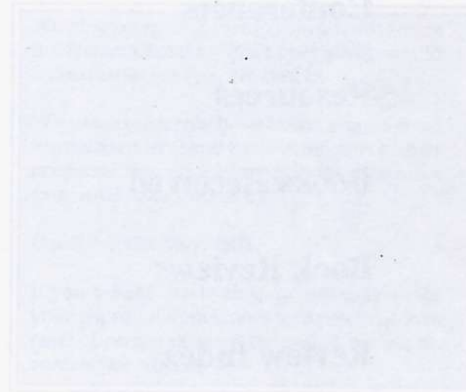


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## 'I AM NOT A PHILOSOPHER':

## SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR AND THE DELIRIUM OF GENIUS

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In this paper I will examine Beauvoir's own refusal of the discipline of philosophy, and her claim that women in general are unlikely to possess the kind of mind necessary to excel at philosophy. I am not, of course, the first feminist philosopher to focus on this issue. As Margaret Simons has remarked:

When we first met in 1972, Beauvoir seemed angered by my questions about her philosophy in *The Second Sex*.... 'I am not a philosopher,' she insisted, 'but a literary writer; Sartre is the philosopher. How could I have influenced him?' When I asked about the importance of Hegel's *Phenomenology* on *The Second Sex*, she angrily replied that, the only important influence on *The Second Sex* was *Being and Nothingness* by Jean-Paul Sartre. This was certainly an odd response, given that she tells us in her memoirs that immediately prior to writing *The Second Sex* she had made a careful and extensive study of Hegel. Understanding her response became a continuing topic in my research and interviews with Beauvoir.<sup>1</sup>

Beauvoir's claim about the incompatibility of women and philosophy is particularly startling given her own vigorous refusal of the notion of a specifically 'feminine' psychology. What I will be arguing in this paper is that Beauvoir has an ambivalent attitude to the role of the *philosophe*—a term that cannot simply be equated with that of the 'philosopher' as understood in the Anglo-Saxon tradition. Instead, both she and Sartre link the *philosophe* with 'genius' and the supra-rational mind in ways that make philosophy particularly problematic for women. Thus, Beauvoir's conception of philosophy is by no means that of a 'rational' discipline. Her own situating of herself outside the borders of philosophy needs to be explicated in terms of Franco-German myths that bind the *philosophe* to the universal by means of a kind of delirium of thought.

As both Beauvoir and Sartre acknowledge elsewhere, Simone de Beauvoir helped determine both the style and content of all of Sartre's philosophical (and major literary) works. She was the audience whom he addressed: a censor whose approval was requisite before publication

could go ahead—and one who was also expected to argue and revise.<sup>2</sup> If her severe editorial skills were most necessary for the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* [1960]—where Sartre's amphetamine-induced flow required the imposition of the greatest form (and punctuation!)—during the early period she exercised a more gradual control. Thus although in a 1982 interview with Alice Schwarzer, Beauvoir once again eagerly positions herself as merely the philosophical disciple of Sartre (glossing this with the claim that she was a follower of existentialism), she also goes on to admit that she and Sartre talked *Being and Nothingness* through together:

In an early draft of *Being and Nothingness*, he spoke of freedom as if it were quasi-total for the entire world. Or, at least, as if it were open to all to exercise their freedom. I, on the contrary, insisted that there are situations in which freedom cannot be exercised, or in which it is mystifying to talk about freedom. He agreed with that. And, in the end, placed much more weight on the situation in which the human being finds himself.<sup>3</sup>

