

Olay
THE SECOND SEX, by Simone de Beauvoir, originally published in France by Gallimard in 1949. published by Knopf in ~~1953~~ 1953.

Reading this book now made me appreciate greatly Betty Friedan's observations about de Beauvoir in the Saturday Review (June 14, 1975), ~~following~~ following BF's dialogue with her. ~~Friedan's~~ Friedan's phrase that de Beauvoir's views about women were "sterile, cold, an abstraction", that she did not identify with ordinary women were very much what I felt about SECOND SEX.

Indeed, I would say that what came through for me was that de Beauvoir does not like women at all, and very much wished that she had been a man. ^{More important, no doubt,} on Sartre's existentialism is abundantly clear. Likewise her mechanical view of what "socialism" ~~would~~ be.

Chapter I
In Book I, Part I ("Destiny"), I would have thought that ~~she~~ I would have held some interest for me (The Data of Biology), just because I have generally liked layman's "science" -- but she somehow managed to deal even with these "scientific facts" with anti-female prejudice. And her descriptions of menstruation and menopause convinced me that she was really sorry she was a woman. The view on p.28 that after menopause women are some sort of "third sex" -- "while they are not males, they are no longer females" is pitiful! ~~she~~ ^{the whole point to her having} gone into these details of biological data ~~is~~ apparently (p.33) just to show us that "biology is not enough to answer: why is woman the Other?" Which led me to wonder against whom she was arguing?

Chapter II (the Psychoanalytic Point of View) -- ~~she~~ boils down to declining to accept Freud's "method" of psychoanalysis without rejecting Freud's contributions (p.44) -- and finally she gets around to talk about "liberty" -- i.e., that she will place woman in a world of values and give her behavior a dimension of liberty -- but from this page to the end the "dimension of liberty" is never seen as a dimension of the subject, woman. Woman is always the object that terrible things are done to (primarily because she supposedly allows it to be that way.)

Chapter II (Pt. of View of Historical Materialism) supposedly takes up Engels. But with appreciation that Engels certainly isn't Marx, I don't feel that SdB understands Engels whatsoever, e.g. (p.49) "The problem of woman is reduced to the problem of her capacity for labor." She says that Homo economicus is an abstraction, which makes Engels' account superficial.

Now we come to what ^{her} explanation for the "phenomenon" of oppression: (p.52): it is a "result of the imperialism of the human consciousness seeking always to exercise its sovereignty in objective fashion." There is some sort of "original aspiration to dominate the Other." And then we come to her real opinion of women: the slaves were always conscious of their oppression, the proletariat has always been in revolt, but for women? "No desire for revolution dwells within her." (p. 52)

Having rejected the "sexual monism of Freud" and the "economic monism of Engels" SdB will show us that the "existentialist foundation...alone enable us to understand... human life."

Part II ("History") we get over and over and over the stress about how women have always been "handicapped". She ~~refers~~ refers (p. 59) to Hegel and says his definition of the relation of master to slave applies better to the relation of man to woman. But there is not a whiff of the dialect of struggle to overcome contradiction (and oppression) on a single page of this entire book that I could see. ^{On p. 64} she refers to Bachofen and Engels again, and to "the great historical defeat of the feminine sex". On p. 75 we are told that "woman was dethroned by the advent of private property and her lot through the centuries has been bound up with private property."

14407

She will stick to French history as "typical" and we do have considerable "history" given, especially about "women of rank and of wit" but more about men as "leading feminists". (p.99). Not until p. 101 (on the French Revolution) do we get any mention of women in revolt. (Madame Roland, Lucile Desmoulin, Charlotte Corday) -- and "there was some feminist agitation". Olympe de Gouges, who proposed in 1789 a "Declaration of the Rights of Women".

Index

On p. 103 is the reference to Fourier: "With the utopian socialism of Saint-Simon, Fourier, and Cabet was born the utopia of the 'free woman'". ... Fourier, for example, confused the emancipation of women with the rehabilitation of the flesh, demanding for every individual the right to yield to the call of passion and wishing to replace marriage with love; he considered woman not as a person but only in her amorous function."

On p. 104 the reference to Proudhon: "He broke the alliance between feminism and socialism, relegating the honest woman to the home and to dependence on the male and attempting to demonstrate her inferiority. 'Housewife or harlot' was the choice he offered. There is a pt. that the letters of his own wife were one long lament."

p. 105 has sources on conditions in the mills for women in early 19th c. and quotes Marx from Capital.

p. 106 -- We hear again about unionization beginning in 1848 but advancing so slowly because of the "tradition of submission", "lack of solidarity and collective consciousness" of women. And on and on about the "resigned inertia of female workers". And on p. 107 (on women getting lower pay and male workers being opposed to the women) "it is understandable" (and "only when women have been integrated into the life of trade-unionism have they been able to defend their own interests and cease endangering those of the working class as a whole." !

Right!

