

Introduction

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Existence—others have said it and I have already repeated it more than once myself—cannot be reduced to ideas, it cannot be stated in words: it can only be evoked through the medium of an imaginary object; to achieve this, one must recapture the surge of backwash, and the contradictions of life itself.

—Simone de Beauvoir, *The Force of Circumstance*

“The contradictions of freedom.” This poignant phrase, penned by Iris Murdoch, eloquently describes Simone de Beauvoir’s monumental novel, *The Mandarins* (*Les mandarins*). In 1956, Murdoch reviewed Beauvoir’s novel in the *Nation*, saying, “*The Mandarins* is a novel about loss of faith, about the contradictions of freedom, about the possibility of despair” (Murdoch 1956, 494). Aptly captured by Murdoch, Beauvoir’s tumultuous epic about the personal and political lives of post–World War II French intellectuals inspires this study of the various contradictions of freedom. Although based in a specific historical, social, and cultural period, *The Mandarins* transcends the narrow confines of time and place to speak powerfully to audiences fifty years after its original publication.

This collection of philosophical works brings together some of the most respected scholars in the fields of existentialism, phenomenology, and feminism. Although there has been some attention devoted to the literary aspects of *The Mandarins*, the philosophical content remains a largely untapped treasure.¹ This edited volume aims to remedy that oversight.

Beauvoir’s most acclaimed novel demonstrates her vision into world politics, interpersonal relationships, professional and private life, gender roles, and personal choice and responsibility. In this introduction, we provide a backdrop for the further exploration of these issues. We begin with a summary of the novel, followed by a history of Beauvoir’s writing of the text, which draws upon her autobiographical accounts as well as her letters. Next, we offer a survey of

the critical reception of the novel in France and around the world. The reviews of the novel after its initial publication reveal the various ways Beauvoir's text pushed the boundaries of acceptable literature while also recording a distressful period in history. Finally, we provide a brief summary of each of the essays collected in this volume.

Life and the Text

Henri found himself looking at the sky again—a clear, black crystal dome overhead. It was difficult for the mind to conceive of hundreds of planes shattering that black, crystalline silence! And suddenly, words began tumbling through his head with a joyous sound—the offensive was halted . . . the German collapse had begun . . . at last he would be able to leave.

—Simone de Beauvoir, *The Mandarins*

Paris fell early in World War II. From June 1940 to August 1944, the people of France lived under Nazi Occupation. Simone de Beauvoir and her companion, Jean-Paul Sartre, became political in that war. “The family,” as Beauvoir called her close group of friends, felt the deprivations of war as well as the experience of loss when friends and acquaintances were killed by the Germans in concentration camps or while fighting in the Resistance. The Occupation was “a long fast” (Beauvoir 1956, 11), and the solidarity experienced during the Liberation held tremendous promise. But Beauvoir, like so many of her fellow citizens, soon discovered that freedom, too, is fraught with paralyzing contradictions.

In August 1944, still besieged by German troops, Paris became a model of unity as resistance movements with members having vastly different political viewpoints mounted a climatic struggle to retake their city.² Some of these were the *maquisards*, who went from being guerrilla fighters to fighters in more organized units, and others were citizens who bravely joined the battle. The insurrection became intense on August 18–19 with a call to mobilize against the Nazi occupiers (Chambard [1970] 1976, 201). By August 25, 1944, when the Second Armored Division entered Paris commanded by General Jacques Leclerc, all the German strongholds in the city were taken back. General von Choltitz, the German officer in charge of operations in Paris (who in spite of orders to destroy Paris's treasures had refused to do so) negotiated the surrender with General Leclerc and Colonel Rol-Tanguy. The American Fourth Infantry division entered Paris at this time and joined in the battle for liberation.

Historian Claude Chambard notes that the revenge against collaborationists began even before the surrender had been signed. He claims that the “hatred focused mainly on female ‘collaborationists’ or on women merely suspected of having collaborated—for many mistakes were made” (Chambard

[1970] 1976, 221). These “horizontal collaborationists” had their heads shaved and marked with swastikas. Other collaborationists were not as lucky; the vengeance became murderous.

General de Gaulle spoke the evening of August 25, asking for national unity, but it was not long before it was clear that various political factions would dispute France’s future. By August 28, the liberation of Paris was complete.³ The next four years were marked by dramatic events in France and around the world, not least of which was the bombing of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. Clearly, a new era had begun. France and Britain, concentrating their postwar energies on reconstruction, found themselves forced into a position of choosing between the two great superpowers that emerged at the end of the war.

As post–World War II reconstruction pushed forward, the cold war between the United States and the Soviet Union intensified. As a result, a number of questions emerged regarding France’s relations with both the US and the USSR. Bourgeois politics effectively trumped leftist politics in the years after the war. Accepting American aid during reconstruction essentially put France in opposition to the Soviet Union. But for many intellectuals, the Soviet Union held the promise of a liberated future. Beauvoir and her colleagues felt the antinomies involved in how to respond to such a situation as well as the responsibility of acting on behalf of the world’s oppressed. Many of the bourgeois politicians gained their fame fighting in the Resistance alongside members of other diverse political parties, many left of center (Vinen 1995, 227). Reform-minded leftists became increasingly split over the means to achieve European unification. The intellectuals in France were among the vanguard of leftist politics, and their disappointment with the Fourth Republic and its reconstruction alliances has been well documented.

In 1954, the prestigious Prix Goncourt went to an author whose novel was the first major literary attempt to capture this postwar period. Simone de Beauvoir’s monumental novel *The Mandarins* examines France in the years immediately after liberation (1944–48) and records the aspirations of the Left as well as their disagreements and disappointments. In *The Prime of Life*, Beauvoir explains that the time following the liberation of France from Nazi Occupation was an emotionally chaotic period. Stating that her memories of this time were very confused, she elaborates, “I have often felt, since the restoration of peace, how difficult it was to speak of those days to anyone who had not lived through them” (1966, 601). *The Mandarins* is an attempt to speak of the difficult situation in which France in general and the French intelligentsia in particular tried to establish their roles after World War II. In other ways, Beauvoir’s own struggle with the relationship between the political and the private permeates the novel. She tells us in rich detail that when she first began the novel, she wanted it to be an all-encompassing project:

I wanted it to contain all of me—myself in relation to life, to death, to my times, to writing, to love, to friendship, to travel; I also wanted to depict other people and above all to tell the feverish and disappointing story of what happened after the war. . . . I had no lack of things to say; but how to set about it? This was to be no pot-boiler, oh no! I was high with excitement, but frightened. How long would it take, this new adventure? Three years? Four? A long time anyway. And where would it land me? (1992a, 193)

Beauvoir readily admits that *The Mandarins* was a profoundly personal and all-consuming work, and in many ways these are the very reasons for its tremendous success and longevity. It begins with a party on Christmas Eve 1944 when the liberation of Paris was still forefront on everyone's mind. The first lines of the novel (quoted in the epigraph of this section) illustrate the profound sense of freedom that liberation from the Nazis brought to the people of Paris. However, what should mark a period of calm after a long, tumultuous time, instead ushers in an era of personal and political tensions. Beauvoir uses two narrators to chronicle the excitement of liberation, the factions among left-wing intellectuals, the possibilities of love relations, and the dramatic disappointment with Stalin's regime. Truly, this was an age that marked generations of people the world over. But France faced many more specific problems given its place in Western Europe and its past status as a powerful nation. The post-war era brought with it an identity shift as the people of France had to rely on the new world powers: the United States, the Soviet Union, and, to a lesser extent, Britain. As Elizabeth Fallaize argues, Beauvoir's novel addresses a number of "political doubts" in this new situation: "[W]hy have the Americans not gone on to remove Franco and Salazar, after Hitler? How are the American liberators treating the inmates of the German camps? Is American aid not a form of colonization?" (Fallaize [1988] 1990, 102). Furthermore, how can the French maintain a relation with a country that drops the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, killing hundreds of thousands? Can the French continue to support Communism in light of the oppression of millions as subproletariat? But what other alternative is available? These are among the salient ethico-political questions Beauvoir's narrative addresses. Is it possible to remain neutral in such a world-historical situation?

The first narrator of the novel is Henri Perron: a writer in his mid-thirties whose first book made him famous. Henri edits a newspaper for the noncommunist Left, *L'Espoir*, a name loaded with political and personal meaning. It is the *hope* for a peaceful future, the *hope* for a united Europe, the *hope* for quality working conditions for workers all over the world, and the *hope* for time and solitude to pursue the innumerable personal pleasures denied during wartime. Henri's activities in the Resistance movement inspired him to see the potential

of collective political action, but he longs to sink into a sort of political oblivion and merely concentrate on his next novel, which he hopes will be a “light novel.” As the book opens, he has made plans to go to Portugal. Ostensibly it is to meet with political activists against the dictatorship there, but in his mind the trip to Portugal will be a well-deserved vacation. Henri desperately wishes to get away from politics, at least for a time.

