

who reflects on the practice and conditions of life of the excluded.

Finally, the naturalist paradigm expresses a belief that moral behaviour has its "natural basis" linked with embodiment. Parsons traces some elements of this paradigm in the writings of Margaret Fuller, Emma Goldman, and Virginia Woolf. Making general statements about "woman's nature," this paradigm is steeped in controversy. It can be turned against women's interests, as for example in Aristotle, or it can be used to women's advantage, as in Mary Daly's celebration of distinctly "female" morality. Parsons presents the views of two theologians working from within the naturalist perspective, Lisa Sowle Cahill and Carter Heyward.

An interesting feature of Parsons' book is her use of literary narratives at the beginning of each chapter devoted to a critique of particular paradigms. Thus Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" allows Parsons to problematize the issue of difference as a major weakness of liberalism. The imagery of *The Wizard of Oz* is used to criticize social constructionism's anti-humanist replacement of the human subject by discourse. Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* shows the dangers of naturalism in the fundamentalist context.

Throughout her discussion of these paradigms, Parsons evaluates their approach to three basic feminist concerns: the quest for an appropriate universalism; the search for a non-patriarchal redemptive community; and the hope for a new humanism. All three are discussed separately in the second part of the book as three possible directions for the feminist project informed by Christian ethics.

If the glossolalia of discourses can be seen as one of the problems of living in a pluralistic world, Parson's book insists on the necessity of looking for common grounds of understanding and the need for translation and communication. As she says, "conversation between moral frameworks is essential." The dialogic model she adopts for presenting the con-

flicting claims of different ethical paradigms makes her book exemplary of the process of forging alliances by means of constructive criticism.

SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR: THE MAKING OF AN INTELLECTUAL WOMAN

Toril Moi. Cambridge, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 1994.

by Deborah Heller

In a famous passage in *A Room of One's Own*, after narrating how she was barred from the library at "Oxbridge," Virginia Woolf ruminates on "how unpleasant it is to be locked out; and . . . how it is worse perhaps to be locked in." While Woolf's anger at her exclusion from the bastions of cultural authority contributed to her reflections, in stressing the dangers of being locked in she was surely on to something real. The outsider's position, which she was not at liberty to choose, nonetheless became one she would cherish.

Unlike Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir never thought to question the desirability of full inclusion in dominant cultural institutions. Born in 1908, twenty-six years after Woolf, Beauvoir was able to benefit from educational opportunities that would have been all but unthinkable for a woman just a few years earlier. The prestigious *agrégation* examination in Philosophy, for example, which Beauvoir passed in 1929, placing second only to Sartre, had been open to women only since 1924. In her excellent new study, Toril Moi reminds us that Beauvoir "belonged to the first generation of European women to be educated on a par with men," and that, as a result, "these women believed that they were being treated as equals in an egalitarian system." Such a belief was not, however, justified by their actual situation. At the time

Beauvoir began to study Philosophy at the Sorbonne, as a woman she would still have been barred from admission to the more prestigious *École Normale Supérieure*, where Sartre was a student. Beauvoir's real position in the educational and intellectual establishment remained marginal *solely* because of her gender, Moi emphasizes, but her success in crossing many previous barriers to women's higher education prevented her from recognizing this.

According to Beauvoir's own startling account, it was only when, at the age of almost forty, she began to think about writing her memoirs that she first reflected on what her femaleness had meant to her. The result was that she postponed the memoirs "in order to give all my attention to finding out about the condition of woman in its broadest terms. I went to the Bibliothèque Nationale to do some reading, and what I studied were the myths of femininity." Three years later she published *The Second Sex* (1949).

Beauvoir reading myths of femininity in the Bibliothèque Nationale may recall Woolf reading similar pseudo-science in the British Museum some thirty years earlier. "If truth is not to be found on the shelves of the British Museum," Woolf wrote in *A Room of One's Own* (1929), "where, I asked myself, picking up a notebook and a pencil, is truth?" Rather than engage the arguments of male authorities, Woolf dismisses them with ridicule. Though packaged as an academic lecture, *A Room of One's Own*, is more properly viewed as a subversive anti-lecture—chatty, personal, digressive, anecdotal. (She adopted a similarly subversive format some ten years later, in her more bitter feminist polemic *Three Guineas*, packaged as a personal letter.) Beauvoir, confronting many of the same stereotypes and prejudices as Woolf, undertakes instead to beat the professors at their own game. Drawing on literature, history, case studies, and her own (never explicitly acknowledged) experience, *The Second Sex* presents a vast compendium

of the ways in which patriarchal culture has constructed women as the Other and denied them freedom as autonomous individuals. The book explores—and explodes—the often contradictory myths of femininity, as well as the concrete social, economic, and political structures of patriarchal oppression.

