains a relatively neglected area of study. Attention here therefore centres on

³⁶ Heath, *Simone de Beauvoir*, p. 3.

³⁷ See Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, footnote 27, pp. 272–3.

³⁸ Moi acknowledges what she call the 'ethical integrity' of 'purely aesthetic' approaches to Beauvoir but regrets that they tend to miss the 'real cultural significance' of her work by concentrating on her as a writer of fiction (p. 5). However, given the dearth of studies that deal with the form of the fiction in any depth, it seems appropriate that, within the context of recognised cultural significance, effort should be devoted to an evaluation of Beauvoir's writing in the fiction, to the appraisal of *how* she writes. This is not to preclude comparable studies of nonfictional works.

text as opposed to *story* and *narration*. These are the terms used by Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan for the basic aspects of narrative fiction.³⁹ They correspond to Genette's distinction between *histoire*, *récit*, and *narration*.⁴⁰ 'Story' denotes the narrated events and the participants in these events, 'le contenu narrative,' however minimal. 'Text' denotes the discourse, spoken or written, that tells the story. 'Narration' denotes the act or process of production, the communication of the narrative by a fictional narrator within the text. All three aspects are essential and interrelated. To base an evaluation of narrative fiction on an appreciation of story only, that is an examination of events and characters, is evidently partial. To a great extent, the how of the telling *is* the meaning of the story.

Indeed, Beauvoir attached a great deal of importance to the artistic reworking of lived experience, to the creative process. She did not simply transcribe lived experience in her fiction. In a lecture she gave in Japan in 1966, when the bulk of her fiction was already written, she told her listeners: 'Écrire un roman, c'est en quelque sorte pulvériser le monde réel et n'en retenir que les éléments qu'on pourra introduire dans une re-création d'un monde imaginaire [...]. Un roman c'est une espèce de machine qu'on fabrique pour éclairer le sens de notre être dans le monde'; 'Writing a novel is like pulverising the real world and only keeping the elements you'll be able to introduce in a re-creation of an imaginary world [...]. A novel is a kind of machine that is designed to reveal the sense of our being in the world' (my translation).⁴¹ Beauvoir believed that the transposition of experience into fiction, the creation of a work of literature required attention to be paid to form.⁴² Elsewhere in *La Force des choses* she describes the exacting process of reworking the drafts of her books; the initial writing, 'un labour pénible'; the second draft, '[le] brouillon'; and then the final rewriting:

M'aidant de mon brouillon, je rédige à grands traits un chapitre. Je reprends la première page et arrivée en bas, je la refais phrase par phrase; ensuite je corrige chaque phrase d'après l'ensemble de la page, chaque page d'après le chapitre entier; plus tard, chaque chapitre, chaque page, chaque phrase d'après la totalité du livre. (FCi, p. 372)⁴³

With the help of my rough draft, I sketch the broad outlines of a chapter. I begin again at page one, read it through and rewrite it sentence by sentence; then I correct each sentence so that it will fit into the page as a whole, then each page so that it has its place in the whole chapter; later on, each chapter, each page, each sentence, is revised in relation to the work as a whole. (FOC, p. 285)

³⁹ Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*, London: Methuen, 1983, pp. 3–4.

⁴⁰ Gérard Genette, 'Discours du récit,' in *Figures III*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1972, p. 72.

⁴¹ Beauvoir, 'Mon expérience d'écrivain,' Lecture given in Japan, 11 October 1966, in Claude Francis and Fernande Gontier, *Les Écrits de Simone de Beauvoir: La vie – L'écriture*, Paris: Gallimard, 1979, p. 443.

⁴² FCi, p. 119.

⁴³ The whole process is described in 'Intermède,' FCi, pp. 371–4.

In her contribution to the 1964 debate, *Que peut la littérature?*, Beauvoir is categorical that in literature, which is essentially an exploration/a search ('une recherche'), 'la distinction entre le fond et la forme est périmée; et les deux sont inséparables'; 'the distinction between content and form is obsolete; the two are inseparable' (my translation).⁴⁴ She goes on to say: 'On ne peut pas séparer la manière de raconter et ce qui est raconté, parce que la manière de raconter c'est le rythme même de la recherche, c'est la manière de la définir, c'est la manière de la vivre'; 'How a story is told cannot be separated from what is told because how a story is told is the rhythm of the exploration, the way to define it, the way to experience it' (my translation).⁴⁵ Given the importance Beauvoir attached to form, given the care she took with the writing of her fiction, with the craft of writing, this aspect of her work deserves close examination.⁴⁶

Consideration of Beauvoir's writing practice is amply rewarded. Not only does it reveal the richness of her texts, it can also afford alternative readings of her fiction. These may be deconstructive readings that undermine authorial readings of the texts.

Before going further, it is useful at this point to examine some of Beauvoir's own views with regard to her fiction. Beauvoir knew (thought she knew) what her texts meant. Her intentions are, in each case, clearly spelt out in her memoirs.⁴⁷ Toril Moi has pointed out how 'the autobiography becomes a repertoire of *authorized*

⁴⁴ In *Que peut la littérature*, ed. by Yves Buin, Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1965, pp. 73–92 (p. 84).

⁴⁵ *Que peut la littérature*, p. 85. See also Beauvoir's comments in the interview with Catherine David, 'Beauvoir elle-même,' *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 22 January 1979, pp. 82–90 (pp. 88–9). She denies that style is of no great importance to her: 'Au contraire, j'y attache une grande importance. Je travaille énormément tout ce que j'écris. Vous savez, pour émuouvoir, il faut que les choses soient dites d'une certaine façon, avec un certain ton, des ellipses, des images, des développements. Ça a toujours beaucoup compté pour moi. [...] Dans mes romans et mes Mémoires, je fais toujours très attention à la manière dont je dis les choses. On ne peut évidemment pas séparer la manière du contenu'; 'On the contrary, I attach a great deal of importance to it. I spend a long time working on everything I write. You know, to move people, things have to be said in a certain way, in a certain tone, with ellipses, images, developments. Style has always been very important to me. [...] In my novels and Memoires, I am always very careful about the way I say things. Obviously, style cannot be separated from content' (my translation).

⁴⁶ Beauvoir states that some essays can also be described as works of literature to the extent that 'dans l'essai même il y a un style, une écriture, une construction; on communique aussi à travers ce qu'il y a de commun et de désinformatif dans le langage' ('even in essays there is a style, a way of writing, a construction; meaning is also communicated through what is ordinary and what is misleading in language') (my translation). 'Mon expérience,' p. 441.

