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Moving Mothers of Women: Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, and Motherhood in Motion

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Abstract

This article builds and expands on the notion that Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir are the 'mothers' of second-wave feminisms. It comprises three interrelated movements. First, Simone de Beauvoir's paraphrase of Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* is explored, in particular through the 'myth' of Judith Shakespeare. This movement naturally leads to a discussion of the women's literature anthologies of the 1970s and 80s in the United States. An intermezzo attempts to show the inherent plurality of the category of 'second-wave feminism' by mapping Beauvoir's trajectory in France, the United States, and Britain, beyond the rather long shadow of a feminism of difference. The third and final movement investigates the reception of Woolf and Beauvoir among second-wave feminist critics and activists through the notion of 'feminist Bible' and through that of matrilinearity.
By adopting an overtly transnational perspective, this article shows how the very idea of (intellectual) motherhood ought to be understood in its border-crossings and its movements across time, space, languages, and disciplines.

Any course on women's history will include the names and works of Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir. Although neither of them wanted to be labelled as a philosopher, their discussions of womanhood have never ceased to produce interesting insights for subsequent generations of feminist theorists, to the effect that Woolf and Beauvoir are often described as the 'mothers' of second-wave feminism(s).[1]

Like that of most canonical authors, especially when it comes to women writers, any history of Woolf's and Beauvoir's reception in subsequent generations is bound to show how they were often challenged or appreciated, rejected or adored, depending on who is claiming authority to do so and what vested interest they have in their analysis. As the signifiers 'Woolf' and 'Beauvoir' move from one context to another, from one intellectual to the next, they seem to acquire different meanings which often contradict one another. Because their meaning is never empty, 'Woolf' and 'Beauvoir' may be understood to be *moving* – rather than 'floating' – signifiers, whose travels through intellectual history constitute the very substance of their work. The object of this study of literary history is, after all, "an object with an unstable ontology, since a text can resonate only insofar as it is touched by the effects of its travels" (Dimock 1997: 1061): only by following its meandering through time, place, and language(s) can we better understand it.

This article comprises three movements: first, Beauvoir's paraphrase of *A Room of One's Own* in *The Second Sex* will be addressed in order to show what kind of 'Woolf' she was fabricating; an intermezzo will attempt to deconstruct the monolithic category of second-wave feminism in order to highlight its inherent plurality; then, the final section will look at how Woolf and Beauvoir were received and analysed by second-wave feminists in several countries through the notions of 'feminist Bible' and matrilinearity. Because of how problematic the translation of Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* was, reference will be made mainly to the French original, but the latest English translation will be provided in notes.[2]

1. Beauvoir's reception of Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*: The myth of Judith Shakespeare

The first time Woolf is mentioned in *The Second Sex*, it is through a paraphrase of the famous argument about the fictional sister of Shakespeare, whom Woolf('s narrator) chooses to call Judith.[3] The original reference to Judith Shakespeare occurs in Chapter III of *A Room of One's Own*, and in her retelling, Beauvoir alters some details of the original parable. Interestingly, Beauvoir offers here one of the first summaries of Woolf's text in France at a time when this was still not available in French translation.[4]

Just to give a little more context, the first French translation of *A Room* would only come out two years after *The Second Sex*, in 1951, in Clara Malraux's rendition for the publisher Gonthier. Like *Orlando*, *A Room* was proposed to Stock, the first publisher of Woolf in France, after *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* came out in 1929, but both the 1928 novel and the 1929 essay were considered to be "too special and too exclusively related to problems of English life to be published with any success in French" (quoted and translated in Marcus 2002: 331); unlike *Orlando*, which would be published by Stock in 1931 after some insistence on the part of French cultural mediator and translator Charles Mauron, *A Room* will have to wait until 1951 to be considered by French publishers to be a text worth investing in, with *The Second Sex*'s *succès de scandale* paving the way for Clara Malraux's first translation. Anne-Laure Rigeade has aptly argued in this respect that

> in order for a text from one dominant literature to be received in another dominant literature, the latter must be able to welcome it, the tradition within which it will be inscribed must be constituted, and readers must have a framework of understanding in which to situate it. This is why, while Woolf's modernist novels were immediately translated, French readers must wait until 1951 to read *A Room of One's Own*. (Rigeade 2014: 72)[5]

In this sense, Beauvoir's *magnum opus* definitely contributed to expanding the patriarchal framework so as to make it more hospitable to Woolf's feminist polemic in France.

