

Subverting the Dominant Order: Narrative as Weapon in Simone de Beauvoir's *Tous les hommes sont mortels*

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Tous les hommes sont mortels (*All Men are Mortal*), Simone de Beauvoir's third novel, published in 1946, combines the theme of narrative competition with a focus on the ways men and women differ in their usage of language. Verbal communication entails situating one's discourse and revealing one's point of view. In making her male and female characters view and narrate certain events in the text, Beauvoir, as a female who seeks to realize herself simultaneously as a transcendent subject and object in a society which encourages women to remain in their traditional place as objects, displays her own unique linguistic practices. More specifically, her main female protagonist's discursive reactions to male-authored language problematize a woman's quest for independence and socially recognized equality. Through the narrative techniques of point of view and embedding, Beauvoir highlights the interactions between the discourses of men and women.

A text presents a story through the mediation of some angle of vision which includes cognitive, emotive, and ideological orientations and which is often termed focalization (Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative* 71). If the focalizer, or the point from which elements in the story are viewed, coincides with a character, the reader will be, in principle, inclined to accept the bias and limitations of this character, who thereby has a technical advantage. Régine, the main female in Beauvoir's third novel, focalizes the first 112 pages constituting the prologue as well as the last four pages composing the epilogue. Fosca, the main male protagonist, views and narrates the 400-page narrative inserted between her visions of the present. Perhaps because of the greater length of Fosca's portion, many studies iden-

tify him as the most important character and his narrative as the predominant text. Plot summaries often ignore or diminish Régine's significance. For example, Beauvoir's own summary of the novel depicts Fosca as the chief protagonist and his story of his past as the central issue (*Choses* 1: 94-98). Similarly, Yolanda Patterson sees the novel as the saga of a thirteenth-century Italian nobleman who attains immortality (101). Others question the verisimilitude of the characters and the blending of the narrative strands. Robert D. Cottrell calls the characters wooden and unconvincing (68). Fosca never really comes to life for Frances Keene (Bennett 178) who states that the plot is too aimless and Beauvoir's research of past centuries too broad. Terry Keefe claims that Fosca's narrative becomes turgid near the end where references to beginning episodes proliferate and that the narratives of Régine and Fosca are unsuccessfully linked (178). It is Elizabeth Fallaize who comes the closest to suggesting that the interpretive focus should be shifted from Fosca to Régine. Establishing Fosca's narrative as dominant in terms of themes and sheer weight of pages, Fallaize rightfully notes that, structurally, the text emphasizes Régine since Fosca narrates to her (82).

Other elements, unexplored by Fallaize, offer further support for defining Régine as the novel's core. For example, Jean Leighton maintains that Régine is motivated by an incomprehensible rage, which impedes her from enjoying her coiffure, makeup, and dress, thereby making her unreal (138-39). Intense anger accurately describes Régine's driving force, but her rage is understandable and her character is believable. This essay argues that Beauvoir carefully designed the narrative and gendered points of view in *Tous les hommes sont mortels* to explain why males dominate society. Furthermore, the construction of the narrative encourages a woman to comprehend the source of her fury and to use that wrath to fight constructively against the current patriarchal social order. Just as Beauvoir continually disguised her status as a philosopher and as a bisexual in her interviews and autobiographical works, so too she exploits the compositional technique of embedding in this novel to camouflage the foregrounding of Régine's focalization as the heart of the entire text.¹

In addition to identifying embedded narrative as one narrative inside another, Mieke Bal has defined one instance of embedding which involves a change in narrator leading to a change in the focalizing subject, and which helps to interpret *Tous les hommes sont mortels*. Although an embedded unit is, by definition, formally sub-

ordinate to its greater unit, Gérard Genette, Mieke Bal, and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan agree that the embedded structure often is thematically more important than the one framing it (Genette, *Revisited* 90; Bal, "Notes" 48). The more independent and complete the embedded narrative, argues Bal, the more problematic its relation to the embedding unit becomes. Employing John Barth's typology, Genette redesigns his own categories for the types of relationships between framed and framing stories (*Revisited* 92-95; cf. *Narrative Discourse* 232-33 and Barth 56). These relationships may function to explain, to predict, to thematize, to persuade, to distract, or to obstruct. Bal clarifies that psychoanalytic theory can often help detect hidden or metaphorized analogies (48). To these explanations, Richard Shryock adds the notion of the primacy of the setting in which the embedded narrative acts take place. He comments that although most analyses of embedded stories privilege the information contained in the story (the narrative *énoncés*), the *énonciation* (who is telling the story to whom, the material and ideological context of the act of storytelling as well as how the story is told and understood) is equally important ("Zola's" 48). The role of the relationship between *énoncés* and *énonciation* stressed by Shryock will be of utmost importance in the following analysis.

Although Beauvoir and a great number of this novel's critics view the embedded narrative told by Fosca as more important than the embedding narrative focalized by Régine, an exploration of the relationship between these two texts reveals the opposite. Elements supporting the primacy of the embedding text include thematic repetitions and contradictions, the narrator's reliability, and the use of time. Psychoanalytic theory, the author's life at the time of writing, cultural history, and theories concerning *énonciation* aid further in interpreting the relationship between embedded and embedding texts in this novel.