⁴⁷ *L'Invitée* in *La Force de l'âge*, pp. 384–93; *Le Sang des autres* in *La Force de l'âge*, pp. 618–25; *Tous les Hommes sont mortels* in *La Force des choses*, vol. 1, pp. 92–8; *Les Mandarins* in *La Force des choses*, vol. 1, pp. 358–70; *Les Belles Images*, in *Tout Compte fait*, pp. 172–5; *La Femme rompue*, in *Tout Compte fait*, pp. 175–81.

readings' as Beauvoir attempts to control the meaning of her books.⁴⁸ Martha Noel Evans also discusses the way in which Beauvoir's fiction is 'documented and shadowed' by her memoirs.⁴⁹ She sees the autobiography as 'a second writing that explains, completes, and justifies the first' (p. 77). Beauvoir's memoirs reveal a tension between her desire to control the meaning of her texts, particularly her fictional texts, and her wish to leave room for a certain ambiguity she intended to guarantee *vraisemblance* (in life there is no closure, no certainty, no Truth).

About *L'Invitée* she writes: 'Dans les passages réussis du roman, on arrive à une ambiguïté de significations qui correspond à celle qu'on rencontre dans la réalité' (FA, p. 391); 'In the novel's more successful sequences I achieved an ambiguity of meanings corresponding to the kind of thing one meets in real life' (PL, p. 344, ta). She quotes with approval what Blanchot says about existence in his essay on *le roman à thèse*: 'Le but de l'écrivain c'est de *la donner à voir* en la recréant avec des mots: il la trahit, il l'appauvrit, s'il n'en respecte pas l'ambiguïté' (FA, p. 622); 'The writer's aim is to *make people see* the world, by re-creating it in words; he betrays and impoverishes it if he does not respect its essential ambiguity' (PL, p. 544). This is Beauvoir's declared reason for preferring *L'Invitée* to *Le Sang des autres*, because 'la fin en demeure ouverte; on ne saurait en tirer aucune leçon' ('it has an open ending, and no lesson could be drawn from it'), whereas *Le Sang des autres* 'aboutit à une conclusion univoque, réductible en maximes et en concepts' ('reaches a clear-cut, definite conclusion, which can be reduced to terms of maxims and concepts') (FA, p. 622; PL, p. 544).⁵⁰ Beauvoir is even more critical of her text than Blanchot, writing: 'Le défaut qu'il dénonce n'entache pas seulement les dernières pages du roman: d'un bout à l'autre, il lui est inhérent (FA, p. 622); 'The fault that he criticizes does not only mar the novel's final pages: it is inherent in the text from beginning to end' (PL, pp. 544–5). Ambiguity is what Beauvoir values in *Tous les Hommes sont mortels*:

En le relisant je me suis demandé: mais qu'est-ce que j'ai voulu dire? Je n'ai voulu dire rien d'autre que l'aventure que j'inventai. Le récit se conteste sans répit; si on prétendait en tirer des allégations, elles se contrediraient; aucun point de vue ne prévaut définitivement; celui de Fosca, celui d'Armand sont vrais ensemble. J'aurais dit dans mon précédent essai que la dimension des entreprises humaines n'est ni le fini ni l'infini, mais l'indéfini: ce mot ne se laisse enfermer dans aucune limite fixe, la meilleure manière de l'approcher, c'est de divaguer

⁴⁸ Toril Moi, 'Intentions and Effects: Rhetoric and Identification in Beauvoir's "The Woman Destroyed,"' in *Feminist Theory and Simone de Beauvoir*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1990, p. 67.

⁴⁹ Martha Noel Evans, *Masks of Tradition: Women and the Politics of Writing in Twentieth-Century France*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987, p. 76. She contends that Beauvoir establishes a hierarchy in which the (masculine) commentary takes precedence over the (feminine) fiction and relates this to what she defines as Beauvoir's ambivalent views of fiction that are, in turn, linked with her ambivalence toward her gender.

⁵⁰ Beauvoir was extremely critical of the ending of *L'Invitée* for aesthetic reasons. In *La Force de l'âge* she describes it as clumsy, abrupt, and implausible. See pp. 387–8.

sur ses possibles variations. *Tous les Hommes sont mortels*, c'est cette divagation organisée; les thèmes n'y sont pas des thèses mais des départs vers d'incertains vagabondages. (FCi, pp. 97–8)

Rereading it, I asked myself: But what was I trying to say? I was trying to say nothing more than the story I invented. The conflict is presented throughout within the narrative itself; an attempt to isolate specific assertions from it would only produce a set of contradictions; no one point of view finally prevails; Fosca's point of view and Armand's are true together. In my earlier essay I had said that the dimension of human enterprise is neither the finite nor the infinite but the indefinite: this word cannot be fixed within any given limits, the best way of approaching it is to explore its possible variations. *All Men are Mortal* is an organised version of such an exploration; its themes are not theses, but points of departure for uncharted wanderings. (FOC, p. 75)

Indeed, for Beauvoir, ambiguity is at the heart of the literary enterprise.⁵¹ This is what she writes in *La Force des choses*: 'J'ai dit déjà quel est pour moi un des rôles essentiels de la littérature: manifester des vérités ambiguës, séparées, contradictoires, qu'aucun moment ne totalise ni hors de moi, ni en moi; en certains cas on ne réussit à les rassembler qu'en les inscrivant dans l'unité d'un objet imaginaire' (FCi, p. 358); 'I have already explained what is for me one of the essential purposes of literature: to make manifest the equivocal, separate, contradictory truths that no one moment represents in their totality, either inside or outside myself; in certain cases one can only succeed in grouping them all together by inscribing them within the unity of an imaginary object' (FOC, p. 275). Rejecting the idea that *Les Mandarins* is un *roman à thèse*, she writes:

La confrontation – existence, néant – ébauchée à vingt ans dans mon journal intime, poursuivie à travers tous mes livres et jamais achevée, n'aboutit ici non plus à aucune réponse sûre. J'ai montré des gens en proie à des espoirs et à des doutes, cherchant à tâtons leur chemin. Je me demande bien ce que j'ai démontré. (FCi, pp. 368–6)

The basic confrontation of being and nothingness that I sketched at the age of twenty in my private diary, pursued through all my books and never resolved, is even here given no certain reply. I showed some people, at grips with doubts and hopes, groping in the dark to find their way; I cannot think I proved anything. (FOC, p. 283)

Beauvoir's comments here are in line with the conception of fiction as a process of discovery for author and readers alike, a conception developed in 'Littérature et métaphysique,' where she writes:

⁵¹ This is underpinned by Beauvoir's philosophy; ambiguity is a key element of her existential-phenomenology. For an exploration of what ambiguity means for Beauvoir see Monika Langer, 'Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty on Ambiguity' in Claudia Card, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Simone de Beauvoir*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 87–106.