Henri’s mentor, Robert Dubreuilh, is in his early sixties and has distinguished himself as perhaps the most important thinker and writer of the age. As early as this opening scene, Dubreuilh is making plans for the next political movement. His aim is to unite the Left and the workers in a noncommunist party, the SRL. Dubreuilh’s party mirrors the ill-fated RDR (Rassemblement Démocratique Révolutionnaire), a leftist movement founded by Jean-Paul Sartre, David Rousset, and Gerard Rosenthal in 1948 (Ritsch 1966, 175). Both the RDR and the fictional SRL were meant to be distinct from the French Communist Party and aimed at providing a new, powerful voice of the Left. Dubreuilh lobbies Henri not only to join his political cause but to make *L’Espoir* the organ of the SRL, thereby clearly defining “a position in relation to the Communist Party” (Beauvoir 1956, 124).

Anne Dubreuilh alternates with Henri as the narrator of the story, and unlike Henri, speaks in the first person. She is Robert’s wife, twenty years his junior, and has made a name for herself as a psychoanalyst. At the opening party, Anne’s primary concern is her teenage daughter, Nadine, whose lover died in a concentration camp during the war. As the story unfolds, Anne is confronted with personal choices and contradictions that mirror the political ones unfolding for Henri. Anne often provides an intimate analysis of the relationships in the book. Given the postwar situation, it is not surprising that Anne’s analysis is tainted by death and its significance for those who survive.

Another major character is Paule, Henri’s lover of ten years. Paule was once a successful singer, but she gave it all up in order to love Henri. Paule’s story forms a backdrop of madness resulting from the failure to take responsibility for meaning in her life. Her single-minded focus on Henri has already alienated him from her as the novel begins. Given that Beauvoir had published her most famous work, *The Second Sex*, just prior to beginning *The Mandarins*, it is no surprise that her analysis of the situation of woman reappears here, reflected in the character of Paule. Paule has given up a potentially lucrative singing career because she believes she is absolutely necessary to Henri. Like the “woman in love” from Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, Paule defines herself by her relation to Henri; she has “relinquish[ed] everything for the benefit of a master” (Beauvoir 1952, 642). As the novel progresses, the reader watches as Paule’s self-denying narcissism turns to self-loathing and madness.

The Christmas Eve party during which we meet Paule, Anne, Robert, and Henri is presented from Henri’s perspective and introduces most of the

other characters and their political positions as well. At the outset, Beauvoir captures the tension between the various factions within the left intelligentsia regarding the direction of postwar France. But she also uses this party to illustrate tension in various love relationships, thus effectively blending public and private affairs to illustrate the interconnections of personal commitment and political choice. Henri and Paule, Robert and Anne, Nadine and Lambert, and others ruminate on their relationships and the ironies that almost of necessity emerge when one is committed to acting. Paule is the most obvious case, but each of the characters experiences the contradictions of freedom in his or her political and personal life.

As the story unfolds, we learn more about Nadine. Her lover, Diego, had been killed in a concentration camp, and Anne speculates that her current promiscuity is an attempt to hide from that and to avoid ever loving again. Nadine even gets Henri drunk and, after he wakes up in bed with her, explains that sleeping with people is a way of breaking the ice (Beauvoir 1956, 63). For her it is important that Henri like her because she wants him to take her to Portugal. Eventually, Henri agrees and then faces the task of telling Paule. It is noteworthy that Beauvoir herself traveled to Spain and Portugal in 1945. There she published a number of articles under the pseudonym Daniel Secrétan so as to protect her sister Héléne and her diplomat brother-in-law, Lionel de Roulet, with whom she stayed while in Portugal (Bair 1990, 300–1).

Beauvoir's fictional counterparts, Nadine and Henri, are struck by the contrast between Lisbon and Paris. At first they gorge themselves on delights and fill their luggage with presents for people back home. But they also tour the squalid parts of Lisbon, and the tyranny, poverty, and corruptness overshadow their joy at the plenty they had discovered. This trip to Portugal becomes a fitting symbol of the dilemmas encountered during postwar reconstruction. On the political level, the US policy not to intervene against the dictatorships of Franco and Salazar was a stark contrast to its willingness to participate in the ousting of Hitler. On the personal level, Nadine and Henri experience the guilt of plenty—in spite of their four years of deprivation under Nazi Occupation—in the face of the extreme privation suffered by so many in Portugal. In her real-life articles, entitled “Quatre jours à Madrid” (Four days in Madrid), published in *Combat* on April 14 and 15, 1945, and “Le Portugal sous le régime de Salazar” (Portugal under Salazar's Regime), published in *Combat* on April 23 and 24, 1945,⁴ Beauvoir likewise exposes the political hypocrisy and grapples with the sharp contrasts between poverty and opulence, between the beauty of the region and the devastation of civil war, and between her own deprivation during the war and the unqualified hunger of the masses in Portugal.

Henri's trip to Portugal and the responsibility incumbent upon him as a writer to expose the injustice there make concrete the question of the power of literature. All of the central characters of the novel grapple with whether lit-

erature ought to be for its own sake or serve some other purpose. Henri desires to write “sincere books” (Beauvoir 1956, 57), while Anne and Robert wonder if it is possible to write sincere books and also be involved in politics. Involvement in politics has the potential to transform one’s writing into scandal (45). Literature and the role of the intellectual functions as a driving concern throughout the novel and was clearly one of the issues with which Beauvoir and her cohorts wrestled.

Among the issues confronting postwar France, and its politically active intellectuals, was that of European unification. Prior to the war, a number of voices had spoken in favor of a “United States of Europe,” perhaps most notably Edouard Herriot (Ritsch 1966, 3). After the war ended and as cold war tensions mounted, this idea was revived with Winston Churchill taking a leading role. The idea in uniting Western Europe was to create a third power that would oppose both the Soviet Union and the United States. After the war, a number of intellectuals dreamed of “an independent Europe federated under Socialism” (222). The Marshall Plan and the unification that followed served as an approximation to this aspiration but the dream of socialism met numerous obstacles. While the central concern of where France would stand in relation to the two developing super powers occupies a great deal of Beauvoir’s novel, the issue of European unification is a bit more understated, lending to the setting of the story and providing a context for some of the relationships.

Framing these concerns is the question of whether accepting American money for reconstruction makes France a pawn to American policy as well. The Marshall Plan called for a united economic front in Western Europe that would be able to oppose Communism. Secretary of State George Marshall revealed the plan during a speech in June 1947. Clearly an underlying motive was to shore up US interests in Europe while also playing to the various leftist political parties’ interest in unity. By 1948, however, “the non-Communist intellectuals and the French Communists appeared . . . to be converging on the theme of peace. . . . [T]he intellectuals were now convinced that neutralism was the only course for France and Western Europe to follow” (Ritsch 1966, 222). Dubreuilh’s position follows this course in the book: his initial goals for a united socialist Europe transform into a humanism that aims to prevent war.

Victor Scriassine, an anti-Communist/pro-American Russian émigré, charges Dubreuilh with “dreaming of a united, autonomous, socialist Europe,” adding “[I]f Europe refuses the protection of the United States, she’ll inevitably fall in to the hands of Stalin” (Beauvoir 1956, 122). Dubreuilh brackets the European unity question by concentrating on the immediate situation in France: “[H]ere in France we have a clear-cut objective—to achieve a real popular front government. And for that, we need a non-Communist left that’s able to hold its own” (122). The SRL is that popular front government, he hopes. Dubreuilh represents this position later as well when arguing with Anne and Henri about

whether to publish information about the Soviet gulags and when he embraces politics again in a revived hope for a united leftist front at the end of the novel.

A clear tool for effecting a change in public opinion is the press. Dubreuilh mounts an intense campaign to convince Henri to dedicate *L'Espoir* to the SRL, but Henri resists, in part because he would like to remain neutral and in part because he believes that if he takes a clear stance he will lose the readership of the workers. The workers will abandon him because he'll be considered too much like the communist papers. But Henri does take a bold stand for the truth. He publishes his stories on Portugal and also criticizes American policy for not ridding the Mediterranean region of Franco and Salazar.⁵ For Henri, this sort of truth-telling is the job of the journalist; he does not see it as "opening that campaign" (Beauvoir 1956, 139). When pushed to see that publishing certain facts might have unfortunate consequences, Henri declares his intent to give up journalism rather than suppress the truth. Henri confronts similar versions of this ethical dilemma again in his work at the paper as well as in his personal life.

Beauvoir explores the power of the media through Henri's decision of whether or not to make *L'Espoir* the organ of the SRL. Although Henri had viewed the paper as "a sort of toy," the politics entailed in this decision made him see that it was more of a "weapon," and that "people had the right to hold him to account for the way he used it" (Beauvoir 1956, 155). Joining forces with the SRL has the potential to factionalize the Left. Similarly, the planned SRL mass meeting would be viewed as an attack on the Communists. As the Communist Lachaume states, "[T]he moment [the SRL] annexes a newspaper, the moment it organizes a mass meeting, then the only conclusion to draw is that they mean to undermine us. In the beginning the Communist Party wanted an alliance. But when they come out against us, we have no other choice but to fight back" (158). The third chapter ends with Henri musing that "everyone had died in the war. . . . Act, unite, serve, obey Dubreuilh, smile at Samazelle"—that was all that was left (175). Henri resigns himself to giving the paper to the SRL.

