



BRILL



brill.com/sdbs

Editor's Introduction / Présentation du numéro

What We Talk about When We Talk about Privilege

Claudia Bouliane | ORCID: 0009-0001-8101-0897

Université d'Ottawa, Ottawa, ON, Canada

cboulian@uottawa.ca

Could it be a sign of the times? Although we did not put out a call for a special issue, many articles recently submitted to the journal converged on the same main topics: right-wing thought and privilege. One might think that the abnegation of women's selfhood required by certain forms of religion or the right to choose abortion would be long-outdated themes by now. But they feel more relevant than ever, and Beauvoir's writings on them are still necessary to get a better sense of what we can do to resist the forces that compromise our freedom. Forty years after her passing, *Le Deuxième Sexe* has finally received a canonical Pléiade collection, and her feminist texts and interviews are gathered in an anthology, *Une fois que les femmes ont ouvert les yeux. Écrits et paroles féministes 1947–1985*.¹ These are both incredible literary feats achieved by the ever-hardworking duo composed of Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir and Esther Demoulin, and these publications feel so timely. It appears that we once again need to *open our eyes* to the situations—political, social, economic, ideological—taking place before us and act on them, because *once* we see injustices being committed, we must unveil them for others to join in our fight.

Beauvoir performs this unveiling through thorough research, accumulating compelling data to support and illustrate her arguments; facts to oppose myths. Following her dialectical method, skillfully brought to light by Demoulin in her Pléiade introduction, aimed at “singularizing the universal,” her writings reveal the deep articulation between systemic structures—such as patriarchy

¹ Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe*, ed. Esther Demoulin, Paris, Gallimard, 2026 [1949]. Subsequent references to this work are indicated by the abbreviation *DS*. Beauvoir, *Une fois que les femmes ont ouvert les yeux. Écrits et paroles féministes (1947–1985)* (Once women opened their eyes: Feminist writings and speeches), ed. Esther Demoulin and Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir, Paris, Gallimard, 2026. Subsequent references to this work are indicated by the abbreviation *UF*.

or colonialism—and individual lived experience.² While Beauvoir's scope is broad, and she has an uncommon capacity to digest an impressive quantity of information and make a structure emerge, she still pays close attention to meaningful details. And in her endeavor to cover the field of knowledge on a topic as completely as possible, she never neglects features that have historically been deemed unsuitable for discussion. Notoriously, reflecting on patriarchal domination as a structure, she delves into the minutiae of female anatomy or the various possible sexual relationships women can have. Just as she was not afraid to talk about sex, she would not refrain from talking about money, another taboo, especially for women.³ We can actually see in her the original audacity she celebrated in Violette Leduc in her foreword to *La Bâtarde*, whose draft is brilliantly analyzed by Marine Rouch and Alexandre Antolin in this very issue: "In these days [1964], there is an abundance of sexual confessions. It is much rarer for a writer to speak frankly about money. Violette Leduc makes no secret of the importance it has for her: it too is a materialization of her relations with other people."⁴ It was even rarer more than two decades earlier. Indeed, Beauvoir, who has written extensively about power and privilege, and specifically about how they are justified in right-wing idealism or, for instance, "American abstraction," has been preoccupied, even before her Marxist turn, with questions of money. For privilege is rarely articulated as such; rarer still is the recognition of the role money plays in making it possible. Yet it is precisely in the relation to money that one of the most effective operations of right-wing thought takes place: rendering legitimate—indeed natural—what in fact stems from historically constituted relations of domination.

While prevalent in Beauvoir's writings, money per se—not the economic mechanisms creating inequities—has seldom been discussed by Beauvoir scholars. Donald L. Hatcher, in his *Simone de Beauvoir Studies* article with a provocative title, "Beauvoir on Sex, Love and Money: Money Can't Buy Love, but It Sure Makes for Better Sex," reflects on the positive effects financial indepen-

² *DS*, pp. XXIV–XXXII.

³ And we could say that she completes the trio of traditional taboos—death, sex, and money—by later recounting the agony and death of both her mother and Jean-Paul Sartre, the second of which was often judged distasteful. Maybe this propensity to tackle proscribed topics is the positive counterpart to the lack of distinction Toril Moi identified in Beauvoir's petite-bourgeois habitus, following Pierre Bourdieu's theory. Toril Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2nd ed., 2008 [1994], pp. 89–92; Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1984 [1979].

