DEATH SENTENCES:*
Writing Couples and Ideology

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> "To write is to embalm the past [. . .], it leaves it a bit congealed – like a mummy." Simone de Beauvoir
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> "Mummy – from Low Latin: a dead body preserved in a dry state from putrefication; . . . or, figuratively, a dark, thin person". . . . Webster's Dictionary

As my reader may or may not have had time to remark, there is a moment of modest ambiguity in my title – if only in terms of the signified. At the first level, there is the question of writing couples, of what it means to "write couples," to write-in-couples with/as/through ideology. At the second level, there is the perhaps – but only perhaps – more referential question of the "Writing Couple," couples who write, and their shared ideology.

In order to open the way for and approach the first sense in which I evoke "Writing Couples" quickly, let me briefly invoke the other, larger title which brings this text here (today), our entitlement-so-to-write: *Poetics Today*. Let me infuse "poetics" into the title and re-mark it "Writing Couples and The Ideology of Poetics." And let me concentrate on today.

Today, then, "The Ideology of Poetics." By "ideology," I do not mean here the everyday sense of the term – one ideology as opposed to another; capitalist versus communist ideology, etc.; nor even – although this definition might be closer to our concerns here – Paolo Valesio's definition of ideology as decayed, dead rhetoric (Valesio 1980). I will remain in fact hopelessly Althusserian on just this one point and invoke his now infamous definition of ideology as "the 'representation' of the Imaginary relationship of individuals

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to the Real conditions of existence" (Althusser 1971:162). Through this definition, I would insist upon ideology as the conceptual glue of culture, that which makes culture seem natural, that which holds any cultural system together, that which, in fact, makes any system of relationships appear natural.

By "poetics," I mean something relatively straightforward: that theoretical discourse which would desire to account for what may certainly be called here, after Jakobson, "the poetic function" (Jakobson 1960) – as well as that discipline concerned with theories of literature.

My concern, under the title of "The Ideology of Poetics," is with that conceptual, cultural glue which insists upon naturalizing, holding together, indeed *reifying* any poetics grounded in and dependent upon binary opposition, whether those oppositions are static – structural – or put into movement – dialectical. As Hélène Cixous has put it:

> Always the same metaphor: we follow it, it transports us, thru all of its figures, everywhere discourse organizes itself. The same thread, or *tresse double*, leads us, if we read or speak, across literature, philosophy, criticism, centuries of representation, of reflection.
>
> [Western] thought has always worked by opposition [...] the law organizes the thinkable thru oppositions (whether as irreconcilable dualities or incorporative, uplifting dialectics). And all of these couples of oppositions are *couples*. Might that not mean something? That logocentrism forces all thought – all concepts, all codes, all values to submit to a system of 2 terms, might that not be in relationship to "the" couple: man/woman? (Cixous 1975:116).

The question of "the couple" has become the object of contemporary philosophical fascination, where *all* metaphysical couples are in the process of being discoupled, recoupled differently and urgently: active/passive, form/matter, speech/writing, conscious/unconscious. This work has been pursued by some of us because these couples, intrinsic to the ensemble of symbolic systems in the West (cf. Cixous 1976: esp. p. 7), would indeed appear to be modeled on *the couple*: Man/Woman, Masculine/Feminine.

Since Lacan at the very least, it has been made quite clear, particularly in France, that One never writes without the Other, One never writes Alone; One is always at least two, usually more: One is always coupled with Others. My hand is moved across the page according to different scripts, different readings, with different names, different faces, on ready or distant call. The lone *cogito*, fully in control of a message, even if in anguish while finding it, has been thrown on the philosophical junkheap; the lonely image of the lone author, always male, remains alive only for die-hard romantics. The couple, therefore, has not only become the privileged *object* of contemporary interpretive fascination, but has become its doubled *subject* as well.

Couples. We tend to think in couples even when we try very hard not to; we revise the concept of the couple, we re-write it, we mediate it in new ways, but couples are very hard to get away from. It's just the way we think in the West, have been trained to think – based on the force of the *copula*, of copulation (cf. Derrida 1972).