Even this formulation of her philosophical status (disciple, modifying the master's views) does, however, distort the historical record in a number of quite subtle ways. In the above passage Beauvoir credits Sartre with including in *Being and Nothingness* [1943] what seems to me one of the most original theses of her own in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* [1947]: the claim that there are certain situations within which freedom cannot be exercised. In *Being and Nothingness* Sartre stressed that it is the universal condition of consciousness that it is 'condemned to be free'. Although it is true that in the closing chapters Sartre does go out of his way to emphasise that human freedom is only ever exercised in situation and against the background of contingent circumstances over which man has no control, he nowhere differentiates between those situations within which that freedom can be exercised and those in which it cannot. By contrast, Beauvoir's *Ethics* attempts a classification of the historical difference between a slave's consciousness, a rebel's consciousness and a revolutionary's consciousness in ways that introduce difference into ontological sameness—and prefigure

Camus' *L'Homme Révolté* [1951] (that work which signalled the break in relations between Sartre and Camus).

Despite Beauvoir's claim that Sartre had modified the final draft of *Being and Nothingness* to take account of her objection that in certain situations it is 'mystifying' simply to assert freedom, there is little sign of this in Sartre's own (short) excursus into ethics two years later. *Existentialism is a Humanism* [1945] is marred precisely by its failure to register this point. I am inclined to accept Beauvoir's claim that her objections did indeed alter the shape of *Being and Nothingness* (since there are tensions within Sartre's discussion of freedom, and elements in Part IV that were not prefigured in the opening chapters). But Beauvoir (and most of the philosophical commentators) would have us believe that her *Ethics of Ambiguity* is simply the applied ontology of *Being and Nothingness*, and it is not. Rather, it incorporates philosophical moves that Sartre would only go on to develop later in his career.

Beauvoir promotes the relationship between Sartre and herself as a form of 'osmosis': one individual, with the Jean-Paul-side of the androgyne determining philosophical orientation, and the Simone-side determining lifestyle.<sup>4</sup> But, as she well knows, Sartre did not invent 'existentialism'. It is, therefore, misleading for her to verbally equate being an existentialist with Sartrean 'discipleship', particularly since her own 'philosophical' writings are centrally concerned with ethics and with locating a theory of action within a philosophy of history. By contrast, Sartre's own ethics is so much tacked on to the ontology and the epistemology as to seem almost denuded of a moral dimension. This is an aspect of Sartre's Heideggerianism: Beauvoir herself is in many ways closer to Hegel and Kierkegaard than to Sartre's own philosophical 'master'.

What should we make of this? How should we respond to Beauvoir's insistence that she is philosophically ineffectual—merely a novelist—and it is Sartre (and Sartre alone) who is the philosopher? As somebody who is also a female philosopher (and who also has great difficulty in thinking of herself as a philosopher), I have a personal stake in this inquiry. Although I believe that philosophy is indeed a gendered discipline, I find many of the arguments adduced by feminists to buttress such a claim far from convincing. Thus, it is often asserted that philosophy involves the development of the rational, analytical and logical side of the personality, and that in our culture all these are

considered male attributes. But, as I argued in *Gender and Genius*, the supposed links between 'maleness' and 'rationality' were broken towards the end of the eighteenth century, when the pre-Romantic philosophers and their heirs (Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche etc) re-valued the emotions, unconscious instincts and other previously-despised 'feminine' characteristics of mind and developed a conception of the ideal philosopher as both male and supra-rational.<sup>5</sup>

These questions are given an added poignancy by Francis and Gontier's biography *Simone de Beauvoir* [1985] in which they register that Sartre was so impressed by Beauvoir's philosophical abilities that in 1936 he tried to persuade her to give up literature and devote herself to philosophy.<sup>6</sup> They also record that the Professors who placed Jean-Paul Sartre first and Simone de Beauvoir second in the final examinations at the *École Normale* in 1929, are reported to have debated long and hard about the result:

'For although Sartre demonstrated obvious qualities, great intelligence, a strong culture he it in some ways sketchy, everyone agreed that she was the true philosopher.'<sup>7</sup>

In her *Hypatia* interviews Margaret Simons seems to proceed from the assumption that for Beauvoir it is a good thing to be a philosopher. To explicate Beauvoir's negation of her years in the profession of philosophy, Simons probes both Beauvoir's relationship with Sartre and her educational upbringing. Simons is seeking to uncover what makes Beauvoir see herself as an intellectual inferior. However, *en route*, Simons produces evidence that casts doubt on the assumption that Beauvoir herself would have linked intellectual prowess with philosophical expertise. As Simone de Beauvoir reveals in *The Prime of Life* [1960]:

Sartre says that I understand philosophical doctrines, Husserl's among others, more quickly and more exactly than he. . . . I have solid powers of assimilation, a developed critical sense, and philosophy is for me a living reality. I'll never tire of its satisfactions.