⁴ Simone de Beauvoir, foreword to *La Bâtarde*, by Violette Leduc, trans. Derek Coltman, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965 [1964], v–xviii, p. xvi.

dence and meaningful labor have on the private dimensions of a woman's life, mainly insofar as they give her freedom and a sense of self-worth.⁵ And Shannon M. Mussett, thinking through how mystifications serve to justify oppressions, makes a brief Simmelian argument concerning Beauvoir's remarks on money as a means becoming an end in *America Day by Day*:

Just as time, when divorced from the past and any meaningful engagement with the future, results in the abstraction of an empty "now," money too serves as the abstract arbiter of value, reducing everything to the barest common denominator. Money, rather than concrete achievement (making, building, solving, inventing), becomes the standard by which humans are valued and judged.⁶

Although she does not refer to the text explicitly, the way Mussett discusses money is indebted to *The Philosophy of Money*.⁷ Both scholars make good arguments but consider money mainly as something of an abstract means rather than as a motor of tangible social dynamics.

Yet we know how the social dimensions of money affected Beauvoir's life and philosophy. All her readers are familiar with her origin story as the granddaughter of a banker, to whom her father had announced early in life that she would have no dowry, after the irreparable financial loss of 1917, and that she would therefore have to earn her own living. We recognize how rarely a woman born into the bourgeoisie—since women have, of course, always worked—would aspire to a profession that would allow her to support herself.⁸ And we're also aware that French married women could not open a bank account or sign checks without their husband's authorization before 1965, a historic marker of gender and wealth inequality in the country. So, we can appreciate how special it was for Beauvoir, freshly out of the Sorbonne, to earn the exact same salary as her companion as a philosophy teacher in secondary education, a privilege that

5 Donald L. Hatcher, "Beauvoir on Sex, Love and Money: Money Can't Buy Love, but It Sure Makes for Better Sex," *Simone de Beauvoir Studies*, vol. 13, 1996, pp. 56–65.

6 Shannon M. Mussett, "Time, Money, and Race: Simone de Beauvoir on American Abstraction," *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy – Revue de la philosophie française et de langue française*, vol. 28, no. 2, 2020, 1–22, p. 7; Simone de Beauvoir, *America Day by Day*, trans. Carol Cosman, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1999 [1948].

7 Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, 3rd ed. trans. Tom Bottomore and David Frisby, ed. David Frisby, London, Routledge, 2004 [1900].

8 Sylvie Schweitzer, *Les femmes ont toujours travaillé. Une histoire du travail des femmes aux XIXe et XXe siècles* (Women have always worked. A history of women's work in the 19th and 20th centuries), Paris, Odile Jacob, 2002.

gave her an exceptional vantage point from which to conceive of the necessity of being financially independent in order to experience authentic freedom.⁹ This led to the several passages in *The Second Sex* where Beauvoir insists on the crucial importance of economic autonomy and thus on paid work: "It is through work that woman has been able, to a large extent, to close the gap separating her from the male; work alone can guarantee her concrete freedom."¹⁰ In her introduction to the new anthology of Beauvoir's feminist writings and interviews, Esther Demoulin underlines this theme that runs through the texts and explains gendered power relations: "Above all, it is necessary, in her view, to profoundly transform the economic infrastructure of society."¹¹

Even before the seminal essay, Beauvoir had portrayed in the short stories forming her first novel, *Quand prime le spirituel*, young women working and thus manipulating money in their jobs, earning it and spending it—which could have been part of the reason for the book's refusal by the editor, as it was still infrequent to acknowledge such realities in literature. We first discover Marcelle Drouffe, an idealistic social worker on rue de Ménilmontant, in the opening scene after the initial pages setting the action, "in her office, busy with accounts."¹² It is mentioned later that she is the breadwinner in her couple and the one who manages their expenses, a situation that gives her the right to react to her husband's bad spending habits: "[H]e forgot that it was she who earned the money he threw away so readily, but she could not remind him of the fact without looking mean."¹³ He knows it very well, in fact, and it makes him sour, as he throws it in her face during their parting quarrel: "'I know,' he said quickly. 'I eat the bread you earn by the sweat of your brow: but I do assure you it's very bitter bread.'"¹⁴ This unusual gendered power imbalance is the cause of the rupture of their marriage, which was anyway built on Denis's desire to avoid working by being in relationships with women who take care of him, while he pretends that money has no appeal for him and demonstrates contempt for those who care about it: "It's true that for you people these questions of

9 "When Simone de Beauvoir took up her first teaching position in Marseilles in 1931, she could expect to earn the same salary as Sartre in Le Havre, but that right had only been conquered four years earlier." Moi, *Making of an Intellectual Woman*, p. 73.

10 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 2010 [1949], p. 804.

11 *UF*, p. 20, my translation.

12 Simone de Beauvoir, *When Things of the Spirit Come First*, trans. Patrick O'Brian, New York, Pantheon Books, 1982 [1979], p. 17. Subsequent references to this work are indicated by the abbreviation *WTS*.

13 *WTS*, p. 38.