The question of copulation brings us to the second not unrelated level of what I mean by "Writing Couples," the "Writing Couple": here and now, the historically heterosexual, famous, totally necessary to each other, oh too human, writing couple.[1] For there would appear to exist a seeming historical necessity for the heterosexual woman who wants to create, to write – and be read – to couple herself, in fact or fantasy, albeit if only temporarily, with a man who also writes or wrote, a famous man in her life or in her writing – if not the *necessity,* then the *desire* to do so, under the illusion that it will be easier that way. . . Anyone who has tried to write "on" or with women who write has undoubtedly run across this problem at some point. My own most intimate textual encounters have been with Virginia and Leonard, Lou Andreas and Friedrich, Julia and Philippe, Simone and Jean-Paul.

How this second way of reading the words "writing couples" is linked to the first, should become clear in what follows. And while I will be insisting upon this second more biographemic sense of the term "Writing Couple," the first, more philosophical sense should not and, indeed, cannot be forgotten. Nor can we forget the *very* famous couple, "literature and philosophy." For what Plato called "the ancient quarrel between poetry and philosophy" is being acted out once again at the end of the twentieth century – with the stakes involved in whether this couple stays together or separates getting higher by the day. What follows is, then, a first gesture towards exploring the various possible ideologies and logics of "writing couples," towards establishing a typology of coupling, especially in relationship to the maternal body. Here I will be able to look only at a first kind of possible configuration for male and female, a first kind of occidental glue. I will be exploring very explicitly the poetics of an ideology that insists upon killing the mother and therefore, although more implicitly, will be exploring the ideology of the poetics responsible for that murder.

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1. "Historically heterosexual" for two reasons: first, because I am using the word "heterosexual" in its everyday sense. That is, we are concerned here primarily with the couple consisting of a man and a woman as historically defined – although such dominant forms of heterosexual logic can of course appear in the most unlikely places. But, secondly, I also want to underline the potential for, the possibility of, new logics for radical heterosexualities, beyond the hetero/homo dualism, and especially beyond the common and conservative notion of heterosexuality which, as Jane Gallop has put it, "has always been a veiled homosexuality, one modality of desire, one libidinal economy" (Gallop 1982:127).

For many reasons, not the least important of which is the current hysteria surrounding the couple "literature and philosophy," it was the writing couple Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre that came to occupy the center of my attention as I began to think about writing couples at the intersections of literature and philosophy, poetics and ideology, modernity and feminist theory. The decision made me very nervous.

First, because Sartre and Beauvoir do, of course, represent for many *the couple*, not only in a general "People Magazine" kind of way, but also, I think, within a certain feminist fantasy: Beauvoir is the woman who managed to find a man with whom to share her intellectual passion without sacrificing either "intimacy" or "independence," as she herself might put it. Because of the strong grip this feminist fantasy holds on a certain heterosexual imaginary, especially here in the United States, I hesitated to continue the tradition.

Second, Sartre and Beauvoir do incarnate, in an embarrassingly old-fashioned way, the philosophy/literature split and its most idealistic kind of synthesis: "they each do a little of both," but Sartre is the philosopher and Beauvoir is the novelist, they say. As Nancy Miller has reminded me, the way in which Beauvoir has positioned her texts to deal only with that which Sartre's undeniably classical philosophical discourse cannot deal with is a problem in itself.

Third, Beauvoir and Sartre, as a couple, provide perhaps too easy a symbol of the old *versus* all that is new in the realm of poetics and literary theory. Sartre did not want to represent any formal, theorized poetics; he proposed, nonetheless, a theory of language and literature that is no longer acceptable to many theorists and writers of modernity, for example Roland Barthes, who highlighted his differences with Sartre early and irrevocably (Barthes 1953). In fact, in one of Sartre's last interviews, when pressed by Beauvoir to be more precise about what he meant when he qualified *Les Mots* as "literary," he replied simply, "It was full of clever tricks, artful writings, word-plays almost."[2]

Finally, and most importantly perhaps, Beauvoir and Sartre are no longer a couple. There have been so many deaths of the Fathers in France over the past few years: Lacan, Barthes, Sartre, Foucault. Talking about any one of these four Dead Fathers can be painful — what one has to say becomes so quickly elegiac or vulturesque . . . and Sartre was of course, *The Father* for intellectual France.

Beauvoir has been left alone, at home, but as a Widow for France,

2. My translations. Simone de Beauvoir, "Entretiens avec Jean-Paul Sartre" in *La Cérémonie des adieux* (CA) (1981:276). All further page references in text.

not as France's Mother. By what authorization may I write of a "them" now?