Anne takes up the narration in the fourth chapter, and the reader gets a more intimate look at the relationships among the characters. Henri and Robert open the office of *Vigilance* and publish the first issue. *Vigilance*—like its real-life equivalent, *Les Temps Modernes*, which Sartre, Beauvoir, and others began in 1944—is a leftist literary and political magazine. Anne's personal story begins to take what will become quite a dramatic turn with an invitation to give a series of lectures in the United States. While she resolves not to go early on (ostensibly because she perceives Robert's frailty in the post-Liberation era), by the end of the chapter she has decided to go to New York and views this decision as an opportunity "to live again" (Beauvoir 1956, 234). Anne's postwar experience may be characterized as a preoccupation with death. Her psychoanalytic practice aims at helping others deal with the

atrocities of the war, her relations with her daughter are haunted by the death of Diego, and even her marriage with Robert is tainted by the specter of death as she sees him becoming old. Her decision to travel, then, is really an existential choice—the choice to live.

While deciding whether or not to accept the invitation to the US, Anne visits Paule, which provides the reader with a different lens through which to examine the Henri/Paule affair. Paule explains that she and Henri are not distinct beings and that her life's work was creating Henri: "When I took him, at twenty-five, he thought only of literature. But I knew at once I could make him rise much higher than that. What I have taught him is that his life and his work should become a unit so completely realized, so pure, so absolute that it would serve as an example to all the world" (Beauvoir 1956, 194). Paule's attempt to take on Henri as her own life's work reveals nothing less than a maniacal obsession.

Although Anne and Henri have many things in common, including their affection for Dubreuilh, they rarely speak throughout the novel. One notable exception is when they are swept along by the crowd during the celebration of victory in Europe. This encounter blends the two perspectives momentarily as they discuss Paule and Robert in turn. More interesting, perhaps, is their discussion of their own lives and choices. But the conversation ends as quickly as it began with a silent walk to the subway and a return home.

L'Espoir undergoes a number of changes throughout the years covered by the novel. When its finances reach a critical low point, Henri and the editorial board are forced to consider the possibility of accepting private money to keep the paper afloat. Trarieux, a wealthy leftist, offers to provide the necessary funds but attaches the condition that Samazelle get a position on the board. Henri immediately suspects Robert of participating in what he views as blackmail and contemplates breaking with Dubreuilh. Ultimately, however, it is not the question of finances that causes the break between Robert and Henri. *L'Espoir* manages to stay afloat with money from Vincent, who extorts it (or steals it) from collaborators whom he single-mindedly pursues in order to punish. This raises the question of whether a paper can exist as a moral body in spite of its financial ties to an immoral action. Henri clearly disapproves, saying that by accepting the money the paper implicitly encourages Vincent to continue his murderous campaign against collaborators (Beauvoir 1956, 252). Lambert offers to buy into the paper as well, thereby allowing Henri to maintain the majority vote should Samazelle join the board. This serves as an adequate solution for a time, but the paper continues to be the site of tension because of its ambiguous relation to the Communist Party and the Right.

The reality of the intensifying cold war is brought into sharp relief during a holiday bicycle trip in August 1945. When the United States drops the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, the unbelievable destruction is contrasted with the setting of Vercors. Anne, Robert, and Henri cycle into Vercors in the midst

of a funeral procession. While the hundreds of thousands dead in Hiroshima may seem remote, the lived experience of death in Vercors offers a concrete example of human suffering that illustrates the incredible misery humanity can inflict on humanity.

But the suffering is not reserved for wars between nations. In different ways, Paule and Henri cause each other to suffer. Paule's love for Henri, she says, is "with complete generosity, with an absolute respect for [Henri's] freedom" (Beauvoir 1956, 305). Precisely the opposite is the case, however. Paule tries to control Henri and even claims that the lucidity of her solitude makes her understand that Dubreuilh is destroying him. Paule tries desperately to preserve their past relationship while simultaneously claiming that she wants Henri to be free. For his part, Henri misleads Paule by masking his ambivalence toward her. Rather than make a clean break with Paule, Henri continues to reassure her of his love and dedication while also beginning a mutually instrumental romance with Josette Belhomme, a young actress/model who is given the lead in his play about the Occupation. He even depicts Paule and his future breakup with her in his new novel, but when she reads it, she refuses to recognize herself in the character.

Before the fifth chapter ends, two startling revelations are made: the existence of Stalin's work camps and Josette's Nazi lover. Scriassine accompanied George Peltov to Dubreuilh's house in the hopes that *L'Espoir* would expose the camps and the Soviet regime for what it is. Peltov had been the head of Tebriuka Agricultural Institute and offers evidence of an estimated 15 million in the camps:

The program of the Soviet State requires surpluses which can only be furnished by excessively hard labor. But if the consumption of free workers falls below a certain level, their productivity drops accordingly. Therefore, the State resorted to the systematic creation of a subproletariat receiving only absolutely minimal sustenance in exchange for a maximum amount of labor. Such a system is possible only when concentration-camp methods are brought into play. (Beauvoir 1956, 319)

The revelation shatters the mirages of Soviet-style Communism and Henri's personal pleasure. His easy, playful romance with Josette is contrasted with the fact that "in every corner of the earth, men were being exploited, starved, murdered" (318). The existence of the camps meant that the hopes placed on the Soviet Union, the prospects of communism for "a thousand million subhumans slowly dying of hunger in China and India, the only hope for millions of workers enslaved to inhuman conditions," were utterly destroyed (322). Publishing this news would devastate the Communist Party in France, and yet if the

camps really existed, not publishing the news would be complicity in their evil. The board of *L'Espoir* urged publication, but the SRL, with Dubreuilh in the lead, warned that publishing the news of the camps was an alignment with the Right against the Communists. Henri chooses to follow the board and precipitates a hostile break with the SRL and Dubreuilh himself. Anne agrees with Henri and questions Robert's hesitation in not publishing the information (356–59). While the circumstances of the break between Robert and Henri differ, the public airing of their differences mirrors the break between Sartre and Camus in 1952 (see McBride 1991, 91).

Beauvoir has taken some liberties in dating the revelation of the Soviet work camps. The “news of the existence of the Soviet labour camps . . . broke at the end of 1949” (Fallaize [1988] 1990, 91) but comes much earlier in the novel. However, her depiction of the effect on leftist movements within France is striking. The unity found during the Resistance had shown numerous cracks in the postwar years, but it shattered completely with the news about the Soviet Union. Nor did it help to have the United States, France's ally in war and prominent partner during reconstruction, preparing for war against the USSR.

The United States is painted in bold personal colors when Anne takes her journey there to attend a series of conferences and lectures. While in the US she begins a passionate affair with an American writer, Lewis Brogan. This aspect of the story is Beauvoir's mildly fictionalized version of her love affair with Nelson Algren, to whom *The Mandarins* is dedicated. In Lewis's arms, Anne describes her body coming to life again. Through Lewis's eyes, Anne sees America—its seedy side as well as its self-righteous side. The same United States that produces Lewis also threatens the world with its bombs and its aggressive form of capitalism.

By printing the articles about the Soviet labor camps, Henri loses his private life just as Anne is rediscovering hers. Wooed by the anti-communists and reviled by the Communists, Henri finds himself politically isolated and socially misplaced as he continues to live the bourgeois lifestyle with Josette. His attempts to break with Paule send her into a spiral of denial as she tries to convince him of the love that she thinks he demands. When she finally comes to grips with the break, she throws an insane dinner party for everyone involved in “the conspiracy.” Anne eventually manages to have her taken to a hospital, where her “cure” will leave her a sort of empty shell that completely denies her relationship with Henri.

The contrast with Anne's love for Lewis and her commitment to Robert could not be more striking than at this point. However, Anne's hold on Lewis is also fleeting. She rejoins him in the US for a trip on the Mississippi followed by a holiday in Mexico, but they leave Mexico early for a meeting in New York in anticipation of the publication of Lewis's new book. When Anne discovers that Lewis deliberately cut their trip short, she confronts him. Lewis desires to

marry Anne and accuses her of controlling their relationship. Clearly taken aback by this startling parallel to Paule, Anne, like Paule, tries to salvage their relationship by affirming his freedom. Before Anne departs again for her alternate life in France, Lewis admits that he had tried to love her less but was not able (Beauvoir 1956, 484).

In chapter 9, Lucie Belhomme reveals that her daughter, Josette, had been in love with a Nazi officer and was being blackmailed by an informer who was recently arrested. Lucie pleads with Henri, as a prominent former member of the Resistance, to testify that the informer was a double agent within the Resistance movement.