A closer look at Beauvoir's paraphrase of *A Room* in the first volume of *The Second Sex* reveals the combination of faithfulness to, and variation on the original which Beauvoir proposes. Of the elements present in the original, Beauvoir maintains the following: the Judith Shakespeare parable, although she

alters some details; the hostility that women writers garner from the (male) reading public; Lady Winchilsea's poetry, of which Beauvoir translates three lines that Woolf reports from the collection *Miscellany Poems, on Several Occasions* (1713); the Duchess of Newcastle's furious statement about how women are treated; Aphra Behn as the first middle-class woman who was able to "make her living by her wits" for the first time in women's history (Woolf 2015: 48); and the argument about the room of one's own as a space of material independence (cf. Beauvoir 1986: 182f.; Beauvoir 2011: 123f.). As Pierre-Éric Villeneuve has rightly pointed out, Beauvoir, in emphasising the materialist slant of Woolf's feminism, is anticipating one of the main trends in the second-wave feminist revision of Woolf (cf. Villeneuve 2002: 26ff.); at the same time, however, she is also adapting the previous essay to her own arguments while embellishing or, arguably, misinterpreting parts of it, as the case of Judith Shakespeare will show.

There are several differences between *A Room of One's Own* and Beauvoir's two-page summary of it. The first one is in relation to Samuel Johnson's notorious comparison between women preachers and dogs marching upright. Beauvoir claims that Johnson was talking about women *writers*: "En Angleterre, remarque V. Woolf, les femmes écrivains ont toujours suscité l'hostilité. Le docteur Johnson les comparait à 'un chien marchant sur ses jambes de derrière : ce n'est pas bien fait mais c'est étonnant'" (Beauvoir 1986: 183).[6] In contrast, Woolf references Johnson's statement correctly in the text on two occasions: once, it is voiced, albeit in relation to women acting, by the theatre manager when Judith aspires to become an actress and write for the stage ("The manager [...] guffawed. He bellowed something about poodles dancing and women acting – no woman, he said, could possibly be an actress", Woolf 2015: 37); the same statement by Johnson is referenced a few pages later, but this time in relation to women composers and Germaine Tailleferre in particular ("Of Mlle Germaine Tailleferre one can only repeat Dr Johnson's dictum concerning a woman preacher, transposed into terms of music", ivi: 42). Thus, while Woolf relied perhaps on her readership's understanding of the original reference, Beauvoir did not have access to the same collective imaginary and seems to have misunderstood Woolf's variation on Johnson's disdainful statement about women preachers, choosing instead to keep her focus on women writers. While this first divergence may seem to be a matter for academic pedantry, the other two give an overtly different colouring to Woolf's essay in *The Second Sex*.

A second difference is Beauvoir's addition of a reference to Daniel Defoe's novel *Moll Flanders* (1722) to the Judith Shakespeare story. While Woolf only hints at the fact that Judith, as she was prevented from accessing the theatre and getting "training in her craft", may have ended up "roam[ing] the streets at midnight" or "seek[ing] her dinner in a tavern" (ivi: 37), Beauvoir gives a more explicit twist to the story by writing "On peut aussi l'imaginer devenant une joyeuse prostituée, une Moll Flanders telle que la campa Daniel De Foe [sic] : mais en aucun cas elle n'eût dirigé une troupe et écrit des drames" (Beauvoir 1986: 182-3).[7] It could be argued that Beauvoir is trying to show her knowledge of English literature by referring to a canonical work of fiction, thereby establishing a prior literary tradition that complements Woolf's parable. It is quite striking, however, how she is turning Judith's hunger-stricken search for food and her being relegated to the public streets (as opposed to the theatre) into an experience of blithe, even blissful ("joyeuse") sex work. At best, Beauvoir is trying to show her knowledge of, and passion about English literature, perhaps with an eye to tying this story in with her subsequent discussion of 'prostitutes and hetaeras' in the second volume; at worst, she is adding a titillating element to Woolf's story to make it more provocative and 'scandalous'. That she does not question Defoe's potential patriarchal bias in his portrayal of Moll Flanders seems to be quite an evident omission, especially considering that she will go on to analyse, almost invariably in uncomplimentary terms, the representation of women in the fiction and poetry of Henry de Montherlant, D.H. Lawrence, Paul Claudel, André Breton and Stendhal (only the latter author will come out of it unscathed).[8]

A third and final difference in the Judith Shakespeare story is the ending: while Woolf writes that "at last Nick Greene the actor-manager took pity on her; she found herself with child by that gentleman" and ended up "kill[ing] herself one winter's night and lies buried at some cross-roads where the omnibuses now stop outside the Elephant and Castle" (Woolf 2015: 37), Beauvoir suggests that "ou elle eût été re-

conduite à sa famille qui l'eût mariée de force ; ou séduite, abandonée, déshonorée elle se serait tuée de désespoir" (Beauvoir 1986: 182).[9] Once again, Beauvoir is making more explicit statements than Woolf, but she is also suggesting here *two* possible endings to the story: one that sees her being forced back to her family in order to be married off, and another that is more compatible with Woolf's ending, though with a more poignant twist, namely that she is *seduced*, *abandoned* and *dishonoured* by Nick Greene. While in *A Room* the tone is factual, in Beauvoir's retelling Judith is shown to be an object at the mercy of men, the concision of the sentence and the tripartite adjectival addition ("séduite, abandonnée, déshonorée") contributing to making her a passive character the reader is supposed to pity, rather than sympathise with. In both of the last two variations, then, Beauvoir is adding a more poignant twist to the story in order to highlight the violence women have to suffer in a patriarchal system. Once again, however, one of Beauvoir's additions – in the earlier case, Judith like the "happy Moll Flanders"; here, Judith as a "dishonoured" woman – may perhaps raise a few eyebrows.[10]