But I will, because one of the things the thousands of people (including myself) who walked behind Sartre's coffin in Montparnasse were saying was that we both can and cannot continue, now, without the couple, Beauvoir and Sartre; that, in any case, no one can continue to think/write in the ways that it is urgent for us to think/write in the West without first having written and thought with Sartre the philosopher. Phenomenology, empiricism, metaphysics, the *ego cogito*, the Imaginary, the Other, dialectics, even "ideology," or "poetics," become just so many contemporary buzz words unless one has recognized that 25 years of French thought have been transcribing those words through Sartre, *against* Sartre – killing the Father. Foucault was one of the very few to recognize that fact. And what of our still-alive-feminist-mother? My thoughts of her are haunted by this death of a monolithic couple and its discourse.

Thinking in a soundly referential, biographical way, there is not much new to say about this somewhat mysteriously, perhaps only superficially heterosexual couple. But the insistent questions keep repeating themselves. How was it that they actually managed to remain a couple? They were always sleeping in separate beds – next door, down the street, in the other room, in different cities. And then there were all of Sartre's "contingent women" – so lovingly and openly laid before our eyes in so many places – Melina, Camille, *la fiancée*, Mme Morel, M, Olga, *la femme lunaire*. As Sartre himself put it, "I was more a masturbator than an 'intercourser' of women" (CA, p. 385).

Many people have remarked upon this strange set of affairs, especially feminists: "except for Sartre, Beauvoir is wonderful." That is, the feminist response to this couple is usually divided, ambivalent, an ambivalent reaction most recently evoked by Carol Ascher's very moving imaginary letter to Beauvoir in her book, *A Life of Freedom*. Ascher questions Beauvoir's way of:

> capping a description of pain and ambiguity with the assertion that the period or relationship was a success. It's a little like the *deus ex machina* of Socialism or genderless roles – the seal of the present or future riding in on a white horse to blot out historical suffering. [. . .] It is as if you must put a stamp or seal on your memories in order to go on" (Ascher 1981:111).

It is always these last capping sentences that are cited as tokens of Beauvoir's courage and wisdom by her feminist admirers, never their discursive placement or the blackest pages of passion, despair, and rage they negate.

As *feminist fantasy*, the Beauvoir-Sartre phenomenon has never been described so succintly as by Beauvoir herself:

> . . . we might almost be said to think in common. We have a common store of memories, knowledge and images behind us; our attempts to grasp the world are undertaken with the same tools, set within the same framework, guided by the same touchstones. Very often one of us begins a sentence and the other finishes it; if someone asks us a question, we have been known to produce identical answers. The stimulus of a word, a sensation, a shadow, sends us both traveling along the same inner path, and we arrive simultaneously at a conclusion – a memory, an association – completely inexplicable to a third person [. . .] Our temperaments, our directions, our previous decisions, remain different, and our writings are on the whole almost totally dissimilar. But they have sprung from the same plot of ground (Beauvoir 1965a:643).

I read and reread the passages of her memoirs and interviews where Beauvoir continually speaks (of) this strange, disembodied "we" – and into this dark continent of pure, clear, platonic couplehood, I began to imagine, between the lines, a make-believe letter from Beauvoir to Sartre containing the following words:

> You put yourself in my mouth, and I suffocate. . . Continue to be also outside. Keep yourself/me also outside. Don't be engulfed, don't engulf me, in what passes from you to me. I would so much like that we both be here. That the one does not disappear into the other or the other into the one (Irigaray 1979:9–10).[3]

These lines are from Luce Irigaray's *Et l'une ne bouge pas sans l'autre*. I evoke them here so as to provide a space of slippage in my own discourse – and eventually, I hope, in Beauvoir's – from writing in this comfortable descriptive tone towards writing more uncomfortably about the most intimate Other possible for any writer and, most especially, for any woman writer: *the mother.*

The issue of how to think about the relationships among women/writing/maternity is among the most important in feminist thinking today, especially in France. It is important to recall here that when Hélène Cixous states in her seminars that the vast majority of women writers to date have written within a masculine economy, one of her first and most often repeated examples is Beauvoir. The classical writing economy, the one that belongs to a *masculine* economy, according to Cixous, requires two conditions: for anyone to write, they need (1) maternal love and support, and (2) paternal identification. How this is true for men writing in a patriarchal culture is fairly clear. Male writers have needed the loving support of their muses, mistresses, or mothers in order then to put them aside, deny them, reject them, idealize them or kill them in their writing, but, in any case, to *ingest* them so as better to evacuate them, purify themselves, and identify with the Father – if only then to kill him like the good sons they are.[4] According to Cixous, in a patriarchal culture, a

3. I adopt here Jane Gallop's translation of this passage (Gallop 1982:114).

4. Barthes put it more mildly, but never flinched faced with his recognition that "L'écrivain est quelqu'un qui joue avec le corps de sa mère." Cited by Susan Suleiman (1977).

woman's writing depends in great part upon her relationship with her imaginary father. For her, Beauvoir provides the classic case of a woman writer who has "chosen" to write within the masculine economy just described: she identified with the Father and rejected the Mother. It is, in fact, Beauvoir who has come to represent, for a number of contemporary French women theorists, the proto-typical father-identified-feminist: *Athena* – the one who has no need of a mother.