He withdrew his hand and ran it over his face. Playing the part of the devil didn't suit him. He would give that false testimony because he couldn't do otherwise, that's all. "How did I ever come to this?" It seemed to him at the same time both completely logical and absolutely impossible. Never had he felt sadder. (Beauvoir 1956, 504)

Henri thus experiences the contradictions of freedom in his realization that his personal liaison and the loyalty it inspires is utterly contrary to his political stance as a Resistance fighter and intellectual on behalf of the oppressed. Henri's acquiescence in discounting the testimony of two concentration camp survivors underscores the irony of Beauvoir's title, *The Mandarins*. Like the Chinese mandarins who inspired the title of the novel, Henri's revolutionary spirit and his intellectual commitments have brought him to the critical moment wherein he discovers his own obsolescence.

Although Henri saves Josette's life, he cannot be with her any longer. Moreover, Sézenac and Lambert know that Henri has given false testimony, and Sézenac has become a police informer as well. Henri is left with little choice; he writes a letter of resignation from *L'Espoir*. Ironically, Henri's false testimony and resignation facilitate a reunion with Dubreuilh, who writes expressing his friendship. Henri has seemingly sold out the Resistance and his soul in one quick act to save a collaborator. Dubreuilh argues that the story proves "That personal morality just doesn't exist. . . . You can't lead a proper life in a society which isn't proper" (Beauvoir 1956, 518).

The reader's attention turns again to America when Anne makes another trip to visit Lewis. This time the couple plans to spend the summer in a house on Lake Michigan. Anne's anticipation for the trip is surpassed by her disappointment at finding that Lewis no longer loves her. Like the parallel relationship between Henri and Paule, and the leftist political relations in France, Lewis and Anne can find no hope of recovering the past. Anne's view of America subsequently shifts as well. No longer does she see the picturesque; this is the

America that dropped the bomb and is ever preparing for war in order to avoid having one.

Anne returns to France very much disheartened, but her granddaughter awaits her. This baby, Maria, is the daughter of Nadine and Henri, who had once again started to date. Nadine explains that she got herself pregnant out of a “maternal desire” for a baby, not to trick Henri into marrying her (Beauvoir 1956, 530). To his own surprise, however, Henri finds he similarly anticipates the pleasures of fatherhood and is astonished at having produced a daughter. The three take up domesticity but hesitate to devote real affection to each other. Henri wonders why he didn’t really love Nadine, musing that she even “kept her distance” from her own baby:

She sat down on a tree trunk, Maria in her arms. She gave the baby her bottle with authority, with patience; she made it a point of honor of being a competent mother, she had acquired both a solid background in child care and a lot of hygienic gadgets. But never had Henri caught a look of real affection in her eyes while she was tending Maria. Yes, that was what made it difficult to love her: even with her own baby she kept her distance; she still remained shut up in herself. (572)

Nonetheless, Henri and Nadine plan to move to Italy, where he will be able to write in peace, unperturbed by politics. It quickly becomes evident, however, that Henri is not cut out for solitary life. He agrees to write another article on Madagascar and rejoins Robert in an effort to revive leftist politics. The Madagascan affair was the last important thing he exposed while still editor of *L’Espoir*:

One hundred thousand Madagascans massacred as against one hundred and fifty Europeans; terror reigned on the island; all the deputies had been arrested even though they had disavowed the rebellion; they were being subjected to tortures worthy of the Gestapo; an attempt had been made on their lawyers’ life with a hand grenade; the trial was fixed in advance—and there was not a single newspaper to denounce the scandal. He took out his pen. (506–7)

Once again, then, Henri will attempt to live history by speaking out against injustice. His foolish plans to write a “light novel” with no political significance give way to his true feelings about the role of literature.

In the meantime, Sézenac, who has been exposed as a Nazi informer, arrives at the Dubreuilh’s country house and admits his work with the Gestapo. The dilemma of how to deal with past betrayal reemerges. Vincent steps in to

solve the problem by killing Sézenac while he sleeps. As he and Henri dispose of the body, Henri tries again to revive a sense of justice.

Anne has the final word of the novel. With her relationship to Lewis completely over, she wonders what there is left to live for. “Dead is the child who believed in paradise, dead the girl who thought immortal the books, the ideas, and the man she loved, dead the young woman who walked overwhelmed through the world promised to happiness, dead the woman in love who would wake up laughing in Lewis’s arms” (Beauvoir 1956, 608). But, with Maria representing the future, Anne realizes that she does not own her death, others do. Hope revives again.

A chronicle of this important time in French history, *The Mandarins* is also something of a revelation of the tensions among intellectuals. In addition to recording the history of the immediate postwar period between 1944 and 1948, Beauvoir interweaves events that unfolded during the writing and polishing of the manuscript from 1949 to 1953, such as the founding and breakup of the RDR in 1948–49 and the revelation of the Soviet labor camps (see also Fallaize [1988] 1990, 90–92). Events in her own life from both periods find their place in the narrative flow. The most notable is Beauvoir’s affair with Nelson Algren, which began during her lecture tour of 1947 and reached its climatic resolution in 1950 and 1951 during two visits to Lake Michigan. But Beauvoir does not wish her book to be viewed as a roman à clef, a point taken up in many of the reviews of the novel. Fallaize views Henri’s description of his own novel as Beauvoir’s presentation of *The Mandarins*. The novel is a “portrait of the times,” a depiction of “present-day people, men and women who are in somewhat the same situation as ours” (Fallaize [1988] 1990, 98, citing Beauvoir, 586).

To many at the time, the richness of the novel was found in the way it portrayed the lives of real individuals such as Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre, Nelson Algren, Albert Camus, and Arthur Koestler. Beauvoir acknowledges that some of the scenes and characters resemble real individuals with whom she associated.⁶ In her autobiographies, Beauvoir claims that Henri is modeled both on Albert Camus (whose work in the Resistance and on *Combat* is well known) and on herself. Robert Dubreuilh resembles Jean-Paul Sartre, and his wife, Anne, is also like Beauvoir. Anne represents Beauvoir’s personal love choices, while Henri represents her political dilemmas as a writer and intellectual in the face of post-World War II reconstruction. But these two characters also embody Beauvoir’s character traits, traits that Fallaize argues are coded according to the male/positive female/negative structure. “Henri has her optimism, her appetites, her taste for activity—and, of course, the pen. Anne has fear and shame, and the ‘negative aspects of my experience’” (Fallaize [1988] 1990, 115, citing Beauvoir 1992a, 280). Anne’s preoccupation with death may also reflect Beauvoir’s; in 1952 Beauvoir had a tumor removed, and although it was nonmalignant, it

certainly made her confront personal mortality. Many of the other characters (such as Nadine, who shares traits with Beauvoir's former student Natalie Sorokine) are also reminiscent of Beauvoir's friends, peers, or acquaintances.

The most important parallel to Beauvoir's real-life relationships is found in Anne's American liaison. Nelson Algren, who reacted violently when he was finally encouraged to read the novel, finds his relationship with Beauvoir aired quite publicly through the character of Lewis Brogan (see also Beauvoir 1992a, 124). Algren found it faithful enough to actual events to warrant breaking with Beauvoir. In her biography of Beauvoir, Deirdre Bair relates that when Algren read the English translation of *The Mandarins* in 1956, "it made him furious and caused the second most serious rupture in their relationship. . . . He read the book, and after that she was never again his 'own Simone.' Everything about her was fair game for attack as far as he was concerned" (Bair 1990, 428).⁷ For her part, Beauvoir felt that in telling the fictional story of Anne and Lewis, she was in fact offering her American lover the greatest testament of her affection. In letters to Algren she insists that this book is meant to be not only a book about her love for him, but is in fact to be *his* book. In a letter dated October 15, 1949, she writes to him, "I work steadily and lovingly about your book. I want it to be the best I ever wrote, to be a real good one, since it is a gift for you" (1997a, 290). In perhaps the most telling admission, she writes on October 13, 1952, "You ask about 'your' book, honey: It comes to an end, at last; it is a very thick novel and there is only a part of it about lovely you" (472). This part, however, was enough to cause an irreparable rift between her and the American writer.

Following its publication, Beauvoir expressed profound satisfaction with the book's reception by both the Right and the Left, as well as with the letters and visits she received from past and present friends and colleagues. Yet there is one point that irked Beauvoir about the novel's effect on the public:

My only problems came from the legend, planted and nurtured by the critics, that I had written an exact and faithful chronicle; this legend turned my inventions into indiscretions or even into denunciations. Like dreams, novels are often prophetic simply because they deal with possibilities; thus Camus and Sartre quarreled with each other two years after I began to recount the avatars and the breakup of a friendship. Several women wanted to recognize Paule's story as their own. These coincidences finished off the process by which my fables became accepted as accredited truths. Did Camus or Sartre bear false witness as I described Henri doing? people have asked me. When did I practice psychoanalysis? In one sense, it pleased me that my story carried such conviction; but it upset me that people thought me so unscrupulous. (1992b, 37)

Thus, although Beauvoir willingly admits that her own experience of the post-Liberation period forms the framework of the story, she adamantly refuses to agree with those who claim that the book is nothing more than surreptitious autobiography. Throughout this epic tale, Beauvoir alludes to the various factions of the Resistance movement, the moral dilemmas that confronted individuals both during the war and subsequent to it, and the world-historical social and political questions that marked France immediately after the war. *The Mandarins* is perhaps the most personal of her novels, but it is also the most political.