14 *WTS*, p. 43.

money count enormously. You must forgive me, but I've never been able to get used to that turn of mind."¹⁵ Money, when primarily in the hands of working women—"you people" is referring to both Marcelle and her widowed mother, who are struggling hard to keep the family financially afloat—is devalued and still meant to be spent by a man, who keeps his gendered privilege within the couple and dominates the family situation.

In her foundational study *The Social Meaning of Money*, Viviana A. Zelizer takes an innovative approach to the question, in opposition to previous thinkers of the utilitarian model like Max Weber, who posited that money was the "most abstract and 'impersonal' element that exists in human life," or Georg Simmel, who reduced money to a mere quantifiable value that "turned the world into an 'arithmetic problem,'" demonstrates how "money is not really fungible":¹⁶ "But money is neither culturally neutral nor socially anonymous. It may well 'corrupt' values and convert social ties into numbers, but values and social relations reciprocally transmute money by investing it with meaning and social patterns."¹⁷ Often focusing on the gendered dimension of the social ties of money through her historical survey, she demonstrates that there has been a paradox at the basis of the social construct of money when it comes to women. Although they have long been prohibited from earning it, they have often been the ones managing it in the family unit, especially in the middle and lower classes: "Women were thus caught in a strange predicament of being cashless money managers, expected to spend properly but denied control over money."¹⁸ Even the wage a woman earns does not have the same value, or the same name, or the same uses as the "serious money" that a man earns: women's salaries are notoriously lower for most of the same jobs, are discredited as "pin money," "butter money," or "pocket money," and should be entirely dedicated to housekeeping, as those salaries legally belonged to their husbands or fathers until 1965 in France.¹⁹ This seemed only natural given that women were thought to have not *responsibilities*, like men, but *vocations*.²⁰ No won-

15 WTS, p. 43.

16 Viviana A. Zelizer, *The Social Meaning of Money*, New York, Basic Books, 1994, pp. 6, 5; Max Weber, "Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. and ed. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, New York, Oxford University Press, 1971 [1946], 323–360, p. 331; Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, trans. and ed. Kurt H. Wolff, Glencoe, IL, Free Press, 1950 [1908], 409–424, p. 412.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 42; for the class discussion, see pp. 38–42.

19 *Ibid.*, pp. 27, 62.

20 This is an idea repeated throughout Claire Duchén's *Women's Rights and Women's Lives*

der, then, that Denis feels comfortable denigrating Marcelle and her mother for their pitiful efforts to bring money back home and experiences no guilt in spending it liberally: sure, he is a lazy, opportunistic jerk, but this attitude was socially accepted—and thus not much discussed. Beauvoir, in her first short story, unveils unfair domestic finances in their nakedness, potentially as provocatively as when she mentioned “venereal diseases.”²¹

The last story of the novel, that of Marcelle’s little sister Marguerite, the only one that is narrated in the first person and whose first line contains the title chosen for the book—although it’s Anne’s name that precedes the “things of the spirit”—explores more centrally the ambiguity of money as being not only a means to obtain freedom but also a tool for domination. Marguerite, belonging to a different generation than her older sister turned head of the family, has more of a pragmatic mind and a very distinct relationship to money, closer to that of men, perhaps a reason why she gets along with Denis. Just like him, she thinks money is meant to be spent. She feels trapped in her family and sees money as the key to opening the door to her freedom: “To escape and live according to Denis’ doctrine, money was needed; and that was difficult.”²² The first such door that she pushes open is that of a bar: “The first time I had ten francs to spend I went to have a drink at the bar of the Rotonde.”²³ To sustain this nightlife, Marguerite steals from Marcelle or extracts donations from her mother, supposedly for the charity to which she’s pretending to devote her free time. According to her, the “hidden wealth” of reality, to which she previously only had superficial access, needs simply to be “seized,” and she admires prostitutes whom she hears “wonder aloud how much they would charge for sucking off a customer.”²⁴ She realizes herself that men are willing to pay for her drinks at bars, which she first welcomes unquestioningly: “But when I wanted to pay, the redheaded barman refused my money; and this good omen quite certainly

in France, 1944–1968: “[T]he common notion of a woman’s primary duty [is] expressed, however, not as ‘responsibility’ or ‘duty’ but as ‘mission’ and ‘vocation,’ giving it religious overtones and stressing the family as the natural place for women’s fulfilment.” Duchén, *Women’s Rights and Women’s Lives in France, 1944–1968*, London, Routledge, 1994, p. 42. This is so pervasive in the 1900s before the revolution of the 1960s that Beauvoir’s Marcelle, whose first experience after “she made up her mind to take a job” was disappointing because of the pecuniary concerns of her new colleagues at the Centre, observes: “The nurses were competent, conscientious women, but they looked upon their calling merely as a means of earning a living; and during her inquiries Marcelle never heard a word of anything but worries about health and money.” *WTS*, p. 16.