Or ceci exige que le romancier participe lui-même à cette recherche à laquelle il convie son lecteur: s'il prévoit d'avance les conclusions auxquelles celui-ci doit aboutir, s'il fait pression sur lui pour lui arracher son adhésion à des thèses préétablies, s'il ne lui accorde qu'une illusion de liberté, alors l'oeuvre romanesque n'est qu'une mystification incongrue; le roman ne revêt sa valeur et sa dignité que s'il constitue pour l'auteur comme pour le lecteur une découverte vivante. ('Littérature et métaphysique,' p. 109)⁵²

This expectation demands that the novelist himself participate in the same search he has invited his readers on; if in advance he predicts the conclusions to which his readers must come, if he indiscreetly pressures the reader into adhering to preestablished theses, if he allows him only an illusion of freedom, then the work of fiction is only an incongruous mystification. The novel is endowed with value and dignity only if it constitutes a living discovery for the author as for the reader. ('Literature and Metaphysics,' p. 271)

Like the pursuit of ambiguity, Beauvoir's acknowledgement that readers play a role in the creation of meaning can also appear to stand in contradiction to her desire to control the meaning of her books. In view of the severity with which she criticises her readers (I shall come back to this shortly), it is somewhat surprising to find her writing, 'un livre est un objet collectif: les lecteurs contribuent autant que l'auteur à le créer [...]' ('A book is a collective object. Readers contribute as much as the author to its creation [...]') (FCi, p. 60; FOC, p. 45).⁵³ It is an idea echoed in her preface to Anne Ophir's book, *Regards féminins: condition féminine et création littéraire*, when she acknowledges with gratitude that, although she set out to reveal the *mauvaise foi* (bad faith) of her heroines in *La Femme rompue*, she had been shown how her texts ('récits') could be viewed from completely different angles. She tells us that Anne Ophir enabled her to discover new things in her book and asserts: 'Qu'une étude critique apporte à son écrivain des lumières inattendues sur son travail, je pense que c'est le plus grand éloge qu'on puisse faire'; 'When a critical study allows a writer to see their work in unexpected ways, I think that's the greatest praise it can be given' (my translation).⁵⁴ In fact, this is an attitude that appears early in Beauvoir's career. Comments she makes about the reception of *L'Invitée* are revealing; Beauvoir recognised that her book was now beyond her control, yet was happy with this state of affairs only insofar as it was interpreted in line with her intentions:

⁵² 'Littérature et métaphysique' in *Existentialisme et la sagesse des nations*, Paris: Nagel, 1948, pp. 87–105; 'Literature and Metaphysics,' trans. Veronique Zaytzeff and Frederick M. Morrison in *Simone de Beauvoir: Philosophical Writings*, ed. Margaret A. Simons, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004, pp. 269–77.

⁵³ Sartre echoes these sentiments in his contribution to the debate on literature published in *Que peut la littérature?*. He argues that an author depends on his readers to find out what he has actually written (p. 119).

⁵⁴ Preface to Anne Ophir, *Regards féminins: condition féminine et création littéraire*, Paris: Denoël/ Gontier, 1976. [Pages not numbered.] Reprinted in Francis and Gontier, *Écrits*, pp. 577–9.

Je lus avec un agréable étonnement les remarques que fit Thierry Maulnier [...]: je les trouvai justes et elles me prenaient au dépourvu; mon livre possédait donc l'épaisseur d'un objet: dans une certaine mesure, il m'échappait. Cependant j'eus plaisir aussi à constater qu'il n'avait pas trahi mes intentions. (FA, p. 637)

I was pleasantly astonished by Thierry Maulnier's observations [...]. I felt that they were justified, but they caught me off my guard. So my book existed in depth; it was an object, and to a certain extent had passed beyond my control. Yet I was pleased, too, to see that it had not betrayed my original purpose. (PL, p. 557)

It is already clear from these comments that the freedom accorded to readers was to be strictly limited.

Beauvoir was confident that she had said what she meant to say. In the light of this, the extent to which her texts are read differently than she intended, 'misread' and 'misunderstood' in her terms, is striking. In her memoirs she repeatedly deplores the fact that her readers have, once again, failed to understand her message. She sets out to correct misconceptions and is careful to tell us exactly what we would have understood if only we had read more carefully. This is what she writes in *La Force des choses* about the reception of her second novel:

Le Sang des autres parut en septembre; le thème principal en était, je l'ai dit, le paradoxe de cette existence vécue par moi comme ma liberté et saisie comme objet par ceux qui m'approchent. Ces intentions échappèrent au public; le livre fut catalogué 'un roman sur la résistance.'

Par moment, ce malentendu m'agaça [...]. (FCi, p. 59)

Blood of Others was published in September; its main theme, as I have said, was the paradox of this existence experienced by me as my freedom and by those who came in contact with me as an object. This intention was not apparent to the public; the book was labelled a 'Resistance novel.'

Sometimes this misunderstanding irritated me [...]. (FOC, pp. 44–5)

Unfortunately, Beauvoir was equally disappointed by the reception of *Les Mandarins*. She rejects the idea that it is a *roman à clé* and goes on to write: 'J'aurais souhaité qu'on prenne ce livre pour ce qu'il est; ni une autobiographie, ni un reportage: une évocation' (FCi, p. 367); 'I would have liked people to take this book for what it is; neither autobiography, nor reportage: an evocation' (FOC, p. 282). In her memoirs Beauvoir appears extremely defensive as regards *Le Deuxième Sexe*, justifiably so, perhaps, in the light of the bitter reactions it provoked.⁵⁵ She was convinced that her book had been misunderstood: 'Je souhaite que *Le Deuxième Sexe* soit compris tel que je l'ai écrit' ('I would like *The Second Sex* to be understood in the spirit in which I wrote it') (Note 1, FCi, p. 263; FOC, p. 199); 'Mes adversaires créèrent et entretenirent

⁵⁵ See FCi, pp. 257–68.

autour du *Deuxième Sexe* de nombreux malentendus' ('My adversaries created and maintained numerous misunderstandings on the subject of my book') (FCi, p. 265; FOC, p. 201); 'Mal lu, mal compris, il agitait les esprits' ('Misread and misunderstood, it got people worked up') (FCi, p. 266; FOC, p. 202, ta).