Most obviously, and still at the most referential level, Beauvoir provided what has remained, in spite of everything, *the* feminist myth: the baby *versus* the book. When she says, "I have never regretted not having children insofar as what I wanted to do was to write" (Beauvoir 1965b:36), she means it and feminists have believed in her sincerity. In the classical feminist economy, you cannot have them both; you cannot have it all.

Over the past few years this mutual exclusivity has been seriously questioned – more referentially in this country, more theoretically in France (see Suleiman 1985). To concentrate here on the latter, for women theorists like Cixous, Luce Irigaray, or Julia Kristeva, Beauvoir's decision not to have children in the world might be seen as but an acting out of her complete denial of the maternal, of her refusal of the maternal body within a classical male economy – a refusal of the maternal body's most intimate influences upon her own body and body of work. For these women, Beauvoir's work represents an exemplary denial of woman, of the mother, and it is against the Beauvoirian myth of Anti-Maternity that they set out 10 years ago to *revalorize the maternal* for women: in and through women's writing for Cixous; before and on the other side of our writing for Irigaray; because of marginal men's and women's writing for Kristeva.

Our monolithic heterosexual couple has been decidedly displaced, but it has not disappeared. In order to think about what for me has turned out to be a battle between the old and new mothers – a battle in which my desire not to deny any of them has proven somewhat futile – and in order not to lose sight of *the couple* as our subject, I turned to Beauvoir's last published book: *La Cérémonie des adieux*.[5] I took with me to that text two questions: (1) what *did* Beauvoir do with the jealousy, anger and rage at Sartre that I evoked earlier and (2) *what about* mothers? What about Beauvoir's mother? What I found was most troubling – more than troubling, frightening. How to talk about it without denying my own first feminist mother? I am really not sure I can move without her.[6]

5. It is difficult to call *Lettres au Castor* (1983) *Beauvoir*'s most recent book to date, as some have, since it includes only Sartre's letters.

6. The often painful question of how to explore more freely the political and intellectual

La Cérémonie des adieux is a very strange book; first of all, in its form. It is a ceremony – a sacred rite – in two parts: the first part is written by Beauvoir as an account of Sartre's last ten years – as a narrative, it moves forward most methodically; the second part of the book, twice as long as the first, is the transcription of an oral, taped interview between Sartre and Beauvoir done entirely in the summer of 1974. There is no visible link between the two parts. Neither novel, memoirs, nor biography, the *Cérémonie* is an ambitious project of writing-*qua*-oral-history that, even while a monument to Sartre, is a kind of strange simulacrum of Sartre's own last uncompleted project: a book he wanted to be written truly by two people – not by Sartre and Beauvoir, but by Sartre and his intellectual son Victor (Benni Levi) where, as he puts it, ". . . a thought could exist really formed by you and me at the same time," exactly what Beauvoir had always described as Sartre's and her own economy (CA, p. 126).

This book is, however, remarkable as other than simply monument or simulacrum. The first part of the book is the first thing Beauvoir has ever written and published unseen by Sartre; the second part is completely different – familiar, already said and published to the point of explicit repetition. This book is cut up, cut down the middle, not a simulacrum of and monument to Sartre, but to his death. It is the particularly intense quality of the first part of the book that solicits attention: a flood of words to embalm the past; a compulsion, seeming obligation, *to say everything* about another cut-up-body-to-be-"entombed" – that of Sartre: a corpus in decomposition.

What is so disturbing about this discourse is not that Sartre's referential, historical body is somehow rendered more mortal, less deified – that would be laudible; but rather that this body named Sartre is cut up by the violence of (Beauvoir's) discourse – an explosion of words with razor edges.

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A few pages of politics and then the body-talk begins – with the mouth of course: an abscess in the mouth, a threat of the flu (CA, p. 22).