However, I don't consider myself a philosopher. I know very well that my ease of entering into a text comes precisely from my lack of inventiveness. In this domain, the truly creative spirits are so rare that it is idle of me to ask why I cannot try join their ranks. It's necessary rather to explain how certain individuals are

capable of pulling off this concerted delirium which is a system, and whence comes the stubbornness which gives to their insights the value of universal keys. I have already said that the feminine condition does not dispose one to this kind of obstinacy.<sup>8</sup>

Simone de Beauvoir writes this as she looks back on her life from the perspective of maturity. For Sartre is reserved the 'inventiveness', the status of a 'truly creative spirit', but also the 'delirium' of being a true philosopher. This is admiration; but admiration for an individual whose achievements are so exceptional that they should not serve as a model for the lives of others (particularly women). Nor is this an isolated claim. In general Beauvoir's claims about philosophy express not only an ambivalence in Beauvoir's feelings about herself as a philosopher; but also a deep reservation about the value of philosophy itself—reservations that are perhaps not surprising given the notion of philosophy that is brought into play.

Indeed, Beauvoir's own carelessness about what was (and what was not) philosophically original or important about *The Ethics of Ambiguity* has to be understood as the opinions of one who believes that she has moved beyond the delusions of philosophy which ensnared her in her youth. Thus in *Force of Circumstance* [1963] Beauvoir comments on *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, that most straightforwardly philosophical of her works:

Of all my books, it is the one that irritates me the most today. . . . I went to a great deal of trouble to present inaccurately a problem to which I then offered a solution quite as hollow as the Kantian maxims. My descriptions of the nihilist, the adventurer, the aesthete, obviously influenced by those of Hegel, are even more arbitrary and abstract than his, since they are not even linked together by a historical development. . . . I was in error when I thought I could define a morality independent of a social context. I could write a historical novel without having a philosophy of history, but not construct a theory of action.<sup>9</sup>

Kant's theories are 'hollow'; Hegel's 'arbitrary'; her own concern to develop an ethics and not to provide a materialist account of philosophical change utterly erroneous. Here it is not simply her own past philosophical dreams that are being contemptuously dismissed, but philosophy itself. And yet . . . and yet . . . Beauvoir will carry on admiring Sartre in his role as 'philosopher'. But even that admiration is tinged by ambivalence:

something which must be explored if we are to understand Beauvoir's own refusal of the category of 'philosophy' in which to pigeon-hole her own works.

From the Alice Schwarzer interviews we can see that just as Sartre tried to persuade Beauvoir to become a full-time philosopher, so Beauvoir tried to dissuade Sartre from philosophy and tried to direct his energies more towards literature. But Sartre himself wouldn't (or couldn't) be deflected. 'Hereusement!', as Beauvoir says from the perspective of 1973.<sup>10</sup> Thus, although Simone de Beauvoir relishes her own escape from philosophical delusions, she also welcomes the fact that Sartre's own life became identified with his philosophical project. In order to understand this bifurcated attitude, it will be helpful at this point to look at the philosophy/literature divide as it operates in Beauvoir's memoirs, and also in Sartre's own retrospective view of his life. For, in contrast with Beauvoir's simplistic line-up of 'He/Jean-Paul/philosopher', 'me/Simone/novelist', in the interviews with Beauvoir assembled in *Adieux* [1981] it emerges that Sartre himself would prefer to be celebrated for his 'literary', rather than for his 'philosophical' achievements.