Beauvoir was aware of the risks involved in the new textual strategies she adopted in her later fiction: 'Demander au public de lire entre les lignes, c'est dangereux' ('It is dangerous to ask the public to read between the lines') (TCF, p. 175; ASD, p. 140), she says. The technique in *Les Belles Images* is contrasted with what she had done previously:

Dans mes précédents romans, le point de vue de chaque personnage était nettement explicité et le sens de l'ouvrage se dégageait de leur confrontation. Dans celui-ci, il s'agissait de faire parler le silence. Le problème était neuf pour moi. (TCF, p. 172)

In my earlier novels each character's point of view was perfectly clear and the book's meaning arose from the opposition of these views. In this, it was a question of making the silence speak – a new problem for me. (ASD, p. 138)

Although the book was generally well received, a section of her public did not appreciate her intentions and, in particular, Beauvoir regretted that the character of Laurence's father was frequently misunderstood (TCF, p. 174). Even so, she went on to use the same strategy in *La Femme rompue*. 'La Femme rompue' and 'Monologue' are also constructed 'through silences' (TCF, p. 177).⁵⁶ It is with regard to 'La Femme rompue' that Beauvoir is most prescriptive. Her sympathies clearly lie with Maurice, and Beauvoir sets out to expose Monique's *mauvaise foi*:

J'aurais voulu que le lecteur lût ce récit comme un roman policier; j'ai semé de-ci de-là des indices qui permettent de trouver la clé du mystère; mais à condition qu'on dépiste Monique comme on dépiste *un coupable*. (TCF, pp.175–6, emphasis added)

I hoped that people would read the book as a detective-story; here and there I scattered clues that would allow the reader to find the key to the mystery – but only if he tracked down Monique as one tracks down the guilty character. (ASD, p. 140)

Beauvoir writes that sadly the book was even more misunderstood than *Les Belles Images* had been and that this time she was slated by most of the critics (TCF, p. 177). She regrets that her women readers shared Monique's blindness, and she believed their response rested on a serious misinterpretation (TCF, p. 178).

⁵⁶ I am reminded of Kristeva's comments about women's writing and one of the ways women tend to deal with the art of composition: 'silence, and the unspoken, riddled with repetition, weave an evanescent canvas.' Julia Kristeva, 'Talking about *Polylogue*' in *French Feminist Thought*, ed. by Toril Moi, Oxford: Blackwell, 1987, pp. 110–17 (p. 113).

Beauvoir is severe: 'La plupart des critiques ont prouvé par leurs comptes rendus qu'ils l'avaient très mal lu' (TCF, p. 178); 'By their reviews, most of the critics proved that they had read it very imperfectly' (ASD, p. 142).⁵⁷

In summary, there is an evident tension in Beauvoir's fiction between control and ambiguity. The desire to control the reading of her texts exists alongside Beauvoir's desire to enhance ambiguity in her texts. The freedom she professedly accords readers to participate in the creation of meaning coexists with the severe criticism she directs at readers whose interpretation differs from her own. These contradictions are revealing.

Why is Beauvoir so defensive? As Toril Moi says, 'the very intensity of Beauvoir's efforts to enforce the true meaning of her texts may make the sceptical reader wonder why she protests so much.'⁵⁸ Toril Moi wonders whether 'there is something in these texts that threatens to escape even Beauvoir?'⁵⁹

Speaking of her intentions in her later fiction, Beauvoir uses phrases such as 'donner à voir' and 'faire transparaître' (reveal).⁶⁰ This is not a new way of looking at literature for Beauvoir; ambiguity and readers' participation in the creation of meaning were always crucial to her enterprise. She speaks of her earlier fiction in analogous terms.⁶¹ What is new are the textual strategies used to put these intentions

⁵⁷ Critics have analysed why Beauvoir fails to achieve what she wished to do in 'La Femme rompue.' In 'Resisting Romance: Beauvoir, "The Woman Destroyed" and the Romance Script,' (in *Contemporary French Fiction by Women: Feminist Perspectives*, ed. by Margaret Atack, and Phil Powrie, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990, pp. 15–25), Elizabeth Fallaize looks at the ideology of romance in connection with Beauvoir's fiction. She shows how impossible a task Beauvoir set herself when she set out to undermine/ demystify the romance script in 'La Femme rompue.' No wonder Beauvoir's readers 'misunderstood' her story – it met almost all their expectations, notwithstanding the unhappy ending from Monique's point of view. Fallaize shows how structures and readership work against Beauvoir's subversive enterprise; it was published in serial form in *Elle* magazine and focused on the complications of love for an individual woman. Although Monique's strategies are implicated in her failure to win her man, the battle itself is not challenged; Maurice, vindicated by the narrative, is clearly identified as the prize. Readers are inclined to identify with Monique, not only because of the personal, intimate tone of the first person narrative, but also because of the lifestyle they generally shared with her.

In her analysis of the rhetorical strategies used in 'La Femme rompue,' Toril Moi has shown how they provoke the misreadings identified by Beauvoir and confirmed by her own experience of teaching the text ('Intentions and Effects,' pp. 61–93). She makes a useful distinction between the author's declared intentions which may not have any discernible textual effects and the intentionality of the text itself, that is, the logic of the text as produced by the reader, whether the writer knows it or not.

⁵⁸ Moi, 'Intentions and Effects,' p. 67.

⁵⁹ Moi, 'Intentions and Effects,' p. 67.

⁶⁰ See TCF, p. 172. These expressions are used with reference to *Les Belles Images*.