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differences between feminist mothers and daughters without repeating Oedipal, biological, history-patterns, is being increasingly asked today. In a sense, that question serves as palimpsest to Luce Irigaray's *Et l'une ne bouge pas sans l'autre*. My generation's search for new ways to explore new conceptual territories *with* our mother(s) and grandmother(s), with respect and without denying their experience, is what is at stake. For one of my own first, shaky attempts, cf. my "Interview with Simone de Beauvoir" (1979).

But then the well-recognized "capping sentences" appear: "In spite of these health worries, Sartre continued his political activities" (CA, p. 23).

More pages of referential recounting, ticking off the days. But then there were his teeth, he had to get false teeth: he was afraid – "for obvious symbolic reasons," she says (CA, p. 24).

Politics, politics. His eating habits. Ingestion: "a bit of sausage, some chocolate." He begins to tremble, sputter, jabber – "his mouth was a bit twisted" (CA, p. 31).

After the mouth come the hands that can no longer grip, perform, act upon the material world – that function Sartre valued the most (CA, pp. 32–33).

1972 – more politics, more voyages, until Sartre finally begins to wet his pants and leave brown stains where he was sitting; ruining his clothes; acting like a child, just before he's off on more trips, seeing more people until finally he begins to lose – his arteries, his veins, his nose, his skin, his head. He forgets. He can't get it right, and finally, he loses his eyes. While "eating messily" – "his mouth soiled with food" (CA, p. 75) – Sartre goes blind. "And my eyes. What about my eyes?" he asks (CA, p. 88). And his bladder and intestines are completely out of control.

The unrelenting stream of words occasionally betrays an almost comic relief: he still shaved himself, "very well in fact thanks to a [new] electric razor". . . (CA, p. 97). And he is, after all, still seeing such a lot of women: Sylvie on Sunday, Liliane on Thursday; Michèle on Monday and Friday – and the other days it is Arlette (CA, p. 117). But Sartre's kidneys and intestines only get worse with all this feeding. The doctor talks about cutting off his toes, his feet, his legs.

> He seemed more and more tired, he was beginning to get open wounds and scabs and his bladder was not working – it became necessary to do bypass surgery and when he got up, now very rarely, he trailed behind him a little plastic bag full of urine. . . (CA, p. 154).

I do not cite these sentences to provoke disgust (or sadness), but to try and evoke the horror of this discourse without reprieve, where there is no *arrêt de mort* – no one death sentence and/or reprieve but *only death*. I felt that I had finally discovered what Beauvoir had done with her anger and rage.

Why would Beauvoir do this? How could she so coldly dissect, for the entire world, this supposedly beloved body with, at times, the edges of Sartre's own words?

In Paris, it has been suggested by critics and reviewers across the political spectrum that this book is Beauvoir's revenge on Sartre. But revenge for what? For his love affairs with all those contingent women? For writing with his pseudo-son Victor his last book, the ideal book, the one she had always wanted to write with him?

No, I do not think things are that clear cut *or* that banal.

Julia Kristeva (among others) has defined *le récit*, narrative, in the following way: "Narrative is, in sum, the most elaborate kind of attempt on the part of the speaking subject, after syntactic competence, to situate his or her self among his or her desires and their taboos; that is, at the interior of the Oedipal Triangle" (Kristeva 1980:165). These days, in the wake of deconstruction, schizo-analysis, and feminist post-Freudianism, it is difficult to feel comfortable speaking of Oedipus. But I do think this book may be an instance of one last way for the feminist, in this case Beauvoir, to act out the Oedipal Triangle. Might this not be Beauvoir's last attempt at writing her truest family romance? After all, she wrote so many in the past, both in her memoirs and her novels. One thing is certain. In this narrative, Beauvoir is placing herself in relation to only one privileged body, the female body, the one that has been designated as female by Western, and more importantly and most paradigmatically by Sartre's own philosophical discourse. It is the body that Sartre hated: his own, of course, but more relevantly, the one that smells, bleeds, and falls apart; the one that is sometimes too large, sometimes too small – *the Maternal Body*. Sartre became "too female"; his body must be desexed, evacuated, the narrative body must be purified of what Kristeva has called the ab-ject, of its abjection, that which the discourse of mastery cannot tolerate. This is the ceremony we read. *Eschatologies*. This book is a Tomb, its cadaver purified by the logos with ultimate lucidity.