In order to understand the importance of this novel's thematic repetitions and contradictions, it is useful to examine Debra B. Bergoffen's analysis of the feminist ethic proposed by Beauvoir. Beauvoir explains existential freedom as the basis of the ambiguity of the human condition, which involves acknowledgment of one's own simultaneous subjectivity and objectivity. Individuals make themselves exist as individuals by vainly attempting to be God. Although they never can be God, they cannot exist without tending toward this impossible state of being. This effort, which results in

choosing one's own situation in the world. However, such responsibility for one's own existence also creates anxiety and nostalgia for the original condition of existence as a child in which one is totally dominated by situations and knows neither the worries nor the pleasures of the liberty to make decisions. Beauvoir calls this nostalgia, or desire to be only object, bad faith. Furthermore, one cannot assert one's own freedom without affirming that of others (1-7). This concept of existential freedom is a mainspring of *Tous les hommes sont mortels*.

The basic thematic repetition in this text consists of Fosca, an immortal man, who repeatedly tries to live through or for others and thus figuratively kills them. In each instance, he brings about destruction by not respecting some part of the existential pact of freedom. This cycle goes through several permutations, which foreground the importance of the various narratives in this novel. The principal narrative in question concerns Fosca's inability to die. Studying the effects on others of learning about his immortality draws out some important points about existential freedom and passion which Beauvoir discussed more fully in her philosophical essays. In *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* (*An Ethics of Ambiguity*), Beauvoir states that the passionate lover gets the most pleasure from the belief that nobody else understands the loved one:

Mais la véritable passion revendique la subjectivité de son engagement; en particulier dans la passion amoureuse, on ne souhaite pas que l'être aimé soit admiré objectivement; on préfère le penser inconnu, méconnu; on pense se l'approprier davantage si l'on est seul à en dévoiler le prix.

But true passion demands the subjectivity of its commitment. In particular, in amorous passion, one does not wish for the beloved to be admired objectively. One prefers to think of the beloved as unknown, poorly understood. The lover believes that appropriation of the beloved is greater if he is the only one to unveil the beloved's worth. (92)

She describes the individual ruled by passion as one who inspires horror if that passion becomes obsessive and forgets the beloved's ambiguous nature:

Seulement, dans les passions que nous appellerons maniaques pour les distinguer des passions généreuses, la liberté ne trouve

pas sa figure authentique; le passionné cherche la possession, il cherche à atteindre l'être; on a décrit assez souvent son échec et cet enfer qu'il se crée à lui-même.

Only, in passions which we will call maniacal so as to distinguish them from generous passions, freedom does not find its authentic face. The passionate person seeks possession, he seeks the attainment of being. His failure and this hell that he creates for himself have been described rather often. (*Morale* 92-93)

The best passion, she maintains, accepts alterity and the freedom of the loved one to be quite other than self: "Ce n'est qu'en tant qu'étranger, interdit, en tant que libre, que l'autre se dévoile comme autre; et l'aimer authentiquement, c'est l'aimer dans son altérité et dans cette liberté par laquelle il s'échappe" 'It is only as foreign, forbidden, as free, that the other becomes unveiled as other; and loving the other genuinely is to love him in his otherness and in the liberty through which he escapes' (*Morale* 96).

In Beauvoirian philosophical terms Fosca both forgets that he is still a reality that can be acted upon and adopts the attitudes of the bad passionate lover. These oversights keep him from being aware of the human reality of others whom he recognizes as only his objects, but who repeatedly proclaim their need to affirm their subjectivity. This is why those who learn of Fosca's immortality very young such as Béatrice, Antoine, and Carlier slowly grow to hate him for not treating them as equals. Antoine, for example, warns Fosca that all individuals aspire to make their own decisions: "On m'a appris à raisonner, à réfléchir: à quoi bon, si je dois suivre aveuglément vos avis?" (197) 'I was taught to reason, to think. But what for, if I have to go on blindly following your advice?' (122).² Béatrice indirectly reproaches Fosca for not allowing her to live her own life, when she asks him if she actually chose the life he criticizes: "Elle dit d'une voix lente: 'Ai-je choisi?' " 'She said slowly: "Did I choose?"' (219). Carlier too echoes a need to decide for himself and fight his own battles: "Il faut que je me sente vivre . . . Dussé-je en mourir" (352) 'I've got to feel that I'm alive—even if I have to die trying' (228). Just as man's ability to dominate woman stems primarily from his greater physical strength and independence since he is not corporally affected by menstruation or maternity, so Fosca's capacity to subjugate others derives greatly from his bodily strength. Like the patriarchy which denies rights to women and chil-

dren (Firestone 72-73), Fosca cites his greater familiarity with the world as a valid excuse for his unwillingness to let women or younger men participate fully in world affairs.