These variations on the original myth testify to Beauvoir's original handling of the story received from Woolf as well as to the story's productivity in the hands of subsequent generations. Although Woolf was clearly not the first woman writer to think of a similar myth,[11] the common misconception that women's genius "never got itself on to paper" in the Renaissance and the seventeenth century (Woolf 2015: 37) was contrasted most notably by Margaret J. M. Ezell, a scholar who specialises in early modern women writers. In a 1990 journal article clearly inspired by the recent emergence of New Historicism, Ezell argued that "the twentieth century's perceptions of works by women writing in the Renaissance and seventeenth century are based on a set of anachronistic and deforming presumptions about literary practice, production, and genre, bolstered by an outdated 'Whig' interpretation of English society" (Ezell 1990: 580).

In Ezell's account, Woolf is shown to be "bound by the limitations of the historiography of her day" (ivi: 587), but subsequent feminist critics who compiled critical anthologies of women's literature in English – Ezell mentions the volumes edited by "[Katherine M.] Rogers, [Joan] Goulianos, [Louise] Bernikow, [Angeline] Goreau, [Fidelis] Morgan, [Sandra M.] Gilbert and [Susan] Gubar, and [Germaine] Greer", published between 1979 and 1985 (ivi: 580, 592) – also fall prey to Woolf's misconception. The critic ultimately argues for "a new concept of women's literature" that accepts "manuscript and coterie authorship and non-traditional literary forms as part of the female tradition" so as to better explore these women writers' texts before Aphra Behn in their constitutive differences (ivi: 591).

In Ezell's understanding of the term, the 'myth' of Judith Shakespeare as "the isolated, self-destructive female artist" (ivi: 585) has been foundational for subsequent generations because, as her analysis of women's writing anthologies shows, they have tended to look for similarities in women's literature rather than highlight potential differences: second-wave feminist literary criticism, especially that inspired by Elaine Showalter's gynocriticism and/or Hélène Cixous's *écriture féminine*, has often failed, Ezell argues, to foreground the differences underlying the production and circulation of texts across historical periods, intent as feminist critics were on finding new critical tools that could supplant the patriarchal assumptions inherent in literary criticism (cf. ivi: 581-2). While these feminist critics' work is of course to be praised in some respects, Ezell shows how in this particular regard it has failed to go beyond certain impasses underlying Woolf's knowledge and discussion of early modern women writers: this part of the myth has been reproduced all too faithfully without questioning the problematic categories Woolf brought to bear on previous centuries.[12]

While Ezell uses the term 'myth' in this article in the sense of a fantasy or an illusion, a fiction fabricated and believed, it could be argued that Judith Shakespeare as a story is also a myth in the first sense listed by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, namely "A traditional story […] which embodies and provides an explanation, aetiology, or justification for something such as the early history of a society, a religious belief or ritual, or a natural phenomenon" (*OED online*, "myth, n. 1a"). In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir famously employs the term either as a synonym for 'misconception' or in its original sense, with the first volume of the text bringing together the two interpretations in its subtitle, "Facts and Myths": these two terms are complementary both in the sense that there is a

factual reality about women and then there are patriarchal misconceptions about them *and* in the sense that there is rigorous documentation about women's history and then there are fictional stories – which are not necessarily 'false' – fabricated about and by them. The 'myth' of Judith Shakespeare participates of this very ambiguity: it is at the same time a misrepresentation of early modern women writers, as Ezell cogently demonstrates in her historicist approach to it, and a foundational story for subsequent feminist critics, Beauvoir included, who find in this fiction a liberating starting point for subsequent enquiries. In passing on this myth, Beauvoir is keeping a core mythologem (i.e. a fictional sister of Shakespeare, named Judith, would never have been allowed to write or act and would have ended her life in dire circumstances) while refashioning the story for the purposes of the 'scandalous' *Second Sex*.

2. Time Passes: Deconstructing second-wave feminism with Beauvoir

In view of the temporal distance as well as a pressing need to simplify various movements in different countries, second-wave feminism is sometimes proposed as a sort of unitary, monolithic entity, mainly aligned with the struggle for formal rights (e.g. abortion, divorce) and with a theorisation about the 'difference' inherent in the category of 'woman' (as opposed to that of 'man'). However, any history of feminism will show how such a linear conception of the second wave is bound to omit a series of tendencies and groups which have been marginalised or outright forgotten. This intermezzo will attempt to reconstruct how some groups of British and French feminisms have come to suffer from a marginalisation in (some) feminist reconstructions of the events of the 1970s and 80s, with a particular focus on how Beauvoir's trajectory may help us to uncover these histories.