History of the Text

In her memoirs and letters, Beauvoir depicts the writing of *The Mandarins* as a difficult, deeply personal, and protracted writing project. Undergoing a number of rewrites and corrections, the novel was begun in the fall of 1949 and finished in the fall of 1953 (with only minor corrections of proofs made in 1954). In many senses, the book began much earlier, as the events of the Second World War and its aftermath were its central themes. The journey of the actual book itself—its transformations and rewritings—show the difficulty of the task Beauvoir had set for herself, as well as the sense of personal connection that she had for her beloved story.

In her autobiography, Beauvoir claims that the first words she wrote were Anne's first monologue (1992a, 193) and in a letter to Algren, October 8, 1949, she tells him that the first page of her new novel carries the inscription: "To Nelson" (1997a, 287). She continues, "Now it is so brightly began, it will be easy to go on." In another letter to Algren dated November 22, 1949, Beauvoir recounts the fate of her initial work. She relates a story of how she had misplaced two months of writing in a taxicab. She elaborates: "In two months I had torn away most things I had written and chiefly worked in my head. Then I saw with great pleasure that I remembered really by heart the hundred first pages I had written (I mean hand-written pages, just of this shape) so I began copying feverishly out of my head. Your book is in no danger in the end, honey; it means just a week more, which is not much on three four years [*sic*]" (1997a, 302). So engrossed in her project, Beauvoir was able to reproduce the lost hundred pages from memory in a mere week.⁸

In *Force of Circumstance*, Beauvoir informs us that she had finished the first version of *The Mandarins* in June 1951 and had found it to be a peculiar experience: "[C]ontrary to my usual habit, I had so far shown none of it to Sartre; I found it painful to wrench it out of myself, and I could not have endured any other eyes, even his, to see those pages that were still warm" (1992a, 243). Beauvoir, accustomed to sharing her work with Sartre at most stages of its

development, was unusually cautious with this novel. Unable to deal with any criticisms (which both Sartre and Beauvoir gave to each other without reservation in most cases) until she was ready, Beauvoir was very protective of *The Mandarins*. She does not take long to explain why she had been hesitant to show the manuscript to Sartre. When he did finally read it during their cruise to Norway in the summer, he assured her that although it was going to be her best novel, she still had a lot of work to do on it. According to Sartre's scathing assessment, "as it stood, the book was badly constructed and discouraged the reader" (249). Furthermore, he criticized the dialogue, the lack of suspense, the general incoherency of the plot, and the unbelievability of the characters. Following his analysis, a dejected Beauvoir decided to keep part of it, "But for the rest, I decided to rework the whole thing" (249). Even after she had completely redrafted the book from beginning to end, Sartre was still unsatisfied with it after his second read-through in the late fall of 1952 (1992b, 9).

Despite the good intentions of her partner and his honest critique, Beauvoir felt disheartened by her progress. Even though Sartre encouraged her to continue, she didn't feel up to the task and decided simply to shelve the project. In the spring of 1953, Beauvoir showed the text to Lanzmann. She writes, "It was actually Bost and Lanzmann who convinced me to keep going; they were reading it for the first time, and they were more affected by its positive value than by its weaknesses. So I went back to work" (Beauvoir 1992b, 9). Her work paid off, and in the fall of the same year she completed the book with much relief and gaiety. The only thing remaining for her to do was to find an appropriate title. She was dissatisfied with the candidate, *The Survivors* ("after all, life hadn't actually stopped in 1944") as well as with *The Suspects* (as the word had "already been used a few years earlier by Darbon"). Sartre suggested *The Griots* ("we rather liked comparing ourselves to those blacksmiths-cum-witchdoctors-cum-poets whom certain African societies honor, fear and despise all at the same time; but it was too esoteric") (Beauvoir 1992b, 20). It was Lanzmann who, in the end, suggested *The Mandarins*, and Beauvoir was immediately enamored with the title.⁹ After correcting the first galleys of the book, she wrote to Algren on July 12, 1954: "I don't know how you call in English this [*sic*] Chinese intellectuals among whom some revolutionary leaders were picked, but who looked a little out of date, first: Mandarines? It makes a nice title in French" (1997a, 502). Capturing the ideas of revolution, the weight of the past, and the richness of Parisian intellectual and political life, *The Mandarins* was indeed the perfect title for the book.

As one of the first books to portray the Reconstruction, the novel went to press in October 1954 and exploded onto the French literary scene. Even though Beauvoir was extremely anxious about the book's reception because of her intimate connection with it and years of labor on it, she was soon relieved and even elated by the book's instant success. In fact, she found that she had

written a book that was accessible and relevant to many different political and social factions. She recounts,

Was I going to be greeted with approval from all sides? On the whole, yes. Reversing my expectations, it was the bourgeois critics who found that my novel had a pleasing odor of anti-Communism, while the Communists took it, quite rightly, as an expression of sympathy for them. As for the non-Communist left wing, it was in its name that I had been attempting to speak. Only a few Socialists and the extreme Right attacked me with any venom. Forty thousand copies were sold in the first month. (1992b, 35)

Having completed an enormous undertaking that had consumed four years of her life (not to mention the years of thought that had preceded the moment of taking pen to paper), Beauvoir was able to experience success and satisfaction immediately.

Bair tells us that the publication date of *The Mandarins* had been set for October “to launch the novel at exactly the most fortuitous moment to be a candidate for the prestigious Prix Goncourt. A massive publicity campaign was launched, and Beauvoir cooperated with everything her publisher asked her to do” (Bair 1990, 427–28). The Prix Goncourt is widely held to be the most distinguished literary award in France and is given annually to a generally young and unknown author. The Prix Goncourt, which was first awarded in 1903, was meant to provide fresh talent with a monetary award that would free them from financial worries so that they could write their second book. Among the earlier recipients were such authors as Marcel Proust (1919) and André Malraux (1933). The publicity campaign, coupled with the wide appeal of the book, won Beauvoir the Goncourt in January 1955. As evidenced by her supporters and critics, many believed that she unquestioningly deserved the award and others complained that she was too old and too established to have been deserving. *The Mandarins* was, after all, her fourth novel, and she had already established worldwide fame as the author of *The Second Sex*. Regardless, the award brought greater fame and wealth (both from the prize money and the ensuing increase in sales of the book itself). In fact, with the money Beauvoir was able to purchase a Parisian apartment for the first time in her life and nicknamed her new domicile “the place that Goncourt bought” (quoted in Bair 1990, 453).

Despite the book’s success, Beauvoir gave only one interview (namely, to *Humanité-Dimanche*), and did so to make clear “that my novel was not hostile to the Communists and that it had not aroused their enmity” (Beauvoir 1992b, 36). She avoided public appearances, because she found it repugnant to exhibit herself. Whereas she admits that ten years earlier she would have enjoyed the attention, at the time *The Mandarins* received the award and all of its conse-

quent accolades, Beauvoir declares plainly, “I have neither braggadocio nor indifference enough to offer myself as willing fodder for the curious” (36). She had made the decision to let the book stand on its own merits and with a modicum of interference by the author.

Not everyone was thrilled with *The Mandarins*, however. As Beauvoir had learned with *The Second Sex*, there are plenty of people who are not receptive to women authors at all, and certainly not to ones who freely discuss social, political and intimate issues that are far from uncontroversial. The Catholic Church placed both *The Second Sex* and *The Mandarins* on the index of prohibited books—both books for which Beauvoir felt tremendous affinity.¹⁰ Castigating the two books for their portrayals of “free love” and their critiques of marriage and motherhood, the ban actually had the effect of increasing, rather than harming, their sales (Bair 1990, 456–57). Barbara Klaw explains how even the American edition of *The Mandarins* mitigated more offensive language and deleted two scenes depicting oral sex (Klaw 1995, 197, 205). Beauvoir was not unaware of the editing practices of American publishers; she had experienced it with H. M. Parshley’s translation of *The Second Sex* (Simons [1983] 1999). Beauvoir recounts that when discussing the translation of *The Mandarins* with her publisher, he apologized for “having had to make a few cuts here and there, just a few lines. ‘In the States it’s all right to talk about sex in a book,’ he explained, ‘but not about perversion’” (1992b, 70).

Despite the small roar from the socially and religiously fastidious, the book was translated into numerous foreign languages (even Braille) within the first few years of publication. In the end, Beauvoir considered it to be one of her greatest achievements and her favorite novel (Fallaise [1988] 1990, 88). Its success is due to the clarity of vision and inspiration of its author and to the wealth of themes and issues that it fearlessly tackles. Because of its constellation of characters and situations, *The Mandarins* was interpreted by many different critics to hold a diversity of meanings and themes. With this, we turn to the critical reception of the novel.

