

Table of Contents:

Introduction / Judith Thurman

Translators' note

**Volume 1: Facts And Myths**

Introduction

7f Women are not a minority like Blacks or Jews

8 "They have no past, no history, no religion of their own; and unlike the proletariat, they have no solidarity of labor or interest; they even lack their own space that makes communities of American blacks, the Jews in ghettos or the workers in Saint-Denis or Renault factories."

9 "The tie that binds her to her oppressors is unlike any other. ...This is the fundamental characteristic of woman: she is the Other at the heart of a whole whose two components are necessary to each other."

12 Compares women to Blacks & Jews: liberated, but kept in place by upper status white gentile men. They are "good" when they behave. The "true woman" is "frivolous, infantile, irresponsible."

15 Men cannot know women's situation fully because they are not embedded in it. Women must tell the story.

*Part 1: Destiny. Biological data*

The psychoanalytic point of view

Basically, rejects the Freudian perspective. Women have agency & freedom, & she rejects Freud's purely male perspective.

The point of view of historical materialism

62 Technical developments cancel out physiological differences. Women don't have to be as strong as men if there are machines.

63 Engel's thesis in *The Origins of the Family* – a version of the agricultural revolution thesis. In hunter-gatherer societies, women's strength & productivity was equivalent to men's. When agriculture starts, she is subordinated, and oppression of other men also emerges. Property emerges, as does patriarchy: goods are inherited through the male

line. Men become polygamous & possess women. Her only revenge is through infidelity. "Her social oppression is the consequence of her economic oppression."

64 But Engels' account is superficial, and he doesn't know how/why the agricultural revolution occurred.

66 In particular, woman is complicit in the arrangement, becoming the Other. And her worth cannot be reduced to labor: she also serves in *reproduction*, birth.

*Part 2: History*

71f In hunter-gatherer societies, women may have possessed similar strength as men and have been similarly productive.

74-5 But this productivity, maintaining life, is not the point. The point is in taking life, in killing. Men are the warriors. "The worst curse on woman is her exclusion from warrior expeditions; it is not in giving life but in risking his life that man raises himself above the animal; this is why throughout humanity, superiority has been granted not the sex that gives birth but to the one that kills." Existentialism teaches that Ideas & Becoming transcend mere physical life, and men create that transcendence by not remaining in mere reproduction of life, but in conceiving of new ways of being. She cites Hegel's master-slave dialectic as a model for men-women.

126 The French Revolution did not change the bourgeois arrangement because it was a bourgeois revolution. "It must be pointed out that during the entire ancient regime working-class women as a sex enjoyed the most independence. A woman had the right to run a business, and she possessed all the necessary capacities to exercise her trade autonomously."

127 Noble & bourgeois women were parasitic. Only in a working class revolution will it be possible for women to gain the capacities that the former never attained.

130 "The bourgeois woman clings to the chains because she clings to her class privileges." Liberation would mean she would have to work. Thus, she feels no solidarity with working-class women.

132 Woman regains economic importance in the industrial revolution because it reduces the physical requirements of production.

135 But this created no solidarity among working class men & women, because women were able & willing to work for lower pay. Similar to Blacks in the US.

136f But over & above this was woman's reproductive question: she could not work if she was constantly pregnant & having babies. The Malthusian movement from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century led the search for contraception & smaller families, & even abortion. Christianity opposed abortion because it endowed the embryo with a soul.

Beauvoir, Second Sex, reading notes

140 Calls for political rights emerged with John Stuart Mill.

149 Reviews role of property & then technology & contraception in the development of woman's role in society. Women never formed a separate caste; she was always complicit in the arrangements.

153 Women have a harder time reconciling work & family life than men, who consider childcare & housekeeping beneath them.

153-5 Brief overview of social classes in modern society. Peasant women are reduced to beasts of burden. Female shop-keepers & business owners have always been privileged & are more equal to men. [cf. Glikl of Hameln] Women workers & employees have a hard time maintaining work & household labor. Women in the learned professions still have household chores despite domestic servants & labor-saving household appliances; she is also paid less than her male counterparts. Women retain the right to be paid for sex, whether as prostitutes or as wives; and the bourgeois woman desires to hold this parasitic position.

*Part 3: Myths. Montherlant or the bread of disgust*

271 The empirical woman, like all oppressed people "deliberately dissimulates," lies, deceives. "She is prudent, hypocritical, playacting." But the eternal feminine Mystery is deeper. "In fact, it is immediately implied in the mythology of the absolute Other."

D H Lawrence or phallic pride

Claudel or the handmaiden of the lord

Breton or poetry

Stendhal or romancing the real

## **Volume 2: Lived Experience**

Introduction

279 Women are brought up in a feminine world, the world of the family. Beauvoir will examine this & look at what "escape mechanisms are permitted her."