21 *WTS*, p. 21.

22 *WTS*, p. 182.

23 *WTS*, p. 182.

24 *WTS*, pp. 176, 183.

pointed out the road I was to follow.”²⁵ But the counterpart to this ill-acquired freedom is a domination that threatens it. The men who pay for her drinks and games obviously expect something in return: “He’s angry about the money he spent on you, that’s all,” explains the friend of the “young man with a tough look” who’s menacing Marguerite on her way back home.²⁶ She has the reflex to try to buy her way out with money, again associated with freedom: “I opened my bag at once. ‘There,’ I said, holding out ten francs, ‘pay yourself back.’”²⁷ For the short moment when the frustrated man refuses the money—“I don’t give a damn about the money”—it becomes clear that money cannot always buy freedom in a situation of violent coercion, that money cannot open all the doors.²⁸ Nevertheless, she gets a good deal: five francs for the price of a good lesson.²⁹

In this first attempt at a novel, just as in the last one she published, Beauvoir “implicitly questions whether women’s access to wealth can be equated with their liberation,” as Dana Roglie writes in her in-depth and engaging account of Lauren Elkin’s new translation of Beauvoir’s final novel, *Les Belles Images*, in the book review section of this issue.³⁰ Similarly, Marguerite later gets to discover that the barrier to the realization of dreams is in fact not only the lack of money but also inaction. After she has roguishly suggested to Denis that he extort a large sum of money from her older sister, his wife, to buy a ticket to Saigon—“Why, go and get it from Marcelle”—while seriously planning to ask for a teaching position in the French colony and join him there, she discovers that, all the while, he was reconciling with Marcelle.³¹ As for herself, Marguerite concludes her narration by transforming her loss into a gain in experience and a new outlook on life: for her, “the world was shining like a new penny [*comme un sou neuf*].”³² Her narrative arc, in the traditional form of the *Bildungsroman* or “roman d’apprentissage,” is thus built just like the Balzacian novels in which the young hero, a young (male) student, sees his personal trajectory shaped by economic constraints above anything else and is consequently obsessed with money: “‘Parvenir’ [...]. As with money, the fascination of social mobility is in its boundlessness: it is not a question of reaching ‘a’ position, no matter

25 WTS, pp. 182–183.

26 WTS, pp. 187, 186.

27 WTS, p. 187.

28 WTS, p. 187.

29 WTS, p. 187.

30 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Image of Her*, trans. Lauren Elkin, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2026 [1966].

31 WTS, p. 203.

32 WTS, p. 212; Beauvoir, *Quand prime le spirituel*, Paris, Gallimard, 1979, p. 248.

how high (Napoleon), but of the possibility of becoming ‘anything.’”³³ With Beauvoir’s first novel, we have a young (female) student who goes through this arc, and then beyond, understanding that financial independence is crucial to “*parvenir*,” yes, but not sufficient in itself for her liberation, for her to “*devenir*” (become) herself.

So, already in 1937–1938, when writing her “five early tales,” as the English translation designates them in the subtitle, Beauvoir was displaying a capacity to treat directly the affairs of money just as she did those of sex, as pillars of our society that decency prevents women from discussing for fear that it could undermine the foundations of patriarchy. This preoccupation with money also often appears in her early correspondence with Jean-Paul Sartre, where she refers to it as “*le sou*,” a play on a saying, usually in the negative form (“*ne pas avoir le sou*,” to be without a penny), transposed into the positive form (“*avoir le sou*,” to have a penny). Her phrase uses the individual, concrete “penny” (*le sou*), instead of the general, abstract “money” or even more intangible “means” (*avoir de l’argent, avoir les moyens*), opening significations that are not graspable with the translation “dough.” It can be understood as a euphemism, as a way to diminish the importance of money, to reduce it to its lowest iteration, which would express a certain discomfort on her part with the fact of having money and, moreover, of discussing money with Sartre, who was notoriously detached from this reality and had a nonchalant attitude similar to that of Denis, although he showed no contempt toward “*le Castor*” for caring about it—one could say that having a bourgeois mother who would host him and keep his possessions when he was between places of his own helped. We can interpret it conversely as a mark of the extreme consciousness she had of money, especially in the 1930s, when she was fending for herself and when each and every penny was allocated a function, in a typically feminine way of earmarking wages, according to Zelizer.³⁴ We can also see in it another manifestation of Beauvoir’s attention to the minute details that constitute a system: privilege comes from money, and money is constituted of an accumulation of pennies.

Since my first reading of her correspondence with Sartre, I have been struck by the way she constantly details the money she obtains and spends, something he does too, but much less frequently, only when he asks Beauvoir to manage money for him while he’s away.³⁵ She writes,

33 Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, London, Verso, 1987, p. 131.