The Second Sex also shows how women under patriarchy are led to internalize a belief in their own inferiority and to adopt values that are inimical to them. Moi argues that Beauvoir, in her emotional and intellectual subservience to Sartre, is the prime example of this, though she fails to recognize it. In fact, many of the views expressed in *The Second Sex* illustrate this very point. Reading it today, we may find ourselves responding alternately with appreciative recognition, outrage, and embarrassment. The book juxtaposes male and female sexuality, consistently idealizing the former and presenting the latter with evident distaste. Taking over the frequently sexist language of Sartrean Existentialism (in which the basic human “project” of “throwing oneself forward into the future” consistently relies on an imagery of male erection and ejaculation), Beauvoir somehow arrives at a scheme of values in which childbirth, being “immanent,” is inferior to warfare and murder, which are “transcendent.” Accepting as “universal” a particularly French, male, received view of literary excellence, Beauvoir flatly denies the existence of any great women writers, placing Jane Austen, George Eliot, and Virginia Woolf far below Edgar Allen Poe and T. E. Lawrence (while never even mentioning Mme. de Lafayette). “Living marginally to the masculine world, [woman] sees it not in its universal form but from her special point of view.” Instead of finding strengths in woman’s special viewpoint as, for example, Woolf did, Beauvoir saw it simply as an impediment to creativity. Indeed, the notion that the male position and point of view are somehow “universal” is one Woolf takes particular delight in puncturing. Much of what seems

dated today in *The Second Sex* underscores the wisdom of Woolf’s insight into the danger of being “locked in.”

Still, when it was published some fifty-odd years ago, *The Second Sex* had a far-reaching, liberating impact and, Moi writes, “literally changed thousands of women’s lives.” Despite striving for a phantom “universality” in its rhetoric and its values, despite its sexist language, denigration of female sexuality, and underestimation of various women writers, it emphasized that nothing that existed in current society followed inevitably from differences in biology; nothing in the social state, *The Second Sex* argued, was in itself “natural.” It contained a scathing critique of bourgeois marriage and of social and economic inequality, and was rightly read as a rallying cry for woman’s liberation.

For Moi, the contradictions in Beauvoir’s work and life illustrate the paradoxes inherent in being an intellectual woman in our century. Using life and work to illuminate each other, and setting both in their cultural and institutional context, Moi’s book skillfully negotiates the reader through the complexities of the French educational system, the arcane terminology of Existentialism, and the vagaries of Beauvoir’s and Sartre’s multiple love affairs. It is an impressive and rewarding work of cultural criticism. Moi pays less attention to the novels than to *The Second Sex* and to Beauvoir’s abundantly recorded life, moving gracefully among the multi-volumed autobiography, the letters, diaries, published interviews, and biographical studies. Although Beauvoir did not explicitly think of herself as a feminist until she joined the woman’s movement when she was in her sixties, the ground-breaking impact of *The Second Sex* justifies Moi’s description of her as “the greatest feminist theorist of our century.”

If I have compared her here to Woolf, this reflects my own internal debate with Moi’s unqualified claim concerning Beauvoir’s preeminence. Yet while Woolf may strike us today as more consistently “right,” her impact was delayed and her readership

has been more limited. Taken together, Woolf and Beauvoir illustrate the poles of a feminism of difference and a feminism of equality. We are still learning from them both.

EN GUISE D’AMANTS: POÈMES CHOISIS

Miriam Waddington. Trad. de l’anglais par Christine Klein-Lataud. Montréal: Éditions du Noroît, 1994.

par Dominique O’Neill

C’est une vie entière que récapitule ce petit livre qui, sans en avoir mine, recense plus de cinquante ans d’écriture. Choisis parmi les poèmes de *The Last Landscape*, publié en 1992, et de *Collected Poems* qui lui-même compilait onze recueils de poésie ainsi que des inédits, soixante-quatre poèmes profilent l’œuvre d’une des grandes dames des lettres canadiennes. Miriam Waddington explique ainsi l’abondance de son œuvre poétique: « La poésie est au cœur même de ma vie [...] une constante source de plaisir et d’émerveillement, qui m’a engagée toute entière, à tous les niveaux. [...] Elle a toujours été présente en filigrane dans mes autres activités et rôles dans le monde: ceux de femme, mère, amante, amie et professeure. »

Et ce sont à leur tour ces rôles qui nourrissent ses poèmes. Elle puise dans le quotidien pour y trouver sa matière et pose sur sa vie et celle de ceux qui l’entourent un regard lucide, poignant ou ironique, souvent relevé d’humour noir (« Les vieilles femmes / devraient vivre comme les vers / sous la terre / et ne sortir / qu’après une bonne averse. »)

Ces thèmes sont donc d’actualité: l’identité, la femme, l’amour, l’environnement. Canadienne et juive de souche russe, elle s’interroge sur la multiplicité de cette identité, évoquant avec amour son enfance à