A series of historical circumstances prevented *The Second Sex* from circulating abroad in an undistorted shape. As was hinted above, zoologist H. M. Parshley's first translation of the text was "filled with philosophical misinterpretations that fail to do justice to the complexity of Beauvoir's phenomenological existentialism" and even went so far as to delete "large sections of the original […] without Beauvoir's full knowledge or acquiescence", as reported by Mary Dietz (1992: 76).[13] The flawed English version of the text made it ill-suited to travel without incurring misinterpretation not only because of this editorial (mis) conduct, however: another element, at least outside feminist studies, was the patriarchal bias reinforced by Sartre's long shadow over Beauvoir's philosophical oeuvre[14], whereas within feminist circles the other important negative factor was the "invention" of 'French feminism' in Anglo-American criticism.

French historian Sylvie Chaperon has drawn attention to how, after an initial period of "assimilation" in France, Beauvoir's theses on womanhood and her intellectual persona were challenged in 1965 by texts like Ménie Grégoire's *Le Métier de femme* and Geneviève Gennari's *Le Dossier de la femme*, where more essentialist arguments were proposed; to this first "divide" (*clivage*), another break was added in 1970 with the rise to prominence of the group Psychanalyse et Politique, organised around Antoinette Fouque and later her library and press *des femmes*, both of which are still active today (Chaperon 2012: 277, 279). This *fracture* in France seems to have given rise to a similar divide in Anglo-American criticism, where however French feminism was homogenised as an essentialist, psychoanalytic tendency that had little relation to the variety and complexity of the French women's movement (cf. Moses 1998: 243). According to French materialist feminist Christine Delphy, this "invention" consisted in a process of "internal homogenization and external differentiation" whereby a foreign 'national' movement (the French *Mouvement de libération des femmes*) was crystallised into a psychoanalytic, mostly essentialist group of theorists (Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous) "which is defined by, and only by, its difference to the group which has the power to name; thus they are constituted as an Other" (1995: 214). While Anglo-American criticism was particularly interested in Psych et Po, all the heterogeneous groups that identified as socialist or materialist in the MLF remained underrepresented, if not completely absent, across the Atlantic, as U.S. scholars tended to prefer a form of feminism that could establish a psychoanalytic sexual difference that tended to be unreceptive to other intersections like race or class.

It was in particular through the 1980 anthology *New French Feminisms*, edited by Elaine Marks and

Isabelle De Courtivron, that this invention of 'French feminism' was concretised in Anglo-American scholarship.[15] While this "invention" provided (Anglophone) Woolf scholars with yet another toolkit with which to analyse Woolf's work (cf. Moi 2002; Minow-Pinkney 1987), Beauvoir tended to be dismissed as a dated thinker who still reproduced the main tenets of a more humanist – as opposed to a poststructuralist and psychoanalytic – ethos, even though it may in fact be argued that her own materialist feminism was attuned to (at least part of) Woolf's feminist theories. It was not until the 1990s, especially thanks to the work of Margaret A. Simons (cf. Simons 1999) and Toril Moi (cf. Moi 2008), that Beauvoir was recovered and revised by feminist scholars in the United States.

Interestingly, this rather negative initial reception of *The Second Sex* in US feminist circles is contrasted by a more positive appreciation of the text in Britain, where several socialist feminist philosophers looked to Beauvoir when they started to adapt Marxism to an analysis of womanhood. As early as 1966, Juliet Mitchell regarded *The Second Sex* as "to this day the greatest single contribution on the subject [of women]" (1966: 15), even if she was probably thinking of Parshley's flawed version of it.[16] In her seminal book *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World* (1973), Sheila Rowbotham defined Beauvoir's text an "extraordinary achievement […] which first attempted a total synthesis of the biological, psychological, cultural and historical destiny of the concept and situation of women" while "not neglect[ing] new evidence which was available to her from work in psychology and anthropology" and "tackl[ing] also a philosophical tendency implicit in rationalism which had passed over into both the liberal feminist and Marxist approaches to emancipation" (2015: 10). In a similar vein, Michèle Barrett, in *Women's Oppression Today* (1980), praised Woolf and Beauvoir for being more attentive to the "the ways in which material conditions have historically structured the mental aspects of oppression" than "approaches taken by contemporary feminism", which she finds, in comparison, "notably unsatisfactory" (2014: 84f.). Unlike Anglo-American feminism, then, this British socialist feminism found ways to see in both Woolf and Beauvoir some important thinkers who were even *better* equipped than some of their successors to analyse and criticise patriarchal oppression.

Beyond the rather long shadow cast by a feminism of difference in the same years, then, there exists a plurality of theorists and activists who did not completely reject materialism and in fact emphasised how this other strand in feminist theory could still be useful to tackle the oppression of women.