Sartre has been seen as filling many roles in Beauvoir's Family Romance – her father, her son, her brother. But never her mother – the one *with* the phallus.

And what of Beauvoir's other mother? The weak one, *without* the phallus?[7]

I returned with some trembling to that other Tomb-Book, *Une Mort Très Douce* (*A Very Easy Death* – Beauvoir 1964) and read it simultaneously with this second Tomb. Another tomb, where Beauvoir's other mother is also buried in and by narrative. I read as her (dark, thin?) mother's body "decomposed" in the same way as Sartre's; with amazement, I listened to the same rush of words. Is that because all bodies disintegrate in the same way? No, I do not

7. On the phallic mother as organizing fantasy for the denial of sexual difference, see esp. Kristeva (1974 and 1980).

think so. These two bodies are too linked by their classical sameness and difference:

> His open wounds were terrifying to look at (but happily they were hidden from him, covered up): large purplish red patches [. . .] gangrene was attacking his flesh. . . (CA, p. 155).

The decomposing body named Sartre is never sexed; the sexual organs, the wounds of this (textual) body are hidden, covered up.

Not those of that other "reprieved cadaver" (1964:28) – Beauvoir's "biological" mother whose rotting flesh and scars are described uncovered in the full light of the daughter's vision. Here I invoke the full Greek/Indo-European force of the word "ideology": the *eidos*, the logos of the image, visible idea, vision.[8] The mother's revealed sex and uncovered sex organs force Beauvoir the daughter to turn her gaze away, towards the window – out into the garden, so as to avoid seeing:

> her strained belly, creased in minuscule wrinkles, shriveled, and her shaved pubis [. . .] Seeing my mother's sex organs (*voir le sexe de ma mère*): that gave me quite a shock. No body existed less for me – nor existed more (1964:27).

The scars of this maternal body are not covered, but exposed in words – an open body, its belly the object of devouring cancer. Dead-alive, "she's rotting alive," as Beauvoir's sister put it (1964: 118).

With or without the phallus, good or bad, both versions of this body-of/in-writing must be subjected to catharsis, must be purified by the *Logos* (cf. Kristeva 1980). Beauvoir purifies and exorcizes it – like all writers who fear that which would threaten the integrity of their discourse. She must evacuate the dangerous body, the poisoned body, so that she may continue to write.

Just after Sartre's death, Beauvoir wants to lie down, stretch out, against his body – close and alone – under the sheets.[9] She cannot, of course, because of the poisonous gangrene that has taken over this textual cadaver. Incest is denied because of the poisoned body – she does lie down next to Sartre, but separated from him by the thin white sheet between them. She sleeps.

But she does not dream, as she once did at the side of that other deathbed, of her other mother's bed, while she was grieving the death of *her* mother:

8. On how the relationships among the Idea, the Image, and Vision are valorized within the traditional male libidinal economy, see Irigaray (1974).

9. I cannot here explore this complex desire and its implications with(in) the state of mourning; but this is the place to reveal one of my important intertexts here: the work of Melanie Klein. Cf., esp., her "Mourning and its Relation to Manic-Depressive States" (1940).

> I spent the night by her side; forgetting my distaste for this nuptial bed where I was born, where my father died, I watched her sleep [. . .] Usually, I thought of her with indifference. In my sleep, however – where my father appeared very rarely and then only in a dull way – [my mother] often played *the essential role*: she became confused with Sartre, and we lived happily together. . . (1964:146–147) (My emphasis).

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Turning to a man for nurturance in this culture is one thing; but when doing so involves revalorizing the fantasy of the all-powerful phallic mother, the difficult exploration of sexual difference may become impossible.

Is there a way to move out of the Family Romance without a certain existential feminism turning men into our mothers?; without revalorizing the phallic mother?; without reinforcing an ideology that requires this particular kind of coupling; or a poetics that must ultimately silence the mother's tongue? Is there a way to write without embalming the past?; without writing tombs? Without dismembering the female body; without killing other women in the name of epistemological purity; without killing our mothers, the mother in us?

At the end of *L'Invitée* (*She Came to Stay*), leaving Xavière to die in her bed, Françoise reflects "It was she or I, It shall be I" (Beauvoir 1975:406–407).

Our mothers and grandmothers have done, without a doubt, what it was they had to do. But it is, at least for this daughter, that sentence "It shall be I," *the* patriarchal sentence increasingly turned feminist – that new kinds of feminist subjects need to begin uncoupling and rewriting, without repeating the death sentences of the past.

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