⁶¹ See 'Littérature et métaphysique,' *Existentialisme et la sagesse des nations*, pp. 90 and 92; 'Literature and Metaphysics,' *Philosophical Writings*, pp. 270 and 271; 'Mon expérience,' *Les Écrits*, p. 447.

into effect and the changed emphasis to which this approach gives rise. Noteworthy in this connection is the explicit absence of Beauvoir from her later texts. Of course, the implied author is never completely absent (after all, it is she who in 'La Femme rompue' plants the clues⁶²), but there is a definite shift from using multiple narrative viewpoints where the narrators' points of view coincide with Beauvoir's, to some extent at least, to the use of narrators that are placed at a distance from her. Speaking of *Les Belles Images*, she writes: 'Personne, dans cet univers auquel je suis hostile, ne pouvait parler en mon nom; cependant pour le donner à voir il me fallait prendre à son égard un certain recul' (TCF, p. 172); 'In this world that I dislike, no character could speak in my name: in order to reveal it I had to stand back and view it from a certain distance' (ASD, p. 137, ta). This can be contrasted with what Beauvoir says about *L'Invitée*: 'A chaque chapitre, je coïncidais avec un de mes héros [...]. J'adoptai d'ordinaire le point de vue de Françoise à qui je prêtais, à travers d'importantes transpositions, ma propre expérience' (FA, p. 385); 'In each successive chapter I identified myself with one of my characters [...]. Most often the viewpoint I adopted was that of Françoise, whom I endowed with my experiences, though making various important changes and transpositions (PL, p. 338). She tells us: 'Dans ce roman, je me livrais, je me risquais [...]' ('In this novel I exposed myself so dangerously') (FA, p. 388; PL, p. 340) and 'je m'y étais risquée tout entière' ('I had exposed myself completely') (FA, p. 636; PL, p. 556, ta). Beauvoir's fate is bound up with her character's fate in this text:

Surtout, en déliant Françoise, par un crime, de la dépendance où la tenait son amour pour Pierre, je retrouvai ma propre autonomie. [...] Il me fallait aller au bout de mon fantasme, lui donner corps sans en rien atténuer, si je voulais conquérir pour mon compte la solitude où je précipitai Françoise. En effet, l'identification s'opéra. (FA, pp. 387–8)

Above all, by releasing Françoise, through a murder, from the dependent position in which her love for Pierre kept her, I regained my own autonomy. [...] In order to surmount on my own account the solitude into which I had flung Françoise, I must work my fantasy through to the end, bring it to life (embody it) without diluting it in any way. And indeed, the process of identification took place. (PL, p. 340, ta)

In *Les Mandarins*, Beauvoir wished to put all of herself – 'je voulais y mettre tout de moi' (FCi, p. 268) – and divides her experience between Anne and Henri.⁶³

It may seem paradoxical that the further Beauvoir ostensibly withdrew from her texts, the more prescriptive she became about what they truly meant. Heightened anxiety of control goes some way toward making sense of and explaining this. The more 'freedom' she gave readers, the less she trusted them. And the fact that they did misunderstand, of course, proved that she had been right. Beauvoir, who was disappointed in her readers, was very conscious of the fact that she

⁶² TCF, p. 176.

⁶³ See FCi, p. 365.

had disappointed them. It is a recurring theme in her memoirs. She repeats her attempts to find understanding and approval, in her search for a positive closure, only to recreate the familiar sense of having failed, of having been misunderstood, a disappointment. She repeatedly (re)created the gap between intention and outcome where this pattern could be relived. It is the feeling of disappointment that predominates despite the evident success of her fiction, especially of her later books.

Beauvoir gives readers freedom to read between the lines, but their freedom is strictly limited. Authorial control is not renounced. Beauvoir seeks to retain power over the reader by imposing a true reading of her texts.⁶⁴ In Beauvoir's mind, there is a correct reading that readers are free to choose. Directed to find this reading, to read meaning between the lines, in the space which is empty, readers cannot but fail. Beauvoir's 'trust' in her readers is disappointed again and again. Inevitably, by failing to use their freedom correctly, they fall into the *mauvaise foi* trap that Beauvoir has set up. Her autobiography condemns her women readers as she invites her readers to condemn her characters.

Beauvoir, we have seen, valued ambiguity in literature in the name of realism, *vraisemblance*. Although she intended the ambiguity she sought to be controlled and contained between the lines, she also found it in language itself, in the madness in the text, that is to say, in those qualities that destabilise meaning and identity, that represent chaos. I see the 'second writing' in the memoirs as a bid to restore control, to contain the madness in the text, as a defence against chaos. In this, my understanding accords with the views expressed by Martha Noel Evans. During the course of her discussion on gender and the 'hidden complex of vulnerabilities and defenses' that Beauvoir's ambivalence gives rise to, she makes the following comment:

While [Beauvoir's] ample commentary on her fiction betrays some uneasiness, some attempt to domesticate her fiction's wildness, the net effect of these commentaries is to cover the confusion, to shield or prevent the reader from facing the trouble that is there. (*Masks of Tradition*, p. 80)

Beauvoir's anxiety at the excess and ambiguity inscribed in her fiction seems to me to be a key factor underlying her efforts to prescribe how her texts should be read, her attempt to retrench in her memoirs. Her exegeses can be seen to

⁶⁴ Furthermore, the fact that readers encounter a slippery and unstable text increases the likelihood that they will have recourse to authorial comments beyond the text for confirmation of the 'correct' reading. Martha Noel Evans develops this point in relation to the use of the *style indirect libre* in *L'Invitée*: 'By maintaining the reader in a confused and confusing relation to her discourse, flipping in and out between emotional fusion and moral judgement, Beauvoir as author finally displaces the text as object of desire. The text is so undependable and contradictory that in order to take up a well-defined relation to it we must seek help, guidance, approval from *outside* the text, in the mind and will of its creator.' *Masks of Tradition*, p. 90.

mask other possible readings.⁶⁵ The 'second writing' in the memoirs also reveals Beauvoir's compulsion to complete. Fictional texts that replicate the openness and inconclusiveness of existence are defined (explained and circumscribed) in the memoirs.