3. Woolf-Beauvoir and second-wave feminisms: Feminist Bibles and matrilinearity

Both *A Room of One's Own* and *The Second Sex* are regularly taught in university-level courses on feminist theory because of the central position they still occupy in the canon of women's writing. Jane Marcus, a militant Woolf scholar operating in the United States in the 1980s, rightly remarked, in 1987, that

> the Woolf book that means most to feminist critics of my generation is *A Room of One's Own.* As our literary feminist bible, it is the one most subject to critical exegesis, most quoted and argued over in feminist critical work of the last decade (Marcus 1987: 3).

In a more critical vein, and interestingly in the same country (the United States), Mary Dietz pointed out that

> Despite the legacy of Beauvoir as guide and guru, as well as the legend of *The Second Sex* as the 'Bible' of American feminism, both appear to have had a rather minimal impact upon the feminist movement in the United States. Like the Bible, *The Second Sex* seems to have been much worshiped, often quoted, and little read (Dietz 1992: 78).

If, in Marcus's phrasing, *A Room of One's Own* could rightly be called a Bible because of the admirable and considerable amount of "critical exegesis" it has produced, Dietz is suggesting in 1992 that the Bible is also one of those canonical texts which everyone has heard of, but has at the same time a very superficial knowledge of, even when it is widely referred to – and in fact, despite its canonical status, little was made of Beauvoir's *magnum opus* in the United States before what Dietz terms a "dramatic turn in the 1980s" (ivi: 80), incidentally the same decade that witnessed Beauvoir's death in April 1986.

In a sense, Dietz's apt suggestion of a text that can be parcelled out into a series of pithy sententi-

ae may be applied just as easily to *A Room of One's Own*. Just as critics and university lecturers repeat what has by now become a Beauvoirian aphorism, namely that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman", many Woolf scholars refer to the notion of androgyny or that of matrilinearity in *A Room* on a regular basis. Woolf's (narrator's) idea that "a great mind is androgynous" (Woolf 2015: 74) – an idea openly derived from Coleridge – did not fail to generate a heated debate in feminist circles after Elaine Showalter's notorious claim that "androgyny was the myth that helped [Woolf] evade confrontation with her own painful femaleness and enabled her to choke and repress her anger and ambition" (Showalter 1978: 264). Subsequent feminist critics like Toril Moi and Makiko Minow-Pinkney retorted to her (mis) reading of Woolf, showing for instance how androgyny "radically undermine[s] the notion of the unitary self, the central concept of Western male humanism and one crucial to Showalter's feminism" (Moi 1985: 7). Similarly, Makiko Minow-Pinkney's Kristevan study of Woolf argued for a "radical" understanding of androgyny which considers this Woolfian concept to "open up the fixed unity into a multiplicity, joy, play of heterogeneity, a fertile difference" (Minow-Pinkney 1987: 12). Once seen as an elusive, anti-feminist concept, androgyny in Woolf was recovered and revised by poststructuralist feminists in the 1980s to the effect that now it need no longer be defended against Showalter's allegations; in the meantime, Beauvoir and existentialism were regarded by most as resting upon dated and problematic notions of self, consciousness and will that seemed to be out of touch with the linguistic turn in philosophy and in cultural as well as literary studies.

The first section has already shown that many – if not all – the projects of anthologies of women's literature in the 1970s and 80s were inspired by the Woolfian notion of matrilinearity, another of those oft-cited theses usually abstracted from their original context. Towards the end of Chapter IV, the narrator in *A Room* states that it is not just "discouragement and criticism" that prevented women from writing, but also the lack of a "tradition behind them" (Woolf 2015: 57). As she writes:

> For we think back through our mothers if we are women. It is useless to go to the great men writers for help […]. The weight, the pace, the stride of a man's mind are too unlike her own for her to lift anything substantial from him successfully. The ape is too distant to be sedulous. Perhaps the first thing she would find, setting pen to paper, was that there was no common sentence ready for her use (ivi: 57-8).

In this passage, the narrator is clearly setting up a direct relation between the woman's body – her 'situation', as Beauvoir defines it in *The Second Sex*[17]– and the way she writes: reference is made not only to "a man's mind", but also to his "weight", "pace", "stride", to his physical movement rather than simply his way of observing and transcribing the world, so much so that the inspiration women may draw from men is described in physical – though possibly figurative – terms ("lift anything substantial"). "The ape is too distant to be sedulous" is a veiled reference to Robert Louis Stevenson's claim that he "played the sedulous ape to Hazlitt, to Lamb, to Wordsworth" (Stevenson 1887: 59), but of course, in this case these male models are too far from a woman's body for her to mimic them: once again, the notion of a literary tradition is invested with a bodily quality which prevents the writer from accessing a certain gendered – or even sexed, as feminists of difference would argue – imaginary. Beauvoir's understanding of the (woman's) body as a situation, however, would emphasise how this distance is not simply due to a different biological or psychic make-up; rather, because "The body is a historical sedimentation of our way of living in the world, and of the world's way of living with us" (Moi 1999: 68), there are ineliminable *material* conditions that impinge upon a woman's subject constitution, making all these contradictory aspects of her corporeality co-exist in a proliferation of various differences.