It is Beauvoir who insistently takes up the philosophy/literature divide in her first interview with Sartre in 1974, and it is a subject that will recur in a number of their summer and autumn conversations of that year. Unlike Beauvoir herself, Sartre does not repudiate the label *philosophe*, but nevertheless insists that after his death he would rather be valued as a writer of literature than one of philosophy. Sartre explains that he had initially conceived the study of philosophy as a prelude to his more creative writing:

Sartre: . . . I thought that if I specialized in philosophy I would learn the entirety of the world that I was to talk about in books. It gave me the raw material, you might say. . . .

Beauvoir: But didn't you think that literature ought to consist in talking about yourself?

S: Oh not at all. . . .

B: . . . So you did philosophy because it was the discipline that allowed you to know everything, to believe that everything was known and that all sciences had been mastered.

S: Yes. A writer had to be a philosopher. As soon as I knew what philosophy was it seemed to me natural to insist upon that in a writer.<sup>11</sup>

The young Sartre conceived of philosophy as revealing general truths about the world: positioning himself, in effect, in the tradition of the French eighteenth-century *philosophes* who saw their project as an *Encyclopédie*... of revealing the 'full circle of knowledge', (the literal meaning of the word *Encyclopédie*). Although Beauvoir pushes Sartre insistently to line himself up as either a philosopher or as a literary writer, and although Sartre will value literature over philosophy, for him the two disciplines will be in no fundamental conflict. Literature reflects the universal; philosophy explores it. And this, I think, remains true for all his novels and plays. However much Sartre might delve into apparently peculiar and subjective psyches in *Nausea*, in *Roads to Freedom*, in *Words*, in *Saint Genet* or in plays like *Huis Clos*, his individuals are still positioned as expressions of an existential and ontological dilemma that *all* humans share. And that is precisely Sartre's strength—and his weakness.

Thus, as feminist philosophers have shown, the ontological assumptions lying behind *Nausea*, or behind *Being and Nothingness*, are very heavily gendered; but gendered via a rhetoric of the universal that makes identification with the hero of the existentialist drama all-too-easy, and that makes it very difficult for a female reader to analyse what has gone wrong—or even notice that *anything* has gone wrong. Recent feminist analyses of Sartre's existentialism shock because it is so easy to overlook the fact that Sartre's strongest metaphors for contingency, facticity, obscenity and the in-itself ally that which is to be transcended to the female body and the act of transcendence to the male consciousness.<sup>12</sup> I think it no accident that a disproportionate number of the best early English-language commentaries on Sartrean philosophy have been written by women philosophers and literary critics. Although there is not a whiff of feminism in (say) Iris Murdoch, Mary Warnock or Hazel Barnes, there is an insistent worrying away at the philosophical vocabulary and framework that underpins existentialism. Attraction, but also a level of scepticism which, I would suggest, is allied to an uneasy instinct about the way that *this* universal—so apparently promising to women in its rootedness in the body—also itself manages to exclude women by taking the male psyche as the norm.

Beauvoir's novels, by contrast, never succeed in linking the particular with the universal. For her philosophy and literature constituted an either/or: a choice that had to be made, and which could

not be bridged by a philosophical novel or by developing a metaphysics that would provide a propaedeutic to the novel. Thus she writes of her life in 1940:

When I read Spinoza and Dostoyevsky alternately, at one moment I was convinced that literature was mere meaningless fury, at the next that metaphysics was nothing but speculation and logic-chopping. . . . From an intellectual point of view this confrontation of the individual and the universal was the merest cliché; but for me it was as original and actual an experience as my revelation concerning the existence of rational awareness in others.<sup>13</sup>

Of course, there are plenty of male writers for whom the universal of philosophy cannot be mapped on to the singularity of the novel; but it is nevertheless symptomatic that a *woman philosopher* has difficulty in allying the uniqueness of her own experience with the universals of metaphysics. For in this supposedly 'universal' discipline which concentrates on 'essentials', the paradigmatic individuals and consciousness-types (those that represent both the norm and ideal) are either explicitly or implicitly gendered as male.