34 Zelizer, *Social Meaning of Money*, p. 5.

35 Among a few requests, we can read a sentence that could come straight out of a Rihanna song (I’m thinking of her 2015 hit “Bitch Better Have My Money”): “Have your mother send

I've just received a blow: I went to see the tax people, and they're demanding 2,400 francs from me. I'll check whether it's really true, and appeal if need be. How much have you paid, for instance? I think I'd be allowed to pay just half now, and the rest when school reopens—but it's still rotten. Moreover, Gégé's asking for her dough—1,200 francs—though that's something you ought to take care of. For my part I've had to give some dough to Kos., who's finally leaving on Saturday, and pay some bills—to the dentist, and for books—but I'll just survive till Wednesday.³⁶

While I find these practical details fascinating, as they are revealing of the everyday materiality of her life before she became financially prosperous with the international success of *The Second Sex* and its many profitable translations, I realized, while looking for the English translation of these passages, that many of them had been skipped in translation. For instance, Anglophone readers of Beauvoir's correspondence with Sartre have been deprived of this information, in lieu of which was an ellipsis:

I went with her [Védrine] to pay my sister's rent: 500 F. this month for my sister, along with 100 F. to Sorokine for a reading subscription and some canned lobster, and 100 F. worth of charcuterie at Bost's; the money for my taxes is rather compromised (but our 1500 F. of leave money remains intact).³⁷

The exclusion of these passages from the translated edition appears to reflect a broader unease with the great intellectual figure speaking so frankly and often about money.

In my opinion, it is very useful to witness in action how a financially independent woman of the 1930s and 1940s managed her money when hers was still a rare situation, and also to see exactly how Beauvoir and Sartre conducted the distribution of money to support members of their biological and chosen

me 600 posthaste; she forgot to give them to me, the bitch." Jean-Paul Sartre, Monday, May 3, 1937, in *Witness to My Life: The Letters of Jean-Paul Sartre to Simone De Beauvoir, 1926–1939*, ed. Simone de Beauvoir, trans. Lee Fahnestock and Norman MacAfee, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1992 [1983], p. 104.

36 Simone de Beauvoir, Wednesday, July 5, 1939, in *Letters to Sartre*, trans. and ed. Quintin Hoare, London, Radius, 1991 [1990], p. 26. Subsequent references to this work are indicated by the abbreviation *LSE*.

37 Simone de Beauvoir, Friday, January 12, 1940, in *Lettres à Sartre*, tome II, 1940–1963, ed. Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir, Paris, Gallimard, 1990, p. 44, my translation. The ellipsis can be found in *LSE*, p. 257.

family. We now know, for instance, how she played the fairy godmother for Violette Leduc, under the guise of an advance from Gallimard, to help preserve the dignity of this talented writer who struggled to break through the literary glass ceiling (a woman can write and publish work, but only nice things). Overall, this aspect of their alternative way of life and of forming a “family” is already well established in Beauvoir scholarship, but there is still much to reflect on regarding the application of their ethical approach to financial instability, and then wealth, of which the journals and correspondence give us a glimpse, just as the novels portray real-life situations where women are seen making decisions about money.

I believe this gap exists because we tend to overlook how radical it was for a woman to talk about money the way Beauvoir did, directly and in detail. Still today, it is considered by many people to be a taboo, as we can read, for example, in the opening lines of the introduction to Rebecca Walker’s collection of short essays, *Women Talk Money*:

Though women’s bodies, labor, and very existence have always been interchangeable with money itself, their lived experiences of this reality are often unspoken, silenced, or forced into incoherence. Women’s stories of their struggles with money are shrouded in secrecy and shame, and frequently marked by paralysis and disenfranchisement.³⁸

This shroud is beneficial to privileged people, who can insist on the claimed cause—their merit, an abstract value that can be defined diversely—instead of the fact that it is their money and their choice how to use it. Talking about privilege is still too rarely, in my view, talking about money, and on that topic, I was struck by McKenzie Wark’s offhand remark in a letter she wrote to Kathy Acker:

I find it curious that Warhol did a money series at the same time as the Campbell’s soup series, but nobody made a fuss about it. Perhaps because that was the real scandal. Painting commodities was already old news—all those English portraits of prize dogs and wives and horses, but money ...³⁹

38 Rebecca Walker (ed.), *Women Talk Money: Breaking the Taboo*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 2022, p. 5.

39 McKenzie Wark to Kathy Acker, Saturday, August 12, 1995, in *I’m Very into You: Correspondence 1995–1996*, South Pasadena, CA, Semiotext(e), 2015, p. 42.