Critical Reception of *The Mandarins* at Home and Abroad

As Beauvoir notes in *The Force of Circumstance*: “A book is a collective object. Readers contribute as much as the author to its creation” (1992a, 38). The idea that a book is formed through a collaborative effort between readers and author is certainly vindicated by the wide array of reactions from reviewers of *The Mandarins*. Beauvoir’s novel managed to create a stir—both positive and negative—with many different critics.

The high praise for the novel added to its resounding success. Arguing against those who criticized the choice of Beauvoir for the Prix Goncourt, Maurice

Chavardès writes in *La Vie Intellectuelle* that regardless of her age or the number of books she had published, *The Mandarins* is “representative of the epoch, probably the best book of the year” (Chavardès 1955, 134). In fact, Chavardès asks, what does it matter if there are similarities between actual people and characters in the novel? How else can one faithfully recreate the post-Liberation era? (134). In an interview with Alexandre Arnoux in *Le Figaro Littéraire*, Arnoux compares Beauvoir to Balzac and remarks frankly that the prejudice against the book is a result of Beauvoir’s notoriety and in no way reflective of the story’s merits (Guth 1954, 4).

Some critics, taking note of an aspect of the story that many miss, commend the book for its humor. Dominique Aury’s review of *The Mandarins* in *La Nouvelle Revue Française* argues that humor, often forgotten in women’s writing, is a central strength of Beauvoir’s novel (Aury 1954, 1080). In the American publication *The Reporter*, Madeleine Chapsal highlights the irony of the title by pointing out that the mandarins are themselves intellectual figures who live separated from the masses. She continues, “It is with humor that Simone de Beauvoir, who is one of them, describes the tormented adventures of writers and thinkers—these overexcited, irritable, unstable characters who are always questioning the wisdom, the usefulness, and the purpose of each of their actions” (Chapsal 1955, 46). But far from being a scathing lampoon of these French figures, Chapsal finds that Beauvoir has instead “written the most humane novel that has appeared in France in recent years” (46). Highlighting the wide appeal of the book beyond France’s borders, *London Magazine*’s Erik de Mauny finds that the novel delves “into the always vital issues of freedom and compromise in modern society, of personal loyalty and political commitment. It so happens that the small brightly-lit stage of Left Bank politics throws these issues into glaring contrast, but the shadows stretch far beyond the Seine” (Mauny 1957, 73).

Of course, there are those critics who, while trying to compliment Beauvoir, actually do so in backhanded fashion. For example, Yves Gandon in *Livres de France* artfully argues against the characterization of *The Mandarins* as a roman à clef and says that its chief merit lies in the fact that it is a reflection of actual events that transpired. However, sandwiched around a photograph of Sartre and Beauvoir with the former titled “the master” and the latter “the disciple,” Gandon writes that the Goncourt Academy, having missed awarding Sartre the prize for *Nausea*, instead gave it to Beauvoir. This action was “an honor to the master through the disciple” (Gandon 1955, 13). Sexism toward Beauvoir and her work was nothing new. Often considered to be nothing but a disciple of Sartre, her work was scrutinized by both men and women in a harsher light than was the work of her male existentialist counterparts.

Having undergone the tribulations of publishing *The Second Sex* in 1949, Beauvoir was somewhat prepared for the acrimonious criticisms that inevitably result from a woman writing frankly and with a sense for great detail (no matter

how shocking) about important and often silenced issues. Anticipating the arrival of *The Mandarins* in the bookstores in October 1954, Beauvoir recalls, “*The Second Sex* had taught me a lesson; I could almost hear all the unpleasant gossip in advance. I had put so much of myself into this book that there were moments when my cheeks burned at the idea of indifferent or hostile eyes moving across its pages” (1992b, 35). And indeed, there were certainly those critics who lambasted Beauvoir for any number of offenses: indecency, verbosity, age (regarding her winning of the Prix Goncourt), mimicry (of Sartre), and, of course, for transposing her personal life into what many claimed to be a thinly veiled roman à clef. As with all great works, the harshest of critics also reveal layers of depth and insights into the work that would be lacking were we to only focus on the high praise. With this in mind, it is helpful and sometimes even amusing to turn to a few of the most severe reviews.

Critical of the Academy for awarding the Prix Goncourt to a well-known author, Isolde Farrell writes in *America* that the skeleton of the story is “dry and brittle” and that “The flesh with which she covers it, in introducing us to her heroes’ private lives, is frankly malodorous” (Farrell 1955, 594). Given that *America* is in fact the *National Catholic Weekly Review*, such criticism is hardly surprising.¹¹ Also finding fault with the Academy for its choice of Beauvoir, Italian critic Anna Banti writes in *Paragone* that Beauvoir’s novel (what she calls “an ‘essay’ that is novelized”) serves to show the “profound distance” between French and Italian literature (Banti 1955, 110).¹² In a caustic attack on Beauvoir for what she finds to be a sloppy mixture of personal experience, moral and political reasoning, and fictional intrigues, Banti concludes that the Goncourt Academy had no business giving Beauvoir the award. In so doing, they had to forgive her for “the long reportage and journalistic dialogues, the innumerable martinis and whiskies and *couchages all’americana*”¹³ (111). In the German publication *der Monat*, François Bondy goes so far as to claim that the novel is almost entirely autobiographical and should be read as a complement to her memoirs rather than purely as a work of fiction. He also argues that her descriptions of sociopolitical events are somewhat touristy and superficial: “[S]he can mourn about her close friends, but the remaining people are either ‘masses’—like Castro’s five hundred thousand listeners, such that we are left to think how politics for Madame de Beauvoir was a bit of tourism and aesthetic travel experiences—or supporters of false ideas” (Bondy 1964, 29).

The criticism of the novel as mere reportage of actual people and events often took on unabashedly harsh overtones. The *New Yorker*’s Norman Podhoretz writes that *The Mandarins* “may very well be the most relentlessly thoroughgoing *roman à clef* since the eighteenth century. Indeed, virtually nothing in the book but the names of the characters appears to derive from her imagination” (Podhoretz 1956, 156). In his review, there is the distinct flavor of a typically American attitude toward French thinkers who were left leaning and

critical of American actions. And Podhoretz was not alone in dismissing the novel because of its implicit and explicit critiques of American capitalism and international policies. Donald Malcolm's review in the *New Republic*, entitled "Simone Go Home," expresses great umbrage at Beauvoir's choice of the Soviet Union over America (Malcolm 1956, 19). The effrontery at the perceived anti-Americanism in the text reaches what can only be called comical pitches in Frank Getlein's attack in *Commonweal*. Claiming that the West is a "dirty word" for Beauvoir, Getlein recounts the story in condescending words, calling it "very dull and very flat" and filled with long and pointless love scenes (Getlein 1956, 279). In fact, Getlein writes priggishly, "The only narrative question raised by the constant cohabitation in *The Mandarins* is, Will they ever get out of that bed so we can get on with the story?" (279). Brushing aside Beauvoir as a writer, Getlein chides, "Thus the Goncourt Mandarins passed the palm to La Grande Sartreuse as one praises a three-year-old violinist: not that she writes so well, but that she writes at all" (279).

Time's anonymous review of *The Mandarins* is an extreme example of how the attitude toward Beauvoir as a person easily turned the book review into little more than an ad hominem attack. Completely unaware of the irony, the review opens with the claim, "Like many of her sisters in what she bitterly refers to as the Second Sex, France's Simone de Beauvoir would rather talk than eat" (*Time* 67 1956, 104). Not clarifying exactly what that might mean, the review proceeds to critique what it considers to be a detailed account of the Beauvoir-Algren affair (interestingly, the very next book reviewed is Algren's *Walk on the Wild Side*) and then gives a description of Beauvoir as a "handsome woman" who is involved in an unmarried "liaison" with Sartre. To determine why she is so unhappy and her philosophy so "bleak," her upbringing and social life are dissected long before the review returns to actually talking about the book—which it does quickly and insufficiently.

Many of the reviews, however, attempted a much more even-handed treatment of the novel. In these cases, the reviewers found the exceptional qualities of the book most noteworthy and also added their opinions about what could stand improvement. In this spirit of balance, Paul Engle argues in the *Chicago Sunday Tribune* that the book is complex and philosophically relevant. He adds, with humor, that "it contains what must be certainly the longest, if indeed not the only, sustained love affair between a Frenchwoman and an American man in Chicago" (Engle 1956, 3). And when Engle points to what he sees as anti-Americanism, his criticisms are astute and levelheaded: "What hurts us is that all of those men and women, while accusing the United States of trying to make them conform and while defending the soviet union, would be the first to be stamped into conformity if the soviet way ever took over in France" (3). Virgilia Peterson's review in the *New York Herald Tribune Weekly Book Review* claims that although some of the scenes are "needlessly vulgar;

some have a surprising capacity to touch”; and the failures of the text are often in the translation, not in the writing (Peterson 1956, 3). In fact, *The Mandarins* is, in her opinion, “by far Simone de Beauvoir’s most impressive book” (3).

