

se are the terms used by Shlomith narrative fiction.<sup>39</sup> They correspond to *story*, and *narration*.<sup>40</sup> 'Story' denotes these events, 'le contenu narrative,' *the content*, spoken or written, that tells the *process* of production, the communication of *the* text. All three aspects are essential to narrative fiction on an appreciation of *the* characters, is evidently partial. To *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).<sup>41</sup> Beauvoir believed that the transposition of experience into fiction, the creation of a work of literature required attention to be paid to form.<sup>42</sup> Elsewhere in *La Force des choses* she describes the exacting process of reworking the drafts of her books; the initial writing, 'un labeur 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)<sup>43</sup>

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)

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

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

<sup>41</sup> 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.

<sup>42</sup> FCi, p. 119.

<sup>43</sup> 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).<sup>44</sup> 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).<sup>45</sup> 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.<sup>46</sup>

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.<sup>47</sup> Toril Moi has pointed out how 'the autobiography becomes a repertoire of *authorized*

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

<sup>45</sup> *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 émouvoir, 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 Memoirs, I am always very careful about the way I say things. Obviously, style cannot be separated from content' (my translation).

<sup>46</sup> 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.

<sup>47</sup> *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.<sup>48</sup> Martha Noel Evans also discusses the way in which Beauvoir's fiction is 'documented and shadowed' by her memoirs.<sup>49</sup> 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).<sup>50</sup> 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

<sup>48</sup> 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.

<sup>49</sup> 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.

<sup>50</sup> 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.<sup>51</sup> 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:

<sup>51</sup> 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)<sup>52</sup>

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).<sup>53</sup> 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).<sup>54</sup> 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:

<sup>52</sup> '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.

<sup>53</sup> 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).

<sup>54</sup> 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)

*transcendence*

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.<sup>55</sup> 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

<sup>55</sup> 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 agissait 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 dégagait 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).<sup>56</sup> 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).

<sup>56</sup> 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).<sup>57</sup>

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.'<sup>58</sup> Toril Moi wonders whether 'there is something in these texts that threatens to escape even Beauvoir?'<sup>59</sup>

Speaking of her intentions in her later fiction, Beauvoir uses phrases such as 'donner à voir' and 'faire transparaître' (reveal).<sup>60</sup> 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.<sup>61</sup> What is new are the textual strategies used to put these intentions

<sup>57</sup> 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 Attack, 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.

<sup>58</sup> Moi, 'Intentions and Effects,' p. 67.

<sup>59</sup> Moi, 'Intentions and Effects,' p. 67.

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

<sup>61</sup> 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 clues<sup>62</sup>), 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.<sup>63</sup>

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

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.<sup>64</sup> 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

<sup>62</sup> TCF, p. 176.

<sup>63</sup> See FCi, p. 365.

<sup>64</sup> 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.