Therefore, if a (male) painter representing cash money was so scandalous in the early sixties that it is never talked about, we can only surmise how outrageous it was when a (female) writer, thirty years earlier, started writing about how women like her were affected by money. It is not surprising that, while advocating for abortion rights in France in the 1970s, Beauvoir, never losing track of money, constantly insisted on the necessity of the procedure being free and thus found the “Simone Veil” law of January 17, 1975, “not at all satisfying,” as it decriminalized abortion without covering it under the social security system.⁴⁰ Even when she became wealthy, she never forgot how money was at the crux of the preoccupations of women striving for emancipation.

1 How to Use One's Privilege: 2026 Featured Translation

This year's Featured Translation has been brewing in the editorial team's collective mind for a while, and it proved to be perfectly aligned with the overarching theme of the issue. When we decided to translate some of Geneviève Fraisse's book chapters on privilege for issue 36.1, we had already settled on Sonia Kruks's seminal article on the same idea, although from a different perspective. In doing so, we are realizing the full potential of the idea at the origin of the Featured Translation series: fostering an exchange of views between languages, cultures, and academic traditions, creating a dialogue between thinkers widely read in their native tongue but not as well known in other linguistic spheres. Kruks's approach to privilege is pragmatic, fittingly for the aim of this issue, which reflects on today's problems with right-wing visions of the world and how Beauvoir's writings can help us provide an appropriately robust response, both intellectual and practical, as her conceptualization was always conceived as the first step in a plan that called for action. Instead of practicing the “politics of self-transformation,” which posits somewhat unrealistically that one could experience a conversion out of one's “individual volition,” and thus instead of denying the facticity of our situation by pretending to be able to change it entirely, Kruks boldly suggests working from it:⁴¹

Rather than investing oneself in the more self-referential task of disclosing the subtle benefits that accrue from one's personal privilege and strug-

⁴⁰ *UF*, p. 363.

⁴¹ Sonia Kruks, “Simone de Beauvoir and the Politics of Privilege,” *Hypatia*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2005, 178–205, pp. 182, 184.

gling to renounce them, it may be preferable to acknowledge them but then to act *from* one's privileged location, to deploy one's privilege as effectively as possible, to endeavor to use it well.⁴²

She addresses the delicate conundrum of speaking for others without appropriating their plight and words, something Beauvoir notoriously did for Djamila Boupacha, among others.⁴³

Kruks's stance on the concrete implications of the Beauvoirian position on privilege should resonate strongly with our French-speaking readership, given that there have been many recent instances in the Francosphere when privileged women, similarly to Beauvoir, used their status to give a voice to silenced victims. The first case that comes to my mind is Adèle Haenel's use of the privileges of her talent, visibility, and beauty—the last one mentioned mostly because a woman's attractiveness can help her get men's attention—to denounce the crimes perpetrated against child actors by movie directors, predators not only unbothered by the law but still celebrated by the public for their oeuvre, like Christophe Ruggia, the powerful man who abused her in her youth.⁴⁴ Before boarding the Global Sumud flotilla toward the Gaza Strip in 2025, as her engagement is not solely for the #MeToo movement, her first flamboyant action—she embodied after all *la jeune fille en feu*—was to leave the 2020 César ceremony (the French equivalent of the Oscars) while yelling, “Bravo les pédophiles!” when the prize given to Roman Polanski's movie *J'accuse* was announced—ironically recycling the title of the historical open letter to the president of the French Republic Félix Faure, published in *L'Aurore* by Émile Zola, who used his privileged standing to defend Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish captain who had been wrongly accused of treason by an army commandant.⁴⁵ Although preceded by other prominent figures in naming the antisemitism at play in the Dreyfus affair, the novelist gave

42 *Ibid.*, p. 186.

43 Simone de Beauvoir and Gisèle Halimi, *Djamila Boupacha: The Story of the Torture of a Young Algerian Girl Which Shocked Liberal French Opinion*, trans. Peter Green, New York, Macmillan, 1962.

44 Incidentally, Ruggia's verdict was delivered on April 17, 2026: judged guilty of the sexual assaults committed against Haenel between 2001 and 2004, he was sentenced to five years in prison. “French Director Christophe Ruggia Sentenced to Five Years on Appeal for Abusing Child Actor,” *Le Monde*, English edition, April 17, 2026, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/police-and-justice/article/2026/04/17/french-director-christophe-ruggia-sentenced-to-five-years-on-appeal-for-abusing-child-actor_6752541_105.html.

45 *Portrait de la jeune fille en feu* (*Portrait of a Lady on Fire*), dir. Céline Sciamma, Lilies Films, 2019; *J'accuse* (*An Officer and a Spy*), dir. Roman Polanski, Gaumont, 2019. The opening

it a political turn by directly addressing the head of state and charging the army and the state by name.