*Part 1: Formative years. Childhood*

The girl

Sexual initiation

The lesbian

*Part 2: Situation. The married woman*

The mother

Social life

Prostitutes and hetairas

From maturity to old age

Woman's situation and character

638 Why does woman's "character" appear to be constant over the ages? "She is argumentative, she is cautious and petty, she does not have the sense either of truth or of accuracy, she lacks morality, she is vulgarly self-serving, selfish, she is a liar and an actress. There is some truth in all these affirmations. But the types of behaviors denounced are not dictated to woman by her hormones or predestined in her brain's compartments: they are suggested in negative form by her situation." Beauvoir will seek "to grasp the Eternal Feminine in her economic, social, and historical conditioning as a whole." Even though the feminine world is sometimes contrasted with the masculine, "it must be reiterated that women have never formed an autonomous and closed society; they are integrated into the group governed by males, where they occupy a subordinate position." They have mechanical, not organic solidarity.

646 A free individual accepts blame for failures, but woman know her failures are caused by men, so she furiously rejects all suggested remedies. "Suggesting solutions to a woman determined to complain does not help: no solution seems acceptable. She wants to live her situation exactly as she lives it: in impotent anger."

647 "She is always *against* someone or something." She does not move away from the husband or man she feels hostile toward: "She wants to have the man she hates nearby to make him pay. Choosing to recriminate is choosing not to get rid of one's misfortunes but to wallow in them; her supreme consolation is to set herself up as martyr. Life and men have conquered her: she will make a victory of this very defeat. Thus, as she did in childhood, she quickly gives way to the frenzy of tears and scenes."

649 Much feminine behavior must be interpreted as protest: cheating on her husband, spendthrift behavior, being late.

650 Passive aggressive resistance: woman's famous "contrariness." "As she does not possess an autonomous domain, she cannot put forward truths or positive values different from those that males assert; she can only negate them." Limits of male technological power: "There is a whole region of human experience that the male deliberately chooses to ignore because he fails to *think* it: this experience, the woman *lives* it."

651 Principle of Negation. Woman disagrees with male logic because it's formulated against her. "She does not have the means to create another society: yet she does not agree with this one." "The woman does not positively think that the truth is *other* than what men claim: rather, she holds that there *is* no truth."

653 Women are cynical about lofty male virtues. "They particularly snigger when virtuous males reproach them for being calculating, actresses, liars: they know well that no other way is open to them." "The woman has been assigned the role of parasite: all parasites are necessarily exploiters. ...She uses the service of sex to ensure her benefits. ...Man even requires her to playact: he wants her to be the *Other*." But even though she complies, she is still "watching and judging him."

654 These are the same dynamics as those of the servant. "She has the same cynicism because she sees the man from head to toe as a valet sees his master."

655 Emancipation, the negation of the negation, is blocked. Women do not build a counter universe where they can defy males; they just complain.

664 Any women's liberation must be collective. There are some women who think they can achieve it as individuals, hence the woman in love or the mystic.

*Part 3: Justifications. The narcissist*

The woman in love

The mystic

*Part 4: Toward liberation*

Independent woman

721 Work can give woman a measure of freedom. "The system based on her dependence collapses as soon as she ceases to be a parasite." However, enfranchisement and work alone are not sufficient for total liberation. "Only in a socialist world would the woman who has one be sure of the other. Today, the majority of workers are exploited."

723 "There are quite a lot of privileged women today who have gained economic and social autonomy in their professions." But such women are still in a man's world.

731 Masochism might seem like a way out.

735 But motherhood remains an almost unsolvable problem, tho in the US & GB, she can refuse it with contraception or abortion.

741 For one category of women, their careers affirm their femininity: actresses, dancers, & singers. Their work also gives them sexual affirmation. They do risk imbalance due to their narcissism.

742 Literature and art also promise salvation, but without the risks of narcissism. She can express herself through these media. However, writing & art risk feelings of isolation.

744 And women in literature & art need perseverance; but then they may "remain divided between their narcissism and an inferiority complex."

747 Journalism may also be a viable choice. Women's perspectives are unique and can't be replicated by men.

749 But in all these endeavors, women are still in danger in a man's world. They can't go out travelling alone & seeking adventures as young men can.

### *Conclusion*

753f Summary of much of the above. Woman's castration desires are not so much to rob man of his transcendence as to have it for herself.

754 "All oppression creates a state of war. This particular case is no exception." But today, women are trying, not to imprison men, but to escape prison themselves.

755 Women's emancipation requires that she be treated as a subject as well as an object, a Self as well as an Other. When she "makes a weapon of her weakness," she is trying to assert her Selfhood, even if it is an unfair way, because the situation is "imposed on her." "The conflict will last as long as men and women do not recognize each other as peers, that is, as long as femininity is perpetuated as such."

755f Blame is useless because it is a vicious circle. Each sex feels itself a victim of the other. A solution would be beneficial because the "war does not benefit anyone; but the complexity of this whole business comes from the fact that each camp is its enemy's accomplice."

760 Communism as a solution. "A world where men and women would be equal is easy to imagine because it is exactly the one the Soviet revolution *promised*," tho it has not been accomplished. It promised equal childhoods, jobs, salaries; erotic freedom, marital freedom, free choice of motherhood; maternity leave and guaranteed support for children.

763-4 This is not utopian. Freedom creates freedom. "Freedom can break the circle; let blacks vote and they become worthy of the vote; give woman responsibilities and she knows how to assume them." [cf. Tocqueville & Mill on citizenship]

Beauvoir, Second Sex, reading notes

765 Still, certain differences will always remain between men & women: their experiences of their bodies, of their sexuality, of their children.