The energy in Beauvoir's novels is focused on the experience of a collection of individuals, not in exploring universal ontological dilemmas in the manner of Sartre. Her characters are rooted in the intricacies of particular social situations, and the shaping force on their emotional relationships is historical contingency. Everything is particular; nothing is (quite) general. Beauvoir has frequently insisted that she despises the *genres* of fictionalised autobiography and *romans à clef*. But since even her 'types' are located within an excessively tight spatio-temporal frame (that of a mid-twentieth century French intellectual *élite*), critics have experienced considerable difficulty in taking Beauvoir's protestations at face value. For some this specificity is, no doubt, part of the appeal of Beauvoir as a novelist. For me, I must confess, it is alienating. This dimension of uniqueness only really works for me in her various volumes of *Memoirs*; but there it conflicts with an underlying philosophical project which is that of providing a narrative and structure to her life that could give it a kind of aesthetic (and political) necessity.

Thus, although I understand (and even empathise with) Beauvoir's alienation from 'the universal', I like her best—in her *Ethics*, *The Second Sex*, and

the essays on Bardot and on de Sade—when she tries to bring the universal in line with her own experience in a more honest fashion, via quite ‘systematic’ descriptions of deviant psychologies that modify and radicalise the very notion of a universal truth. I like Beauvoir, in other words, best as a philosopher: a judgement that she herself would find very problematic, and which requires further exploration in terms of the notion of philosophy that is here at stake.

It is from the conversations between Sartre and Beauvoir recorded in *Adieux* that we get most information about Sartre’s own opinions about the relationship between philosophy and genius. Beauvoir tells us twice that when Sartre first introduced himself to her, it was with the remark, ‘I want to be Spinoza and Stendhal’<sup>14</sup>. Remarkingly (not unreasonably!) on the arrogance of that desire, the discussion moves easily from the contrast between ‘philosophy’ and ‘literature’ to that of ‘genius’: the one who can unite the two disciplines. Beauvoir asks Sartre to explore his early conviction that he himself was a ‘genius’. Thus, together they explore the background to the young Sartre’s appropriation of little Hippias’s maxim: ‘I have never met any man who was my equal.’<sup>15</sup>

Spinoza might be thought to have represented simply the deductive method and rationality to the young Sartre. But Sartre denies this. Spinoza might be famous as a systematiser, but he is described as being amongst the ‘sensitive men, accessible to a twentieth-century mind’ and as being ‘more a man than a philosopher’.<sup>16</sup> Spinoza was representative of an ideal type—unique yet universal—the genius as philosopher. For what is central to the early Sartrean notion of genius is that of a personality-type: a kind of *élite* being who is a genius no matter what he does. As Sartre remarks recalling the faith he had in his own genius at the age of nineteen: ‘I believed in it as a Christian believes in the Virgin, but I had not the slightest proof.’<sup>17</sup>

I felt my genius only in flashes of intuition; the rest of the time it was merely form without content. By an odd contradiction I never looked upon my works as works of genius. Although they were written according to the rules that in my opinion implied genius.<sup>18</sup>

Sartre is obviously speaking here with a kind of ironical detachment from his youthful self-confidence. But the contradiction that Sartre cites here between his notion of himself as a genius and his actual output is symptomatic of an

ideology of the genius as an *élite* consciousness-type that reaches back at least as far as Diderot and the late eighteenth-century writers of the Enlightenment period. Indeed, in this context, it is perhaps worth noting that the eighteenth-century *philosophes* were major influences on the young Sartre who was educated at home (via his grandfather’s library) until the age of ten.<sup>19</sup> Because Sartre was immersed in a pre-existentialist framework of assumption about genius (in which essence precedes existence, and being precedes doing), very little work had to be produced for him to be sure of his ‘genius’.