A singular deed also became a political movement when Haenel's courageous reaction was elucidated—not so much in the sense of explained, but in its literal meaning of being brought into the light—by Virginie Despentes in her fiery *Libération* tribune “*Désormais on se lève et on se casse*” (“From now on, we get up and get the hell out”), which turned it into a call to collective action.⁴⁶ Addressing directly the “big bosses,” the novelist writes her accusation in the indefinite plural form, speaking for the actress who was publicly eviscerated after her stormy exit, but moreover for all the people who felt the same indignation. This is a perfect illustration of how an established author can use her privilege to speak for others by Despentes, who famously began her essential book *King Kong Theory* by naming those to whom she is giving voice with her words: “I am writing as an ugly one, *for* the ugly ones: the old hags, the dykes, the frigid, the unfucked, the unfuckables, the neurotics, the psychos, for all those girls who don’t get a look in the universal market of the consumable chick.”⁴⁷ Unsurprisingly, this opening essay is followed later in the book by two quotes from *The Second Sex*, in which Beauvoir first spoke of, if not straightforwardly for, old women, dykes, frigid women, and hysterics, among other excluded figures who did not have the privilege of voicing their lived experience.

2 Right-Wing Thought When It Comes to Others, and Its Antidote

In this section, four articles tackle different aspects of the ways in which right-wing thinkers address the situation of less privileged people, and one final paper dissects Beauvoir’s lesson in how to speak for others when you have the advantage of being heard.

First, in her article titled “Authenticity and Bad Faith in Beauvoir’s ‘Must We Burn Sade?’” Erika Ruonakoski reflects on Beauvoir’s take on the positions of

lines of Zola’s indictment could have been written by Beauvoir: “*Mon devoir est de parler, je ne veux pas être complice.*” (“It is my duty to speak; I refuse to be complicit.”) Émile Zola, “J’accuse ...!,” *LAurore*, no. 87, January 13, 1898, p. 1.

46 Virginie Despentes, “Désormais on se lève et on se casse,” *Libération*, March 1, 2020, https://www.liberation.fr/debats/2020/03/01/cesars-desormais-on-se-leve-et-on-se-barre_1780212/, my translation.

47 Virginie Despentes, *King Kong Theory*, trans. Stéphanie Benson, New York, Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2010, [2006], p. 7. The original term is “*hystériques*,” whose semantic range is richer than that of “neurotics.”

a nobleman who flirted with the Revolution, especially on her interpretation of the scandal his writings provoked, which she explains by their manifestation of truth. In her view, Sade emerges as a revealing figure because he does not mystify his own privilege: unlike the bourgeois subject analyzed in “Right-Wing Thought Today,” who universalizes their particular interests as if they were general values, Sade openly embraces egoism, domination, and injustice. In this sense, he exposes—rather than conceals—the logic underlying right-wing thought: “While Beauvoir does not accept Sade’s ethics, she calls it an ethics of authenticity because of his relentless quest for truth and his refusal to accept the hypocritical morals of his time.” Ruonakoski shows how “his narratives seem to suggest that these innocent maidens would be better off taking matters into their own hands and acknowledging the corruption of the world, instead of placing their trust in Providence and repeatedly falling prey to the schemes of their abusers.” Despite Sade’s taking a stand for the innocent maidens manipulated by the lies of powerful men, however, his purported authenticity is questioned by the author, since the Marquis considers domination natural from the point of view of unquestioned privilege, and thus his morality remains hypocritical, just like conventional morality: “He refuses to understand the impossibility of the mission to have total control over another subjectivity.”

Central to this section is Raphaël Ehram’s article, which analyzes specifically her essay “Right-Wing Thought Today,” published in 1954 and included in the 1955 essay collection *Privileges*. In “Qu’est-ce qu’une pensée de droite? Critique épistémique et critique idéologique de l’idéalisme des pensées de droite chez Simone de Beauvoir” (“What Is Right-Wing Thought? Epistemic and Ideological Critiques of Right-Wing Idealism in Simone de Beauvoir”), he provides an adroit demonstration—in the initial sense of *quod erat demonstrandum*—of the fallibility of right-wing arguments used to justify privilege, which, the author reminds us, rely heavily on the obfuscation of the material, measurable dimensions of power—and such is money.

Beauvoir, en effet, n’a de cesse de mettre en avant l’«idéalisme» de la pensée de droite, qui peut signifier aussi bien la tendance théorique à substituer les spéculations psychologiques aux considérations concrètes sur l’économie et sur la répartition effective des avantages et des pouvoirs, que la tendance normative à interpréter les principes et les idéaux sans référence claire à la situation économique, sociale et juridique des personnes opprimées; ou encore la tendance épistémologique consistant à minorer l’importance des faits mesurables et des documents relatifs aux rapports inégaux entre groupes humains.