Perhaps the most sensitive and respectful review comes from Iris Murdoch. Murdoch shows us the value to be garnered by one author reviewing another. Noting the philosophical complexity of the book, Murdoch lauds it for having “the nerve to be intensely contemporary” (Murdoch 1956, 493). She pinpoints the keen political and psychological analysis Beauvoir employs in the development of the story and mentions some of the most fundamental themes amplified by Beauvoir: the tragic nature of action, the betrayal of the dead, the weight of the past, and the conflict between the sexes. Even though she finds that “too much of the book lies at one remove from reality” and that the characters live in a “far more denuded world” than the world of ordinary customs and virtues, Murdoch’s criticisms are couched more in terms of admiration than condemnation (493). Respectful of the enormous accomplishment, sensitive to its philosophical and literary achievements, critical of its shortcomings, Murdoch shows us that the best way to approach *The Mandarins* is as part of the story, rather than as outside observers. Full of curiosity and questions, we too should approach this book like one of the mandarins who must come to terms with what it means to be a thinker and an actor, a citizen and a critic, an individual and a member of the collective. And we should always remember that Beauvoir herself considered her work to be a collective object. It is our task to contribute our part to it.

The Contradictions of Freedom

The pieces in this collection, taken from a broad spectrum of scholars and interpretative strategies, attest to the vividness of Simone de Beauvoir’s ideas concerning politics, professional life, relationships, responsibility, choice, and the various contradictions that result when these areas of human experience come into conflict.

The political climate of post–World War II France is beautifully captured by Beauvoir. It is fitting that fifty years later a collection of philosophical pieces on the novel would begin with a chapter that scrutinizes this early cold war atmosphere. William L. McBride’s “The Conflict of Ideologies in *The Mandarins*: Communism and Democracy, Then and Now” shows how Beauvoir used the intellectuals portrayed in her story to reflect on the cold war’s two opposing ideologies and the political philosophies underlying them. McBride analyzes Beauvoir’s assessment of communism and democracy by understanding the latter as overcoming domination and subordination worldwide. To be a communist was to believe in a long-term project that required a personal commitment to the

Party's current political judgment; the Soviet regime represented the promise of liberation for workers the world over. Contrasting sharply to this assessment is the assessment of the United States with its project of world capitalism, or neo-imperialism. He concludes with a salient social critique through the eyes of Beauvoir's mandarins fifty years later. As McBride demonstrates, if we look back at the political, ideological, and social rifts of the late 1940s and early 1950s in light of new and remaining tensions, then Beauvoir appears prophetic. Her insight into the political climate of her era through the experience of the intellectuals makes her a critic for our era as well.

Politics, as McBride's chapter illustrates, is about political positions as much as it is about political parties. Taking a stance against domination constitutes perhaps the most prominent political position within *The Mandarins*. Rarely does one act alone in movements for social change of this sort. Sally J. Scholz sees *The Mandarins* as a text addressing the solidarity of individuals within social and political movements for liberation in her chapter "Sustained Praxis: The Challenge of Solidarity in *The Mandarins* and Beyond." Scholz argues that Beauvoir's ethics and politics reveal three basic levels of solidary relations. She uses *The Mandarins* to illustrate the varying obligations that emerge in each of the levels characterized by situation, reciprocity, and commitment. Henri's experiences in Portugal, like his decisions to unite *L'Espoir* to SRL and give false testimony to save Josette, expand the bounds of solidarity and revise the aims of group praxis. For any political movement, one of the key questions is how to stay relevant and active. According to Scholz, Beauvoir offers some insights into this question of group praxis while also emphasizing the unique contribution of individuals.

Sonia Kruks's "Living on Rails: Freedom, Constraint, and Political Judgment in Beauvoir's 'Moral' Essays and *The Mandarins*" develops the theme of individual action in political struggle. Beauvoir, Kruks argues, emphasizes individual responsibility for decisions. Whereas Beauvoir's early essays remain abstract, *The Second Sex* and *The Mandarins* illustrate the importance of situation in any understanding of the individual's freedom. Even more telling is the way *The Mandarins* demonstrates that political judgment itself is action informed by situation. Henri's decision to make *L'Espoir* an organ of the SRL demonstrates how the numerous aspects of one's situation permeate decision-making processes. Far from being a resignation, Henri's judgment results from the shifts in his own existence and his own situation. Kruks's phenomenology of political judgment expands contemporary discussions of Beauvoir's political philosophy by deepening the importance of "situation."

Whereas an analysis of situation illuminates *how* an individual makes a political judgment, an analysis of the individual's responsibility to history and the Other helps to explain *why*. In "Testimony, *Historicité*, and the Intellectual in Simone de Beauvoir's *The Mandarins*," Ursula Tidd argues that a dominant

problematic in Simone de Beauvoir's novel is the political and ethical implications of truth-telling and the intellectual's responsibility to history. Tidd seeks to analyze the notions of testimony and truth production at work in *The Mandarins*, that is, to show how speech or testimony is political action. She argues that Beauvoir's earlier fiction, especially *The Blood of Others* and *All Men are Mortal*, similarly focus on action but distinguish it from speech in personal and political relations. *The Mandarins*, according to Tidd, politicizes speech and literature, thereby highlighting the intellectual's role in social change. She reflects on the ethico-political responsibility of the committed intellectual, especially in light of the Holocaust, postwar reconstruction, and cold war tensions.

Karen Vintges's article "The Return of Commitment: Simone de Beauvoir's *The Mandarins* Revisited" furthers the theme of the commitment of intellectuals, arguing that Beauvoir's novel offers insight into taking a position in ethics and politics while avoiding the pitfalls of dogmatism. Vintges sees *The Mandarins* as developing an ethical "art of living" or "mode of life" that helps to inform political commitment while keeping that commitment from taking on an existence of its own over and against the individual. The key is to avoid the absolutism of Truth but not to sacrifice political struggle. Vintges uses Foucault to push the existentialists' view of freedom into a more nuanced understanding of culture and multiculturalism. However, she also uses Beauvoir to challenge the insufficiency of Foucault's "specific intellectual" as the model of the committed intellectual.

But this raises something of a dilemma for the intellectual. As Gail Weiss argues, the individual is faced with the problem of how to engage in politics but also be true to his or her own projects and values. Her chapter "'Politics Is a Living Thing': The Intellectual's Dilemma in Beauvoir's *The Mandarins*" illustrates that political commitment must be individualized; responsibility for one's past and present entails participation in political engagement for a liberated future. Moreover, as Anne's experiences reveal, passion plays an important role in commitment. Anne's passion brought her back to life after the realization that her love affair was over, but it also suffuses the relationships and decisions of Lambert, Henri, Nadine, and Robert. Philosophy, as Weiss concludes, is not the passionless, abstract activity it is often purported to be. Beauvoir's position requires philosophy, and indeed all intellectual activity, to be politically engaged while recognizing the political import of personal decisions.

Shannon M. Mussett's "Personal Choice and the Seduction of the Absolute in *The Mandarins*" takes up the theme of the personal dimension in decision-making by exploring Beauvoir's critique of absolutism in relation to her depiction of the character of Anne Dubreuilh. Mussett begins with a detailed discussion of Beauvoir's critical analysis of absolute values in her ethical works and proceeds to show how Beauvoir uses the character of Anne as the site where the struggle against absolutism plays itself out most clearly in the novel.

Anne is an illustration of the complex conflict the existent must face in moving from dependence upon external values and authority to the assertion of freedom as the only ethical absolute. Following a discussion of absolutism and seriousness in *Pyrrhus et Cinéas* and *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Mussett develops Beauvoir's rejection of the Heideggerian being-toward-death as the ultimate absolute in favor of a being toward freedom. As Mussett contends, Beauvoir's philosophical critique of absolutism is portrayed in Anne's arduous journey away from her dependence upon external ideas and existents (such as God, her husband, and her American lover). Crucial to her journey, Anne must confront the figure of Paule Mareuil, who both mirrors and apes Anne's love choices. Illustrating the final break from dependency on external absolutes, Mussett focuses on Anne's truly free decision not end her own life.

Further exploring the dynamics of interpersonal conflicts and relationships, Jen McWeeny argues that Beauvoir develops a trialectical theory that challenges the Hegelian dialectic. In "Love, Theory, and Politics: Critical Trinities in Simone de Beauvoir's *The Mandarins*" McWeeny discusses a number of Beauvoir's "critical trinitities" and argues that this structure allows Beauvoir to diagnose cases of oppression and to more successfully seek ways to overcome them. When these trinitities are interpreted in light of Beauvoir's idea, espoused in *The Second Sex*, that woman stands outside of Hegel's master-slave dialectic, they offer a description of an alternative theory of personal and historical relationships. Whereas Hegel's dialectic is focused on the relationship of opposition, McWeeny finds that Beauvoir's alternative triadic theory centrally involves gifts and recognitions of absolute separateness. To bring this discovery to light, McWeeny focuses on third parties that are positioned outside of various dialectics (e.g., woman, intellectuals, socialists, and the French people) who assert themselves through the choice of whether to be complicit with or revolt against the systems that they are observing. McWeeny concludes by arguing that Beauvoir's trialectical theory points us beyond oppression by opening up the possibility of relationships based not on oppressive practices and exclusionary eclipses, but instead on gifts, withdrawals, and solitude.