Having examined some of Beauvoir's views on fiction and ambiguity, I now turn to the notion of madness. One of the most influential studies on madness to date was undertaken by Foucault in his *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*.⁶⁶ Much of what he argues there can be related to Beauvoir's textual practice. What interests Foucault is the way individuals and the social body are regulated through the articulation of discourses, through the application of knowledge or power. For Foucault, discourses are 'historically variable ways of specifying knowledge and truth.'⁶⁷ Discourses produce 'reality.' Discursive practices produce the categories in which we think ourselves and our society. Truth claims of knowledges are not verifiable outside the discourses in which they are produced. Foucault rejects conventional histories of psychiatry that interpret the emergence of psychiatric medicine as a series of humanitarian advances. For Foucault, the modern conception of mental illness and the asylum have been unknowingly constructed out of elements of the classical (seventeenth-century) experience of madness.⁶⁸

A recurring idea in Foucault's study is that madness cannot be silenced, that it will find a voice. Although a critical awareness of madness has dominated since the Renaissance, the tragic consciousness of madness has never quite disappeared, and Foucault finds evidence of this in the work of Nietzsche, Van Gogh, Freud, and Artaud (*Histoire de la folie*, p. 40). The tragic experience of madness cannot be contained; it is dangerously masked by rational analysis of madness as mental illness but will inevitably manifest itself (*Histoire de la folie*, p. 40). Foucault argues that since the tragic experience of madness 'disappeared' with the Renaissance, interpretations of madness have combined, to differing degrees, four synchronous perceptions of madness: dialectical, ritual, lyrical, and analytical (*Histoire de la folie*, p. 187).⁶⁹ None of these elements ever disappears completely, though, at

⁶⁵ I also relate this to the way that Beauvoir seems to have happily seized upon the debate about the 'bad' ending in *L'Invitée* and to have acquiesced in the criticism in order to elude the more threatening questions that a defence of its excess would have raised. Thus, the madness of the text was defined, curtailed, and dismissed. See Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, pp. 95–6 for a discussion of Beauvoir's attitude to the ending of *L'Invitée*.

⁶⁶ Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*, Paris: Gallimard, 1972 (first published in 1961). Translated by Richard Howard, *Madness and Civilisation*, London and New York: Routledge, 1989. The translation is based on the abridged edition published in 1964 by Union générale d'éditions. Further references to this study in French and the published English translation (when possible) are included in the text.

⁶⁷ This definition of Foucault's notion of discourses is given by Caroline Ramazanolu in the Introduction to *Up Against Foucault: Exploration of Some Tensions between Foucault and Feminism*, London: Routledge, 1993, p. 19.

⁶⁸ For example, see *Histoire de la folie*, p. 177.

⁶⁹ 'A chaque instant, se fait et se défait l'équilibre de ce qui dans l'expérience de la folie relève d'une conscience dialectique, d'un partage rituel, d'une reconnaissance lyrique et enfin du savoir.'

any one time, one or other of them may predominate, leaving the others in virtual obscurity, giving rise to tensions and conflict 'au-dessous du niveau du langage' (beneath the level of language) (*Histoire de la folie*, p. 187). The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have favoured an analytical approach to madness, an approach that seeks an objective knowledge of madness. However, Foucault argues, all the other ways of apprehending madness continue to exist in the heart of our culture (*Histoire de la folie*, p. 188).

Foucault's notion of madness clearly converges at times with Beauvoir's writing practice. In spite of attempts to silence, confine, and ignore madness, madness finds a voice in her writing. In spite of repression, it forces its way into the text. Beauvoir's text gets away. It gets messy. The voice of the madness in Beauvoir's text is, in many ways, the voice that madness had in Western culture before 'The Great Confinement,' before it was silenced in the seventeenth century.⁷⁰ Characteristics of the tragic and critical experiences of madness, as depicted by Foucault, coincide with the experience of madness at a discursive level in the text of Beauvoir's fiction. Reading madness in the text is reading these qualities.

The tragic experience of madness informs Beauvoir's fiction. The first quality of madness I read for in her writing is excess. Madness was excess. Foucault tells us that, with the Renaissance, art becomes dominated by the imagination, liberated as Gothic forms disintegrate, no longer tied to strict, straightforward representations of scripture and spiritual significations, and 'l'image commence à graviter autour de sa propre folie' (*Histoire de la folie*, p. 29); 'the image begins to gravitate about its own madness' (*Madness and Civilisation*, p. 16). In Beauvoir, as in the tragic experience of madness, we find a multiplication of significances and meanings. And in her writing, too, 'le rêve, l'insensée, le déraisonnable peuvent se glisser dans cet excès de sens' (*Histoire de la folie*, p. 29); 'dreams, madness, the unreasonable can also slip into this excess of meaning' (*Madness and Civilisation*, p. 16).

I also read Beauvoir's fiction for ambiguity. Madness was ambiguity: 'Tant de significations diverses s'insèrent sous la surface de l'image, qu'elle ne présente plus qu'une face énigmatique' (*Histoire de la folie*, p. 30); 'So many diverse meanings are established beneath the surface of the image that it presents only an enigmatic face' (*Madness and Civilisation*, p. 17). Madness exerted a powerful fascination and was represented as a temptation: 'La liberté, même effrayante, de ses rêves, les fantasmes de sa folie, ont pour l'homme du XVe siècle, plus de pouvoirs d'attraction que la réalité désirable de la chair' (*Histoire de la folie*, pp. 30–31); 'The freedom, however frightening, of his dreams, the hallucinations of his madness, have more power of attraction for fifteenth century man than the desirable reality of the flesh' (*Madness and Civilisation*, p. 18). If the fantastic and wild disorder of animality revealed the anger and madness at the heart of

⁷⁰ Internment, literally and symbolically, placed unreason at a distance. The mad were interned along with the poor, libertines, profaners, debauchees, spendthrifts, and so on. Chapter 2, 'Le Grand Renfermement,' *Histoire de la folie*, pp. 56–91; 'The Great Confinement,' *Madness and Civilisation*, pp. 35–60.

human beings, madness was also knowledge. In their foolish innocence, the mad had access to secret, forbidden knowledge. Madness is discernible in images that are the fruit of unrestrained imagination. I read Beauvoir's fiction for traces of the attraction of excess and disorder that, beyond the expression of anger and madness, convey a sense of elusive meaning. Madness in the text is excess, multivalence, and ambiguity.

The characteristics of the critical consciousness of madness, the second strand of the experience of madness in the Renaissance, and which came to dominate classical conceptions and thereafter modern conceptions of madness (*Histoire de la folie*, p. 39), also find echoes in Beauvoir's writing. In the critical consciousness of madness, madness and reason are seen as inextricably related (*Histoire de la folie*, p. 41). The human condition is madness when measured by the infinite wisdom ('raison démesurée') of God. Human madness is experienced as contradiction as everything is the opposite of what it appears and truth is never attained: 'tout l'ordre humain n'est que folie' (all human order is nothing but madness) (*Histoire de la folie*, p. 42). In its inexpressibility, the wisdom of God is also madness, 'un abîme de déraison' (an abyss of madness), where reason is silenced (*Histoire de la folie*, p. 43). So reason and madness cancel each other out at the same time as they construct and affirm each other in a perpetual dialectic. In the text, madness informs the rational and throws light on it. The rational is undermined. Signs of madness will be read where opposites are asserted as equivalents in a text where contradiction and paradox are familiar. Likewise, I shall read madness in Beauvoir's fiction at points where objective truth becomes elusive and when language is brought up against inexpressibility.