Beauvoir, indeed, never ceases to foreground the “idealism” of right-wing thought, which can refer both to the theoretical tendency to substitute psychological speculation for concrete considerations of the economy and of the actual distribution of advantages and power; to the normative tendency to interpret principles and ideals without clear reference to the economic, social, and legal situation of oppressed individuals; and, finally, to the epistemological tendency to downplay the importance of measurable facts and of documentation relating to unequal relations between human groups.

Ehrsam identifies several key mechanisms through which this ideological operation occurs and points out their logical flaws according to Beauvoir. His meticulous epistemo-political analysis of the counter-argumentation with which she confronts right-wing argumentation will undoubtedly be useful in resisting this persistent rhetoric, which resonates loudly in the current context.

Heather Dawn Lakey's argumentation could be read as an application of the logical deconstruction of right-wing thought Ehrsam invited us to undertake following Beauvoir's lead. “Rethinking Regret: Simone de Beauvoir, Abortion, and Moral Decision-Making” breaks down the reasoning offered by antiabortion proponents surrounding the ethical responsibility a person making the decision to terminate a pregnancy has toward their future self, who could disagree with it. In this critical assessment of a widely shared right-wing discourse, which presents regret as a natural and universal moral signal, Lakey, drawing from the theoretical basis of *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, shows how it erases the individual perspective of moral decision-making, depending on the situation of the person concerned. Beauvoir's existential ethics thus provides a “metaethical framework” to approach this question without instrumentalizing women's emotional lives and prescribing absolute moral rules: “For Beauvoir, freedom always implies risk, and thus the possibility of regret co-arises with every choice. As long as we exist in ambiguity, ‘the specter of regret’ will forever haunt us. To foreclose this possibility is to foreclose moral existence itself.” Therefore, regret is not evidence of moral failure but an intrinsic feature of freedom.

Turning to fiction, Timothy Stock's article, “From Separation to Accusation: *The Inseparables* as Critique of Religious Choice,” reflects on how Beauvoir's posthumous novel presents the implications of Catholic norms on the lives of two young girls becoming women whose destinies end up separating them. Braiding together the different religious threads of the story, Stock exposes how religion is presented as “a crass vehicle for hetero-patriarchal moralism.” The author conceptualizes the “religious ambivalence” at work in the conception

of the friends' reaction to the dominating discourse and practices of religion in a conservative society prioritizing order, tradition, and sacrifice over individual freedom: "The novel makes the crucial point that the gendered harms that are documented in *The Second Sex* are not merely sites of guilt and humiliation (which they are) but also ambivalent sites of transformation and freedom." To the compulsory sacrifice imposed on girls from an early age, *Les Inséparables* opposes an "alternate sacramentality," which is women's friendship. Just as it forms an act of resistance, literature, as used here by Beauvoir, can be seen as an act of religious accusation.

Lastly, Marine Rouch and Alexandre Antolin explore one occasion when Beauvoir spoke for someone else, here on behalf of Violette Leduc, who was struggling to get her groundbreaking novels published in a conservative society uncomfortable with women's feelings and sensations being freely expressed, in a prose that lacked the bourgeois decency and restraint favored by the French Academy, beyond the frontal shock of sexual explicitness. Just as Sade, discussed in the first article of this section, had been censored, and just as *The Second Sex* had also been put on the Pope's Index, *La Bâtarde* was subjected to heavy censorship and generally misunderstood. The article illustrates how Beauvoir carefully chooses her words, in her preface to this novel, to perform a strategic act of "literary godmothering" (*marrainage littéraire*), a benevolent and empowering type of sponsorship: "*Le marrainage littéraire est donc à considérer comme une association entre femmes qui ne vise pas simplement à entrer dans le champ littéraire, comme c'est le cas pour les hommes, mais aussi, et surtout plus spécifiquement, à pénétrer l'entre-soi masculin caractéristique du champ.*" ("Literary godmothering should therefore be understood as a form of association between women that aims not simply to enter the literary field, as is the case for men, but also—and more specifically—to gain access to the male-dominated networks that characterize it.") Through the study of the genesis of the preface and the analysis of excerpts from its manuscript, which is transcribed in full in the appendix of the article so that other researchers can refer to it, the authors ponder how Beauvoir turns Leduc's novel into an existentialist work, making it more palatable for readers of her time. It is thus a real literary engagement when, through a process illuminated by Kruks in the Featured Translation, Beauvoir uses her privilege to speak for a fellow female author.

Despite the grim perspective offered by the manifestations of right-wing thought weighing on individual freedom, this issue gives us, along with reasons to hope, critical tools to react to the process of the naturalization of inequities enacted by privileged people to maintain their position. Within right-wing thought, privilege separates, and its means, such as patriarchal norms or

money, lie between individuals like the Louis Vuitton franchise between *Les Deux Magots* and *Le Café de Flore* in Saint-Germain-des-Prés; within Beauvoir's thought, privilege ought to be shared.