Approaching Beauvoir in a dialogue with her existentialist contemporaries, Thomas W. Busch studies the relationship between Beauvoir and her fiction in "Simone de Beauvoir on Achieving Subjectivity." Busch emphasizes Beauvoir's success in writing a novel about characters in complex social and historical situations, rather than portraying characters as thinly veiled philosophical ideas. Busch contends that in their relationships to their situations and to one another and in their choices and their identity development, the characters in *The Mandarins* reflect neither the dichotomies of Sartre's ontology as expressed in *Being and Nothingness* nor the alternative lifestyles outlined there of bad faith and authenticity. These features of her philosophical outlook show, Busch argues, a similarity to the views of Merleau-Ponty and to Sartre's later

(dialectical) work. Since Merleau-Ponty stressed, against Sartre, a concrete social/historical account of subjectivity, the question of the relationship to and possible influences between Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty arises. Despite what postmodern critics of phenomenology (and of Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty) have spoken about the contamination of phenomenological accounts of subjectivity by Cartesianism, Busch argues that it is possible to see both Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty as exorcising the Cartesian contamination with their concrete notion of achieving subjectivity, a view of subjectivity that shares features with postmodernism.

Eleanore Holveck also focuses on the dynamics of relationships and the Beauvoirian critique of the Hegelian dialectic in “When a Woman Loves a Man: Ownness and Otherness in *The Mandarins*.” Opening with the work of Milan Kundera, who depicts sexuality as a private, immediate relationship between a man and a woman, Holveck contrasts this view with Beauvoir’s depiction of the relationship between Anne Dubreuilh and Lewis Brogan in *The Mandarins*. Holveck argues that Beauvoir’s phenomenological existentialism emphasizes that one’s freedom always exists in a world that is grounded at the same time in the freedom of others. Holveck claims that the love between Anne and Lewis exemplifies Beauvoir’s reinterpretation of the sphere of ownness and its relation to otherness in Edmund Husserl’s theory of intersubjectivity in the Fifth Cartesian Meditation. Holveck compares Beauvoir’s analysis to that of Milan Kundera’s *Slowness* and Nelson Algren’s *Never Come Morning*. Tracing the maturation of the relationship between Anne and Lewis in stages, Holveck shows how at the peak of their relationship, the lovers achieve a merging of intentional temporality, only to have it fall apart when the differences of their past histories and lives come to the surface. Despite the eventual breakup between the lovers, Beauvoir, of all the authors discussed, alone successfully describes free sensuous communication between one free existent and the other. As Holveck shows, it is through her reading of Husserl that Beauvoir is capable of moving beyond Hegelian configurations built upon conflict to show us the possibility of a shared intersubjectivity.

Peg Brand argues in “Salon-Haunters: The Impasse Facing French Intellectuals” that Beauvoir maintains a unified theory of aesthetics throughout her ethics, feminism, and fiction. Brand notes that there are two possibilities for the work of art—either it functions ethically to encourage freedom and the general well-being of humanity, or it functions to glorify the artist and lead others to engage in unethical activities. Brand locates the impasse facing the artist in the two main figures of Henri and Robert (seen through the eyes of Anne, Robert’s wife), who are constantly torn between their humanistic political goals and a personal desire to live the aesthetic lifestyle. Through their stories, Beauvoir portrays the conundrum that every artist faces—an impasse that sets action against inaction, politics against culture. Brand discovers that Beauvoir’s theory

of art in *The Mandarins*, aided by an analysis of women's oppression in *The Second Sex*, advocates the view that art keeps past events alive in the present and in so doing can change even the tragic into the life affirming. She concludes by returning to the idea of Beauvoir's compromise theory of art to show how even those who want to better the world through artistic creation are still plagued by doubt as to the eventual outcome of their activities. However, as Brand points out, Beauvoir's compromise theory advocates that the artist continue to engage in artistic endeavors in the face of such doubt in order to maintain an ethical relationship to the rest of humanity.

The Importance of *The Mandarins* Today --- ---

The Mandarins raises compelling philosophical questions regarding the individual's responsibility in state-sponsored violence, the possibility of attaining human solidarity in the face of poverty and inequality, the parameters of collective decision-making, the impact of the historical situation on the individual, the ambiguity of the artist's project, and the vicissitudes of love and personal choice. In line with the very premise of *The Mandarins*, the various essays in this collection address these issues and highlight the important role of the intellectual in shaping personal and political life.

Beauvoir's novel continues to speak to us in myriad and significant ways. The same questions that haunted the political scene of postwar Europe remain at the forefront of the contemporary world. Beauvoir often acknowledges her use of literature as a vehicle for exploring philosophical ideas, and the characters that populate this novel reveal the difficulties of living an intellectual or aesthetic life. *The Mandarins* also confronts head-on the obligations of intellectuals within political movements, while simultaneously drawing attention to the paradoxes and impossibilities of such participation. Since the student riots of 1960s, the academy has fought to remain connected and relevant; indeed, many would argue that the academy's role is not to comment on culture and politics but to be the vanguard of change. A fresh look at the moral implications of the "intellectual as activist" issue, sparked by Beauvoir's insightful articulation of it, lends an important new perspective to the current discussion. Additionally, the questions of responsibility for dictatorships, the unification of Europe into a common political and economic block, the struggle between capitalism and socialism in public policy, and, of course, the relationship between Europe and the United States all remain considerable issues. In particular, it is fascinating to see the current tensions between France and the United States, as the same paternalistic and condescending attitude remains alive and well in the latter's treatment of the former. The ever-present threat and reality of war

hangs over the international community in many of the same ways that Beauvoir chronicles in her novel, and we would do well to heed her warnings about the consequences of war not only while it is waged, but also in its long-term effects on the survivors.

What Beauvoir offers us in *The Mandarins* is an opportunity to reflect on the political contradictions that result from war, occupation, and the clash of cultures, as well as the personal toll that these political realities take on individuals. The interpersonal relationships of the characters relay the complexities of love and choice, and the often treacherous results of our attempts to find meaning in the face of an objectively meaningless reality. Refusing to separate the two from each other, Beauvoir presents the readers with an extremely relevant testimony on lived experience in the modern age. We are called upon to pay close attention to Beauvoir's often painful and frightening descriptions of death, love, war, and politics. As she repeats throughout her philosophical and literary corpus, without constant vigilance to the past we are depopulating our future and annihilating our present. Perhaps we can read *The Mandarins* with minds willing to face past atrocities so as to prevent their present and future repetitions.

Notes

1. Prime examples of the literary studies include Ascher 1981, Brosman 1991, Fallaize [1988] 1990, Holveck 2002, Keefe 1983, and Keefe 1998.

2. In 1944, Beauvoir, ghost-writing under Sartre's name for the journal *Combat*, wrote "Un promeneur dans Paris insurgé" [A Walk in Insurgent Paris] about the street skirmishes experienced during the Liberation (Bair 1990, 293).

3. See Claude Chambard [1970] 1976 for a detailed account of the Resistance movement.

4. Some of the latter also appeared in the journal *Volonté*.

5. Just as Beauvoir herself did in her April 1945 articles for *Combat*.

6. For example, in a letter to Algren she writes, "I put a lot of things in it, travels, drunken evenings, young and mature people, some of Koestler, Camus and Sartre, and myself, indeed" (1997a, 472).

7. Bair tells us that although he was angry at the publication of *The Mandarins*, Algren's rage was "nothing compared to his fury over what she wrote about him in the memoirs" (Bair 1990, 500).

8. Bair tells us that Beauvoir blamed the absentmindedness of leaving the manuscript in the taxi on her preoccupation with Algren. She also recounts that Beauvoir recovered the lost manuscript in the lost-and-found ten days later (after she had rewritten the greater part of it from memory) (Bair 1990, 417).

9. Beauvoir credits Lanzmann with suggesting the title *Les Mandarins* (1992b, 20). However, Bair recounts that it was Bost, not Lanzmann, whom Beauvoir credits with the title (1990, 427).

10. Beauvoir writes, "I see myself reflected no less in *The Second Sex* than in *The Mandarins*, and vice versa. If I have used two different modes of self-expression, it was because such diversity was for me a necessity" (1992b, 41).

11. *Catholic World* is also critical of the "scenes of illicit love" (Hughes 1956, 230).

12. The editors would like to express gratitude to Lucio Privitello for translating Banti's text.

13. Perhaps best translated as "the American style of sleeping around."

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