The madness that manifests itself in Beauvoir's texts is also inflected by classical conceptions of madness. By the end of the sixteenth century, madness is no longer at the margins, the threat on the horizon, 'cette fuyante et absolue limite' (*Histoire de la folie*, p. 53); 'that fugitive and absolute limit' (*Madness and Civilisation*, p. 31). Madness now plays on the ambiguous boundary between the real and the illusory, truth and appearance; it is the embodiment of contradiction: 'Elle cache et manifeste, elle dit le vrai et le mensonge, elle est ombre et lumière' (*Histoire de la folie*, p. 54); 'It hides and manifests, it utters truth and falsehood, it is light and shadow' (*Madness and Civilisation*, p. 32). In the 'Hospital of Madmen,' the 'Madhouse' that has replaced 'la Nef des fous' in the collective imagination at the end of the seventeenth century, the mad speak 'la contradiction et l'ironie, le langage dédoublé de la Sagesse' (*Histoire de la folie*, p. 53); 'contradiction and irony, the double language of Wisdom' (*Madness and Civilisation*, p. 32). Madness is 'le signe ironique qui brouille les repères du vrai et du chimérique' (*Histoire de la folie*, p. 55); 'an ironic sign that misplaces the guideposts between the real and the chimerical' (*Madness and Civilisation*, p. 33). Beauvoir's textual strategies that blur boundaries in an analogous way will be deemed to introduce madness in the text. Irony and contradiction can be read as madness in the text.

For Foucault, one word conveys what the experience of madness was in the asylums of the classical age: 'furieux' (furious). It designated 'une sorte de région indifférenciée du désordre' (an undifferentiated region of disorder) (*Histoire de*

la folie, p. 125). Madness disturbs and disrupts. Who (what) is mad is recognised, determined by reference to reason and the sense of logic and coherence and continuity of their discourse. Madness is instantly recognisable in its negativity: ‘Elle est de l’ordre de la rupture. Elle surgit tout d’un coup comme discordance’ (It is in the nature of a rupture. It erupts suddenly as discordance) (*Histoire de la folie*, p. 198). Reading for madness in Beauvoir’s text means reading for disruption, incoherence, discordance, and fragmentation.

In this nexus, the meaningfulness of language is cast into doubt. Indeed, Foucault argues that the obvious signs of madness are error, fantasy, illusion, and meaningless language deprived of content – ‘[Elle] ne se présente dans ses signes les plus manifestes que comme erreur, fantôme, illusion, *langage vain et privé de contenu*’ (*Histoire de la folie*, p. 191, emphasis added). On a textual level, madness is apparent wherever the capacity of language to be meaningful is undermined.

To summarise, I read the characteristics of madness outlined by Foucault as madness in the text. The tragic experience of madness in the Renaissance figures on a discursive level as excess, disorder, multiplicity, ambiguity, and fascination and elusoriness. The critical experience of madness of that era is enacted in the text as contradiction and paradox and in inexpressability and the unattainability of truth. Finally, the classical experience of madness is duplicated in the text when boundaries are obscured and in irony, disruption, incoherence, discordance, and fragmentation. Madness is discernible at a discursive level whenever the text puts meaningfulness of language into question.

My reading of madness in the text is also indebted to Julia Kristeva’s theoretical writing on language. The object of attention in my study of Beauvoir’s writing practice is language itself, what Kristeva calls poetic language, the language of materiality as opposed to transparency where meaning is assumed to lie behind or beyond language. Kristeva has identified two types of signifying processes at work within the production of meaning: the ‘semiotic’ and the ‘symbolic.’ The semiotic process relates to the *chora*, which is pre-symbolic. As Toril Moi puts it, ‘the semiotic is linked to the pre-Oedipal primary processes, the basic pulsions of which Kristeva sees as predominantly anal and oral, and as simultaneously dichotomous (life v. death, expulsion v. interjection) and heterogeneous. The endless flow of pulsions is gathered up in the *chora* [...]’.⁷¹ The symbolic process relates to the imposition of symbolic law, what Leon S. Roudiez refers to as ‘the establishment of sign and syntax, paternal function, grammatical and social constraints.’⁷² Poetic language is the outcome of a specific connection between the semiotic and the symbolic and hence undoes that binary. Toril Moi explains that once the subject has entered into the symbolic order, the *chora* is repressed to a

⁷¹ Toril Moi, *Sexual Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, London: Methuen, 1985, p. 161.

⁷² Leon S. Roudiez, ‘Introduction’ in Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. by Leon S. Roudiez, New York: Columbia University Press, 1980, p. 7.

greater or lesser extent and is identifiable only 'as pulsional *pressure* on symbolic language: as contradictions, meaninglessness, disruption, silences and absences in the symbolic language.'⁷³ Traditionally, fiction has been dominated by the symbolic. Recently, it has been more affected by the semiotic.⁷⁴ For Kristeva, poetic language is revolutionary. She believes that writing disrupted by the semiotic, the 'spasmodic force' of the unconscious, undermines conventional meaning, which is the structure that upholds the patriarchal symbolic order, that is to say, all human social and cultural institutions. This disruption is related to madness. Toril Moi explains:

If unconscious pulsations of the *chora* were to take over the subject entirely, the subject would fall back into pre-Oedipal or imaginary chaos and develop some form of mental illness. The subject whose language lets such forces disrupt the symbolic order, in other words, is also the subject who runs the greater risk of lapsing into madness. (*Sexual Textual Politics*, p. 11)

I read marks of disruption metaphorically as signs of madness in the text.