Any attempt to reduce Woolf's (narrator's) theses to a feminism of difference, or 'French feminism' in Anglo-American discourse, would clearly be at odds with other ideas being proposed in the narrative, most notably that of the androgynous mind whereby "there are two sexes in the mind corresponding to the two sexes in the body" and they "also require to be united in order to get complete satisfaction and happiness"; or, as the narrator puts it more concisely a few lines further, "Perhaps a mind that is purely masculine cannot create, any more than a mind that is purely feminine" (Woolf 2015: 74). Much in the same

way as Beauvoir will conclude that men and women need to realise they are equal and necessary to one another – albeit through an unfortunate, patriarchal term, "brotherhood" (Beauvoir 2011: 782) –, Woolf's narrator is here encouraging men and women to come together and contaminate one another, as it were, in order to create more fruitful relationships based on the common acknowledgement that we all contain the masculine *and* the feminine and only a "fusion" enables the mind to be "fully fertilized" and use "all its faculties" (Woolf 2015: 74). Within this framework, writing 'as women' may in fact prove impossible because of the hostile patriarchal environment. As Laura Marcus has pointed out in reference to Woolf and subsequent feminisms:

> [Woolf's] 'alternating loyalty to and deviation from' the familiar positions of the feminist movement produced contradictions in her thought which more recent feminisms have often found it difficult to accept, tending to opt for one pole rather than another, instead of recognising and negotiating inconsistencies (Marcus 2010: 144).

In this sense, feminist critics after Woolf – Beauvoir included – produced 'Woolfs of their own' when they looked back on their English 'mother'. While Beauvoir, as was sketched out above, emphasised the material element to Woolf's text and depicted Judith Shakespeare as a victim of patriarchal violence in a 'scandalous' tone, subsequent feminists found in *A Room* a description of the kind of feminine difference they were coming to theorise. The idea of women's separatism and the urgent necessity to find a feminine vocabulary and syntax seem to owe much to Woolf's essay, especially as it was filtered through the philosophical intercession of Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and/or Hélène Cixous, whose supposedly unitary grouping is in fact an historical myth.[18]

An example of this tendency to look back on Woolf from a feminist differentialist perspective has recently been provided by Elisa Bolchi, who uncovered the history of the Italian Milan-based Novels Group (*gruppo romanzi*), a grassroots movement operating in the 1970s. After reading and discussing novels collectively "from May 1978 to June 1979" (Bolchi 2021a: 103), the feminists of the Women's Bookshop in Milan published a collection of prose texts in their "Catalogo n.2", interestingly titled "Le madri di tutte noi" ("The mothers of us all"). As Bolchi points out,

> The women who wrote the Catalogo looked more thoroughly and consciously into what 'being a woman' meant, a view that contrasted with the emancipation theory that had, until then, predominantly been embraced by Italian feminism linked to left-wing parties and to the Unione Donne Italiane (UDI) (ivi: 98).

Within this context, although Woolf's *Three Guineas* and *A Room* were read as foundational texts for their political aims, her novels – in particular, *To the Lighthouse* – were found wanting because, as Bolchi insightfully remarks, "Although they found Woolf's metaphor of the room useful, they also found that Woolf conceptualised the desire to fill the void with a literary language that was still observant of male symbolic order", whereas writers like Gertrude Stein "served their goal better, since the incomplete or suspended sentences characteristic of her style, and her fragmented syntax, displayed the 'void' rather than circumventing it or translating it into a finite language" (ivi: 108).[19]

In the United Kingdom, a documentary aptly titled "Daughters of de Beauvoir" came out in 1989, directed by Imogen Sutton and produced by the BBC and the Arts Council. Alongside Beauvoir's sister Hélène and her adopted daughter Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir, important feminist authors like Kate Millet, Marge Piercy, Eva Figes and Ann Oakley contributed to this retrospective of Beauvoir, all of them highlighting the huge impact Beauvoir had on their lives. British sociologist Ann Oakley refers to Beauvoir early on in the documentary as "a mother", "the mother in some ways that I think some of us wished we had ourselves, and like one's mother, I think, we thought of her as being immortal" (Sutton 1989: 2:42ff.). In a similar vein, Angie Pegg, a further education teacher, states how she fantasised about telling Beauvoir about her choice of pursuing a university education because her own mother would only tell her that husband and family came first (ivi: 3:03ff.). It seems clear, watching this documentary, that for these women, Beauvoir provided a blueprint of how an independent, successful intellectual woman could live: U.S. author Marge Piercy describes how reading *The Second Sex* was fundamental to acquire a vocabulary to talk about the lived experience of womanhood and goes

on to stress how naming became an essential practice in her and other women's lives (cf. ivi: 25.01ff.). If Beauvoir could state in no uncertain terms, in *The Second Sex*, that, in contrast to proletarians and Black people, "Les femmes […] ne disent pas 'nous'" (Beauvoir 1986: 21) and are thus incapable of positing themselves as subjects and, as a consequence, of turning men into Others,[20] this documentary shows how even as flawed a rendition of her *magnum opus* as that produced by Parshley was able to shock, disturb, inspire subsequent generations of women and encouraged them to pursue different existential choices than those prescribed to them by patriarchal ideology.