In 1944, when the Allies left Paris, I possessed genius and I set off for America as a writer of genius who was going for a tour in another country. At that point I was immortal and I was assured of my immortality. And that meant I no longer had to think about it.<sup>20</sup>

Sartre mentions that his early works were written ‘according to the rules that implied genius’. But what were the rules that he had in mind? Sartre is nowhere explicit, but an intriguing passage on the relationship between philosophy and creative writing provides a clue:

You remember, there were men who thought in universal terms, and they were the learned, and there were others who had general ideas, that is to say the philosophers and the bourgeois. And then there were the thoughts of the man alone, a man such as I wished to be, a man who thought only by his own powers and who gave light to the city thanks to what he thought and what he felt.<sup>21</sup>

No, Sartre is not very far from the Enlightenment—the *siècle de lumières*. He, the aspiring ‘genius’ will ‘give light to the city’: he is outside the universal, the general and the ‘bourgeois’, but he is not really a ‘man alone’ since his genius will enable him to regain contact with the *citoyen*.

Although it is only later, in *The Family Idiot* [1971], that Sartre would coin the phrase ‘universal singular’ to describe the individual whose life is ‘oracular’ in the way it reflects the life of his epoch, such a notion is implicit in Sartre’s philosophical writings from the start.<sup>22</sup> Sartre will eventually replace his ‘genius’/‘bourgeois’ divide with the terminology of ‘real men’/‘swine (salauds)’.<sup>23</sup> But, nevertheless, many of the earlier assumptions about genius remain in play in the later writings via this notion of an exceptional, very individual psyche that mediates between

the particular and the universal. This point is missed if Sartre's early concerns with the universal and with systematisation are equated with a 'profoundly held assumption that reason was adequate to the comprehension of reality'.<sup>24</sup> Against such a reading of Sartre I would emphasise, on the one hand, that for Sartre, philosophical ideas grow of their own accord, like a cancer or hernia—through excessive psychic growth or via rupture within the boundaries of the ego.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, it is also necessary to stress that for Sartre it was not via reason, but via mood and desire that a consciousness constructed its own reality.

Furthermore, in privileging the particular mood or consciousness-type of 'melancholy', the young Sartre once again reveals himself as deeply immersed in the Romantic ideology of genius. For the Romantics also 'melancholy' was the state of mind in which the genius was supposed to access the universal, and Sartre's original title for *Nausea* was *Melancholia*. He was therefore utterly flummoxed when asked to dream up an alternative by his publishers, and assented easily to Gaston Gallimard's eventual suggestion of *Nausea*.<sup>26</sup> This privileging of melancholy had also a gender-dimension. As I argued in *Gender and Genius*, the beneficial forms of 'melancholy' which provided access to universal truths have (historically) been linked to the male body. Women could suffer melancholy; but not benefit from melancholy—and, in any case, their psychic disturbances were generally described (and viewed) as 'hysterical' and thus as emanating from their wombs.

Although such beliefs about melancholy had their origins in Aristotelianism and the theory of the humours (and were hence utterly discredited by the start of the twentieth century), it is only necessary to look at art-theoretical statements such as those of the Italian 'Metaphysical' painters de Chirico and Carrà to see that such ideas did, indeed, survive into our century as part of the ideology of creativity and of genius.<sup>27</sup> I am not arguing that Jean-Paul Sartre explicitly gendered 'genius'; and I would certainly not want to claim that he gendered the discipline of philosophy. I am arguing, however, that both Sartre and Beauvoir were working with a notion of a creative *élite*, and that they described these privileged beings via a range of vocabulary and concepts which made it very difficult for women to conceive themselves as being amongst its members. The conception of 'genius' at stake is not that of a rational being, but is that of a being who transcends rationality. As such, it is problematic in a culture in which women are expected to lack rationality. It might be easy for

an *élite* of males to see themselves as supra-rational; women aspiring to a position in this *élite* will have to resist viewing themselves (and being viewed as) infra-rational.