(I did find interesting some of the history on birth control and abortion, p/10 ff)

p. 113 Léon Richier is presented as the true founder of feminism, in 1848 organizing an international congress on the "Rights of Woman" of 1869. In 1879 came the Socialist Congress proclaiming the equality of the sexes. (women's emancipation seen as dependent on liberation of workers in general, in contrast to bourgeois women seeking rights within the system existing.)

Man?

p. 115 SdB takes up American movement -- with the very mildest reference to the fact that women, in laying claim to political rights in 1830 ~~undertook~~ "undertook a campaign in favor of the Negroes". Lucretia Mott, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Susan B. Anthony (also Emerson and Lincoln) are mentioned -- but only the activity around the vote is discussed, not the anti-slavery roots and not a single Negro woman.

1867 = The terrible power of love

on p. 116 comes the snide reference to Rosa L as being "beside Liebknecht". In this whole section there is no depth, no scope, it is disgustingly superficial and with no feeling of any mass movement, or even for the "leaders"... anywhere, whether France, America or in Russia. Russia supposedly has made the "most sweeping advances" for the feminist movement (!) p. 117 -- even to "many women workers becoming Stakhanovites????!

These pages are the most disgusting in the whole book.

p. 118 "The whole of feminine history has been man-made." + "Woman problem is a man's problem"

p. 119. "Some isolated individuals -- Sappho, Christine dePisan, Mary Wollstonecraft, Olympe de Gouge -- have protested... and occasionally mass demonstrations have been made; but neither the Roman matrons uniting against the Oppian law nor the Anglo-Saxon Suffragettes could have succeeded... unless the men had been disposed toward it."

p.121 "If we compare Joan of Arc, Mme Roland, Flora Tristan, with Richelieu, Danton, Lenin, we see that their greatness is primarily subjective; they are exemplary figures rather than historical agents": (What non-sequiter choices of figures she uses?)... "The great man springs from the masses and is propelled orward by circumstances; the masses of women are on the margin of history and circumstances are an obstacle for each individual, not a springboard."

Yech.

Fart!!! Myths (The taboos about monstration made me think of Barbara Burke. SdB seems to have an obsession about this bodily function. I began to pity her.)

I could not see where the 5 authors she took up were "typical", but that may be my ignorance of literature (Montherlant; DH Lawrence; Claudel; Breton; Stendhal) ????

Book 11 bored us to tears. This may have been shocking and epochmaking in '49, but it seems like pale stuff today. And takes up interminable pages with case histories. By now it is so out of date, who would bet an eye? It may have been intended to show her "erudition" or that she did research or that the book had "scope" -- but even in '49 did it really need all this??

p.542 again, her view of "maturity" and "menopause" is horrible. She calls aging "mutilation" and I was reminded of the strange remark she was quoted as having made (Weekend Magazine of Sept. 30, 1978) "There is something in my body that is dead. That's good, I think, because when I contemplate these old women who are still twitchy -- I don't blame them but they must suffer a lot of embarrassment." But she is 70 when she is saying this. She was only 41 when she wrote Second Sex.

This terrible fear of aging is not what seems to me to be a normal reaction to having passed, say, the 50th birthday, (when the idea that "time is not forever" and there is still so much to accomplish has an urgency it didn't have before 50.) This is really morbid! (She feels the fatal touch of death itself." Hooray for the Princess Metternich who said (when asked "at what age a woman ceases to feel the torments of the flesh") "I do not know, I am only 65."

Somehow nowhere in the pages do you see the presence either of working women or of genuine thinkers. All you see are middle class women (some) and the "exceptional" woman.

And most of all you never see the real revolt, the true history of women.

Ch. XXI (Woman's Situation and Character) again exhibits her terrible attitude to women, especially on p. 566: "Their ideas are mere attitudes". "Her faith is blind!" "They accept what is". ~~They~~ Their "distressing trait is resignation". The best she can say about women is that they have "stoical courage" and "patience" which are only other forms of "resignation". p.567 "They prefer compromise and adjustment to revolution." "For one Flora Trista or Louise Michel, how many timid housewives begged their husbands not to take chances." And others ad nauseum.

Her conclusion on p. 591 that woman must "reject the limitation of her situation and work for her liberation" comes as a preachy sermon from on high. Ch. XXV (Independent Woman) reveals her vulgar interpretation of socialism. And when she says (p. 672) "as long as woman has to struggle to become a human being, she cannot become a creator", it is the exact opposite. Creating to her must mean only works of literature or art? There is no recognition that a new world means a different kind of man as well as a different kind of woman. And when she says it is only possible through social evolution instead of revolution (p.683) that tells a lot. She ends with Marx's pt. on Man/Woman, but totally twists its meaning. IN SHORT, YOU NEVER SEE WOMAN AS REASON OR FORCE OF REVOLUTION, ONLY AS "OTHER".

p.670 of From Marie Curie to the Law: "There is a schabackler as a result of step by step & continual retreat" Lady

14409

The Second Sex by Simone de Beauvoir (1949)

One of the fundamental reasons for being so opposed to feminists is that not only do they know nothing of philosophy, or at least do not believe that that had a direct relationship, but when they do bring it in, it is always as the product of an individual, a great individual. So if you do not find the equivalent of a Descartes, or a Marx or a Hegel--or Sartre?--then the creativity in philosophy of liberation gets lost. On the other hand, when there finally is an original theoretician as, say, RL, she gets demeaned not because of philosophy may be wrong, (and I certainly think her economics is) but because of her association with men personal or political, she certainly gets put into 2nd place.