4. Conclusion

This article has shown how the notion of Woolf-Beauvoir as 'mothers of second-wave feminism(s)' ought to be understood in a transnational perspective that favours movement and border-crossings over strict categorisation. *A Room* and *The Second Sex* both shocked and inspired subsequent generations of women in their attempt to become aware of themselves as political subjects as well as to theorise what their position in patriarchal ideology was, often with widely varying effects. As the texts travel beyond national, temporal, linguistic, disciplinary boundaries, they acquire different qualities that only emerge in their relationship with different times, spaces, and languages. Although this does not mean that there is no text prior to these travels, it does point to how essential the disparate resonances and the meandering movements of the object are to its constitutive qualities.

Notes

[1] Despite being immersed in philosophical discussions through the Bloomsbury Group, Woolf never had the ambition to be a philosopher and even went so far as to state, in the essay "The Novels of George Meredith", that fiction cannot be philosophical without running the risk of becoming didactic: "when philosophy is not consumed in a novel, […] it is safe to say that there is something wrong with the philosophy or with the novel or with both" (Woolf 2009: 550). Beauvoir studied philosophy at the Sorbonne in Paris and, despite producing several philosophical essays in her lifetime, she always cast Sartre as the 'real' philosopher and herself as a literary writer.

[2] On H. M. Parshley's 1953 translation as well as its first and only retranslation, cf. Mann & Ferrari 2017, which contains the field-defining articles by Margaret A. Simons, Toril Moi, Nancy Bauer, and Meryl Altman, as well as newly commissioned essays about the 2008 translation.

[3] There *was* a Judith Shakespeare, but that was the name of one of his daughters. That this is not necessarily an argument proposed by Woolf herself has been emphasised time and again in recent scholarship, where the contradictory theses proposed in the text are shown to create a tension between different strands of (subsequent) feminist theory. As is clear from an analysis of the text, there are different narrators (Mary Seton, Mary Beton, Mary Carmichael, etc) performing in *A Room of One's Own*, a fact which destabilises any attempt to settle on what Woolf 'really' thought (Marcus 2010; Favre 2020).

[4] To my knowledge, even in the French periodical press, *A Room of One's Own* was rarely discussed in depth before its first French translation in 1951. Although the essay would, in 1930, be part of the English literature syllabus for the *Agrégation de l'enseignement secondaire des jeunes filles* (cf. the 1st July 1930 issue of *L'Enseignement public. Revue pédagogique*), it seems to be referenced in depth only in Marguerite Yerta Méléra's somewhat scathing critique of it in the French conservative paper *L'Action française* on 13th March 1930 (cf. Méléra) and in Marcelle Auclair's article on women's need for solitude in *Notre temps* on 23rd October 1933 (cf. Auclair). Even so staunch an Anglophile as André Maurois understandably made but a passing reference to it in *Les Nouvelles littéraires* on 11th May 1935 in his article on the important developments in English literature of the previous 25 years (cf. Maurois).

[5] The original French quote is "pour qu'un texte d'une littérature dominante soit reçu dans une autre littérature dominante, il faut que celle-ci puisse l'accueillir, que la tradition dans laquelle elle s'inscrive soit constituée, que les lecteurs possèdent un cadre de compréhension dans lequel la situer. C'est pourquoi, si les romans modernistes de Woolf sont immédiatement traduits, les lecteurs français devront attendre 1951 pour lire *Une chambre à soi*." The translation is my own.

[6] "In England, Virginia Woolf notes, women writers always engender hostility. Dr Johnson compared them to 'a dog's walking on his hinder legs. It is not done well; but you are surprised to find it done at all'" (Beauvoir 2011: 124).

[7] "She could also be imagined as a happy prostitute, a Moll Flanders, as Daniel Defoe portrayed her: but she would never have run a theatre and written plays" (Beauvoir 2011: 124).

[8] Although Woolf herself wrote in her essay "Defoe", included in the first *Common Reader* (1925), that "The advocates of women's rights would hardly care, perhaps, to claim Moll Flanders and Roxana among their patron saints; and yet it is clear that Defoe not only intended them to speak some very modern doctrines upon the subject, but placed them in circumstances where their peculiar hardships are displayed in such a way as to elicit our sympathy", thereby highlighting the complexity of Moll Flanders' character (Woolf 1994: 103), subsequent critics sometimes found this representation wanting, as noted by Lois A. Chaber (cf. Chaber 1982: 213, n.9-10). For a recent reappraisal of Defoe's potential patriarchal bias in his representation of Moll Flanders (and Roxana) with an eye to the complex narrative (and political) stratifications of the two texts, cf. Pollak 2009.