When Beauvoir refuses women philosophy, she is also refusing them the form of psychic derangement that counts as genius. Understanding her remarks on philosophy in this way also fits them together with those comments on genius in *The Second Sex* and in her 1966 Japanese lecture on creativity where she carries on a Romantic tradition in philosophical thought that reserves for the male the accolade of 'genius': of being the exceptional, unique individual who is in touch with the universal. Thus, in *The Second Sex* Beauvoir explicitly claimed that 'There are women who are mad and there are women of talent: none has that madness in her talent that we call genius'.<sup>28</sup> And in 1966, it is Stendhal whom she quotes approvingly, claiming that it is still true to say that 'Every genius born a woman is lost to humanity'.<sup>29</sup>

Sartre had introduced himself to Beauvoir via the dream of resembling both Stendhal and Spinoza. By contrast, Beauvoir claims women are incapable of being philosophers or geniuses. A woman is only 'other', incapable of mediating between the universal and the individual. This is not the place to argue against Beauvoir's thesis of otherness. Although I think that women do not all the time see themselves as lacking in respect to the male, I would not wish to quarrel with Beauvoir's claim that women in our society are conditioned into seeing themselves as others. And that is nowhere more true still today than in the discipline of philosophy.

Any emphasis on mediating between the general truths of philosophy and the uniqueness of the individual's experience will pose inevitable problems for a woman philosopher. But since it is precisely 'universality' and a concern with 'essence' which are represented as the distinguishing features of this discipline, those feminist philosophers who work towards specifying generalities about a specifically female psyche are likely to be seen (and even to see themselves) as not really philosophers at all. Thus, Beauvoir comments in the Simons interviews:

while I say I'm not a philosopher in the sense that I'm not a creator of a system, I'm still a philosopher in the sense that I've studied a lot of philosophy, I have a degree in philosophy, I've taught philosophy, I'm infused with philosophy, and when I put philosophy into my books it's because that's a way for me to view the world . . .<sup>30</sup>

To see herself as the standard against which all others must be judged, a woman must think of herself as providing a new paradigm for others. She must hold on to the idea that she is transcending the norm, and not simply deviating from the norm. Beauvoir holds onto her sense of her own normalcy by refusing to think of herself in terms of the problematic categories: 'genius' and 'philosopher'. Thus, her own attitude to the relationship between woman and this 'universal singular' fits in with the argument of *The Second Sex* where she insists that woman is always other—even to herself. Simone de Beauvoir's denial of her own status as a philosopher is itself a form of bad faith that comes from taking the male as norm and ideal for not only the rational, but the supra-rational individual.

'Le Castor' Sartre called Simone throughout his life, perpetuating a student joke (not his own) that moved between 'Beauvoir' and the English word 'beaver' and then back to the French translation 'castor'.<sup>31</sup> But in this inter-linguistic free-associational space 'Castor' is the name of one half of the twin star sign—'Gemini'—which, in the middle ages, was associated with those who would attain immortality through their inventions. Castor and Pollux were fathered by Zeus/Jupiter/Genius when he turned into a swan and raped Leda. When they emerged from the cosmic egg, Pollux was divine and Castor mortal. But the divine brother so loved the mortal one that when the latter died he made a gift of half his immortality to his twin brother. They became twin stars, who spent half their time in the heavens, and half visiting earth or the underworld.

Did Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir know this of these myths of the 'Dioscuri' (sons of Jove) who on one of their visits back to earth entered into battle and saved civilisation and the city of Rome?<sup>32</sup> Did their emotional relationship feed off the links between the two inseparable twins, the immortality of stars and 'genius'? The nickname 'Castor' positions Beauvoir as the privileged recipient of half Sartre's immortality; but we might well think that it was Beauvoir's own inability to count herself as a 'genius' in her own right that elevated Sartre to the status of sole philosophical star.