So that Simone de Beauvoir places her ^{Leibnecht} (116) or she is judged "ugly" (671) as if that, rather than her mind, is what has created and rightly such an important place in history for her. And Sheila Rowbotham doesn't even bother to mention her at all, as if unless you were directly involved in women's work, though you may have been the one to have inspired the whole women's socialist movement that Clara Zetkin headed, you don't count.

The only thing worthwhile is the historic periods she mentions in the Ch. 8 "Since the French Revolution: the Job and the Vote." (R101) Olympe de Gouges, 1789. "Declaration of the Rights of Women" (R102) Mary Wollstonecraft's declaration. (R103) on Utopian socialists, Fourier (even though he was for "equality", it was actually on free love "he considered a woman not as a person but only in her amorous function" On the other hand, individual women like Mme de Staël and George Sands who made it in the man's world kept themselves far apart from the women's movement. She doesn't mention the 1848 revolutions, though it is from France that the women played the greatest part, including the publication of a daily paper Les Voix de Femmes. (R106) she mentions the number of women workers unionized and otherwise. She doesn't mention them as revolutions, 1905, 1917 but as to number of workers (R113) she mention the feminist congress held in 1892. (R114) Pope Benedict XV in 1919 pronounced in favor of votes for women which all goes to show what happens when there's a revolution and counter-revolution has lost. New Zealand gave women full rights in 1893. (R115) she mentions Louise Otto as the 1st German feminist, Clara Zetkin in 1892 was a party leader and then began specializing in women workers organizing. (R118) The horror of that ScB is that she shows her fellow-traveling with Comm. so that "the Russian woman is in a singular condition which would repay the close study that circumstances unfortunately prevent me from taking." and she plays up Stakhonovism as a victory.

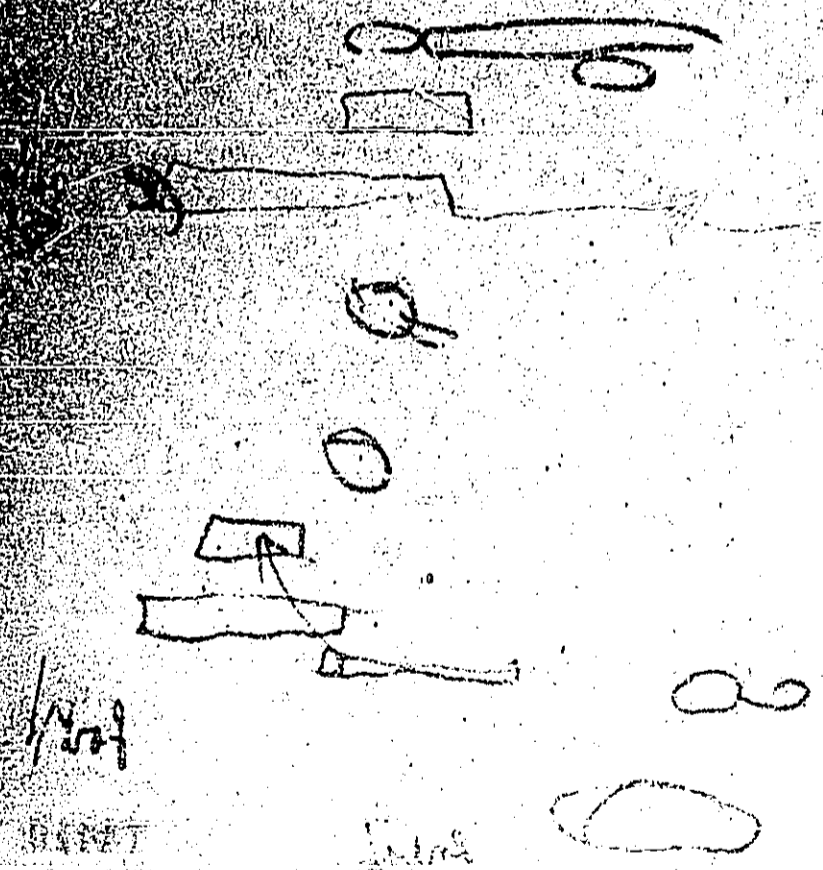
End!! over 14410

ROLL NO.

3/2/80
118) "the whole of feminist history has been man-made."
119) She evidently considers that no women's movement could have succeeded with their pressure unless the men had been quite disposed to submit to it."
121-2) "Thus if we compare Joan of Arc, Mme Roland, Flora Tristan, with Richelieu, Danton, Robespierre, we see that their greatness is primarily subjective; they are exemplary figures rather than historical agents."
130) The most undialectical statement of all is trying to blame it on Hegel at that, she writes about "implacable dialectic of master and slave" as if that didn't involve creativity as well as opposition.

(copy)

Continued
Fallon



14411