[9] "either she would be brought back to her family and married off by force; or seduced, abandoned, and dishonoured, she would commit suicide out of despair" (Beauvoir 2011: 123f.).

[10] A more generous approach to this addition by Beauvoir would perhaps see in her "dishonoured" a class-marked euphemism.

[11] In her posthumously published, unfinished novel *From Man to Man* (1926), Olive Schreiner had already complained: "what of the possible Shakespeares we might have had […] stifled out without one line written, simply because, being of the weaker sex, life gave no room for action and grasp on life?" (Schreiner 1926: 219).

[12] For a different take on Woolf's view of early modern writers and the Elizabethan age more broadly, a take predicated upon the notion of resonance, cf. Fernald 2006: 51-84. Interestingly, Fernald does not limit herself to providing an historical counterpoint to Woolf's (narrator's) view in *A Room* but maps out the peculiar trajectory provided by her essays on the Elizabethan period in order to better situate her readings within Woolf's own thought as it evolves through the decades. Fernald's approach overtly "benefits from and moves beyond the strict historicism of Margaret J. M. Ezell and the feminist psychoanalytics of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar" (ivi: 2) and shows what kind of interesting enquiries may be produced when literary criticism departs from the straight and narrow of 'strict historicism' and 'feminist psychoanalytics' in a new century.

[13] Although Simons and Moi were understandably trenchant in their criticism of Parshley's heavy editorial hand, Yolanda Patterson's and Anna Bogic's subsequent research into the translator's correspondence with the editorial team at Alfred Knopf has shown that, unlike the lack of philosophical training, the heavy editorial hand may not in fact have been his (cf. Patterson 2002; Bogic 2009; 2010).

[14] For a recent, insightful overview of this aspect of the reception of Beauvoir's philosophical work, cf. Kirkpatrick 2019.

[15] Although Beauvoir features in this anthology as a sort of 'mother' who paved the way for (some) subsequent theorists, Moses highlights how the editors' introduction put Psych et Po centre stage in the MFL despite their effective marginality, thereby turning French *women authors* into French *feminists* in one fell swoop (cf. Moses 1998: 255f.).

[16] She never references the text directly, but she does quote Beauvoir's *The Force of Circumstance* in English translation, so she probably read *The Second Sex* in Parshley's translation despite her knowledge of French, as evidenced in the same essay by references to Althusser in the original.

[17] "dans la perspective que j'adopte – celle de Heidegger, de Sartre, de Merleau-Ponty – si le corps n'est pas une *chose*, il est une situation : c'est notre prise sur le monde et l'esquisse de nos projets" (Beauvoir 1986: 75); "in the position I adopt – that of Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty – […] if the body is not a *thing*, it is a situation: it is our grasp on the world and the outline for our projects" (Beauvoir

2011: 46). To be sure, the notion of 'situation' cannot be reduced to that of the body, especially in earlier texts, as pointed out by Keefe (1996); however, the body is overtly defined "a situation" in *The Second Sex* and, as Moi points out, this argument has far-reaching consequences for feminism in that it is "not only a completely original contribution to feminist theory, but a powerful and sophisticated alternative to contemporary sex and gender theories" (Moi 1999: 59).

[18] As Moses remarks, "Hélène Cixous figures in these [French feminist] histories as the best known of the authors closely associated with Psych et po. Luce Irigaray's work in the 1970s is likened to Cixous's: both were grounded in psychoanalytic theory and stressed the specificity of woman, but following a 'violent rupture' between Irigaray and Psych et po in late 1974, the two theorists kept their distance. Julia Kristeva never associated herself with the MLF or with feminism – indeed, she often railed against both in the popular press – and these histories make no mention whatsoever of her or her work." (Moses 1998: 245)

[19] It ought to be noted, however, that the group was relying on a flawed translation of *To the Lighthouse*, the one produced by Giulia Celenza in 1934, reissued by other publishers in subsequent decades, where patriarchal language was one of the additions the translation made to the text. We have to wait for Nadia Fusini's 1992 retranslation to get a better sense of Woolf's prose in Italian. Interestingly, Fusini's version is also the first to translate the title more faithfully as "Al faro" rather than "Gita al faro" (cf. Bolchi 2021b).

[20] "If woman discovers herself as the inessential, and never turns into the essential, it is because she does not bring about this transformation herself. Proletarians say 'we'. So do blacks. Positing themselves as subjects, they thus transform the bourgeois or whites into 'others'. Women [...] do not use 'we'; men say 'women' and women adopt this word to refer to themselves; but they do not posit themselves authentically as Subjects." (Beauvoir 2011: 8). Unlike what the translators chose to do here, I capitalise 'black' to emphasise how the category of race is derived from a cultural and ideological – rather than simply physical or biological – context of white supremacy.

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