<sup>1</sup> Margaret A. Simons, 'Two interviews with Simone de Beauvoir', trans. J.M. Todd, *Hypatia* 3 no 3 (Special Issue), Winter 1989, p.13.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Simone de Beauvoir, *Adieux: A Farewell to Sartre* [1981] (with appended interviews), trans. Patrick O'Brian, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985, p.168.

<sup>3</sup> Alice Schwarzer (ed.), *Simone de Beauvoir Aujourd'hui: Six Entretiens*, Mayenne: Mercure de France, 1984, own trans. p.114.

<sup>4</sup> 1973 interview, Schwarzer, p. 62.

<sup>5</sup> *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics*, London: The Women's Press, 1989.

<sup>6</sup> Claude Francis and Fernande Gontier, *Simone de Beauvoir* [1985], trans. Lisa Nesselson, London: Octopus, Mandarin pb, 1987, pp.150-51

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.* p. 92.

<sup>8</sup> Simons trans., *Hypatia* pp.13-14; *La Force de l'Age*, Paris: Gallimard, pp.228-9.

<sup>9</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *Force of Circumstance* [1963], trans. Richard Howard, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968, p.75-6.

<sup>10</sup> 1973 interview, Schwarzer, p.63.

<sup>11</sup> *Adieux* interviews, pp.138-9.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Margery L. Collins and Christine Pierce, 'Holes and Slime: Sexism in Sartre's Psychoanalysis' in *Women and Philosophy: Toward a Theory of Liberation*, eds. Carol C. Gould and Marx W. Wartofsky, New York: G.P. Putnam, 1976, pp. 112-127.

<sup>13</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *Prime of Life*, trans. Peter Green, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984, p.469.

<sup>14</sup> *Adieux* interviews pp. 142, 156.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.* p.158.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.* p.156.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.* p.143.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.* p.151.

<sup>19</sup> Annie Cohen-Solal, *Sartre: A Life*, London: Heinemann, p.33.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.* p. 153.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.* p. 152.

<sup>22</sup> See Judith P. Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France*, Columbia University Press, 1987, pp.157, 248 fn 31; and Peter Caws, 'Sartre's Last Philosophical Manifesto' in *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy Since Merleau-Ponty*, ed. Hugh J. Silverman, New York; London: Routledge, 1988, p. 113.

<sup>23</sup> *Adieux* interviews, p. 246.

<sup>24</sup> Mark Poster claims this in 'Sartre's Concept of the Intellectual' in *Critical Theory and Poststructuralism: In Search of a Context*, Cornell University Press, 1989, p. 36.

<sup>25</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Between Existentialism and Marxism*, New York: Pantheon, p.10; , p. 106 and Caws, p. 106.

<sup>26</sup> See Cohen-Solal, p.116.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Massimo Carrà, *Metaphysical Art*, trans. Caroline Tisdall, London: Thames and Hudson, 1971.

<sup>28</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe* [1949], Paris: Editions Gallimard, pb. ed., 1968, ii, p. 472. Own translation. For the comments on genius in the English translation see Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. and ed. H.M. Parshley, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1949, pp.713-23.

<sup>29</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, 'Women and Creativity' [1966] in *French Feminist Thought*, ed. Toril Moi, Oxford: Blackwell, 1987, p. 18.

<sup>30</sup> Simons, 1985 interview, *Hypatia* p.20.

<sup>31</sup> See Francis and Gontier, *Simone de Beauvoir*, p. 81. It was René Maheu who christened her 'the beaver'.

<sup>32</sup> The medieval connection between genius and Gemini is discussed briefly in my *Gender and Genius*, pp. 66, 164. As evidence of the survival of the symbolic meaning of the Dioscuri, it is interesting to note that de Chirico painted this subject in 1934, as well as obsessively reworking and theorising 'melancholy'.