My study of the madness that finds concrete expression in Beauvoir's writing practice dovetails with Shoshana Felman's work on literature and madness. Her exploration of madness in Stendhal's novels is based on close textual analysis, which allows her to advance a classification of the instances of madness and of the experiences of madness found in them.⁷⁵ She goes on to trace the evolution of Stendhal's treatment of madness over time. In the concluding chapter to her study, 'Écriture et folie,' Shoshana Felman raises an important question about madness and language: 'Comment la folie pourrait-elle accéder au langage, puisqu'elle est, par essence, ce qui se tait, ce qui bouleverse le registre du sens et qui, par là même s'exclut du domaine de l'intelligible?' (p. 242); 'How can madness accede to language since it is, in essence, that which does not speak, that which disrupts the register of meaning and which, for that very reason is excluded from the domain of the intelligible?' (my translation). Madness is opposed to reasonableness and reason: 'La folie désire l'hyperbole; la raison impose la litote, pose les bornes même du discours – et du sens: conditions de la rencontre de l'Autre. L'hyperbole est violence, folie du désir; la litote – barrage, discipline du langage' (pp. 242–3); 'Madness seeks hyperbole; reason imposes understatement, places limits on discourse itself – and on meaning; these are the conditions of meeting the Other. Hyperbole is violence, the madness of desire; understatement – a barrier, the discipline of language' (my translation). Felman identifies a permanent tension in Stendhal between reason and madness. I want to investigate the extent to which this tension obtains in Beauvoir's fiction, the way in which the excess of madness upsets lucid, measured prose.

⁷³ Moi, *Sexual Textual Politics*, p. 162.

⁷⁴ Roudiez, p. 7.

⁷⁵ Shoshana Felman, *La «Folie» dans l'oeuvre romanesque de Stendhal*, Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1971. (It is interesting to note that Stendhal was one of Beauvoir's favourite writers. See 'Stendhal ou le romanesque du vrai,' *DSi*, pp. 375–89.)

The question raised in the conclusion to Felman's study of Stendhal is one of the starting points of her book, *La Folie et la chose littéraire*.⁷⁶ In the introductory chapter entitled 'Écriture et folie: pourquoi ce livre,' she states her aim to explore the connection between literature and madness. Her study seeks to determine not only how texts speak of madness but also how madness is repressed in texts (pp. 15–16). Her analyses cut across my own readings of Beauvoir. Shoshana Felman examines the rhetorical strategies of different writers in relation to madness.⁷⁷ She distinguishes between 'la rhétorique de la folie' (that is, discourse about madness which, she argues, is always 'une rhétorique de la dénégation'), and 'la folie de la rhétorique':

Mais si le discours sur la folie n'est pas un discours *de* la folie, n'est pas, proprement, un discours fou, il n'est pas moins, dans ces textes, une *folie qui parle*, une folie qui se joue toute seule à travers le langage mais sans que personne ne puisse devenir le sujet parlant de ce qui se joue. C'est ce mouvement de jeu qui déjoue le sens et par lequel l'*énoncé* s'aliène à la *performance* textuelle, que je dénomme, dans ce livre, 'folie de la rhétorique.' (*La Folie et la chose littéraire*, pp. 347–8)

But even though the discourse *on* madness is not a discourse *of* madness (is not strictly speaking a mad discourse), nevertheless there still exists in these texts a *madness that speaks*, a madness that is acted out in language, but whose role no speaking subject can assume. It is this movement of non-totalizable, ungovernable linguistic play, through which meaning misfires and the text's *statement* is estranged from its *performance*, that I call in this book the 'madness of rhetoric.' (*Writing and Madness*, p. 252)

She argues that discourse about madness is subverted by 'la folie de la rhétorique,' for me, the madness in the text. My exploration of Beauvoir's writing practice centres on 'la folie de la rhétorique' and this process of subversion.

Another influential study on madness and literature is *The Madwoman in the Attic* by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar.⁷⁸ It deals with the character of the madwoman in nineteenth century fiction by women. Mad women characters are read as an expression of women authors' rage against patriarchy and their

⁷⁶ Shoshana Felman, *La Folie et la Chose Littéraire*, Paris: Seuil, 1978. Eight chapters of this book have been translated into English by Martha Noel Evans and the author, with the assistance of Brian Massumi in *Writing and Madness (Literature/ Philosophy/ Psychoanalysis)*, Palo Alto, California: Stanford University Press, 2003.

⁷⁷ The writers whose work she explores are Gérard de Nerval, Arthur Rimbaud, Honoré de Balzac, Gustave Flaubert, and Henry James. The rhetorical strategies she considers include the destabilising of identity and repetition, irony and parody.

⁷⁸ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1979.

anxiety of authorship.⁷⁹ The argument is that nineteenth century women authors tell the truth but 'tell it slant,' concealing deeper, less acceptable levels of meaning, thus 'simultaneously conforming to and subverting patriarchal literary standards.'⁸⁰ This impressive study is ultimately flawed as author and character are conflated, the madwoman taken to be 'the *author's* double, an image of her own anxiety and rage.'⁸¹ Yet, in spite of this and in spite of Gilbert and Gubar's focusing on identifying hidden plots in the works they study, *The Madwoman in the Attic* pinpoints textual strategies related to the expression of women's revolt against patriarchy in nineteenth century fiction that can also be traced in Beauvoir's fiction. I shall read textual strategies such as the use of parody and irony and the subversion of the conventions of language, as the stamp of madness on a textual level.

This study is not intended to provide readings of all Beauvoir's fiction. The following four chapters explore the nature and extent of textual excess and transgression in the novels and short stories published at paradigmatic moments in the evolution of Beauvoir's fiction between 1943 and 1967. The novels *L'Invitée*, *Les Mandarins*, and *Les Belles Images* and the short story collection *La Femme rompue* are among Beauvoir's most interesting and most challenging books.

My readings of Beauvoir are based on close textual analysis to show how madness is enacted in the text. Autobiographical and philosophical matters, whilst they form the context of my analyses, will not, in the main, be directly addressed here. My study interrogates the text itself and seeks to be as little distracted from that examination as possible.

My starting point is Beauvoir's first published novel and the symbolic universe she creates there.

⁷⁹ Gilbert and Gubar's ideas on women's creativity and the use of images of enclosure are related to 'La Femme rompue' by Phil Powrie in 'Rereading Between the Lines: A Postscript on *La Femme rompue*,' *Modern Language Review*, 87, 1992, 320–29.

⁸⁰ Gilbert and Gubar, p. 73.

⁸¹ Gilbert and Gubar, p. 78. For a detailed evaluation of *The Madwoman in the Attic*, see Moi, *Sexual Textual Politics*, pp. 57–69. *The Madwoman in the Attic* is discussed in relation to Beauvoir in Fallaize, *The Novels*, p. 179.