Like Beauvoir's imperfect passionate lover, Fosca seeks to possess and thereby to stifle all objects of love. Both Fosca and, by analogy, the patriarchy err by not permitting individuals the right to make decisions for themselves: the text stresses not only the disadvantages of denying freedom to a person but also of keeping a talented individual sheltered from society. Fosca's son Antoine dies in his first battle because his father did not allow him to gain the experience necessary for his survival. Forced to remain by Fosca's side, Béatrice ends her days illuminating manuscripts and resenting her figurative imprisonment. After too many years in which Fosca insisted upon protecting him, Carlier commits suicide. Part of Fosca's power and his subsequent failure resides in the lengthy series of events which comprise his life and in his tendency to forget the value of the lives of others. Just as the patriarchy has silenced or diminished the deeds of women or social groups not in power, so Fosca comes to view the lives of all others as uninteresting and he has no desire to hear or tell about them.

Armand, the great-great grandson of Fosca, is the first individual who succeeds in keeping Fosca's legend from interfering with his life and thereby offers a solution for escaping subservience to the patriarchy. Through Armand's interactions with Fosca, the text illustrates that certain prominent narratives must be kept in perspective or forgotten in order for individuals to live in the present. By his disinterest in Fosca's narratives of the past, Armand suggests that one cannot make others immortal through words: the dead remain dead. Fosca, the narrator, stresses this point for the benefit of Régine who had hoped for immortality via his future tales of her greatness: "Je regardais Marianne; j'avais envie de parler d'elle. . . . Qu'était Marianne pour lui? Une morte parmi des millions d'autres. Elle souriait de son sourire figé au milieu du cadre ovale; jamais elle ne renaîtrait" 'I looked at Marianne and I felt a desire to speak of her. . . . What was Marianne to him? A dead woman among millions of others. She was smiling but her smile was frozen in the middle of an oval frame. Never would she be reborn' (454).

More specifically, the text warns against male narratives concerning women. Just as what Fosca might tell about the deceased Marianne is of no interest to Armand, who wants only to destroy the hierarchy which creates social strife, so the modern day Laure,

who also devotes herself to creating a new society, cares little about Fosca's memories or future dreams of other women: "Tout cet avenir où vous m'oublierez, ce passé où je n'ai pas existé, je les accepte: ils font partie de vous" (510) 'The whole future in which you'll forget me, that past in which I didn't exist, I accept them, they're a part of you' (332). Male images of past or future women do not always change the behavior of politically active and caring people who truly desire social equality, but because Fosca, and, figuratively, the patriarchy, continue to promulgate these faulty reflections, many women are stymied in their development.

The reaction of both Marianne and Régine to the tale of Fosca's immortality indicate how the emphasis on male superiority destroys the female psyche. Both women lose their self-confidence, forget their desires, and end up miserable once Fosca's inability to be equaled is imposed upon them. Marianne, for instance, upon learning of Fosca's immortality, detests him for not having loved her as completely as she loves him and cannot stop comparing herself to his other women: " 'Je me suis donnée à toi tout entière,' dit-elle. 'Je croyais que toi aussi tu te donnais pour la vie, pour la mort. Et tu te prêtai pour quelques années. . . . Une femme parmi des millions d'autres. Un jour tu ne te rappelleras même plus mon nom' " "I gave myself to you completely," she said. "I believed that you had also given yourself to me, for life, for death. And you were only lending yourself to me for a few years. . . . One woman among millions of others. One day you won't even remember my name" ' (428). Unable to compete with past and future tales, she dies bitter and dissatisfied. Similarly, it is in part because Régine constantly wants to prove her equality with Fosca that he intrigues her. Her initial reaction to his tale of immortality is jealousy:

Il y avait un homme qui osait penser cela, un homme assez orgueilleux et assez solitaire pour se croire immortel. Je disais: je suis seule. Je disais: je n'ai jamais rencontré homme ou femme qui me valût. Mais jamais je n'ai osé dire: je suis immortelle.

There was a man who dared to think this, a man proud enough and solitary enough to believe himself to be immortal. I used to say, "I am alone." I used to say, "I never met a man or a woman as good as me." But never did I dare to say: "I am immortal." (48)

To prove her equality, she wants to demonstrate that she is better than all the women whom he remembers: "Elle regarda au fond de la

salle le fauteuil que Fosca venait de quitter. Lui qui pouvait se souvenir, avait-il vu? Avait-il enfin compris qu'on ne devait la confondre avec aucune autre femme?" 'She looked toward the rear of the theater, at the seat which Fosca had just left. He who could remember, had he seen? Had he at last understood that she should not be confused with any other woman?' (98). Ironically, however, it is Régine's effort to prove her equality to Fosca and her superiority to other women that keeps her from true greatness and from the realization of her desires. She becomes banal because of her efforts to equal or surpass the images which man has created of her and of himself. Her primary goal should be to follow her own desire. One way to do so would be to narrate, since, as Peter Brooks points out, desire engenders narrative (48). Régine's mistake is to interpret her desire as the wish for Fosca to tell her story instead of realizing that she must tell it herself without his help. Dale Spender's analysis of language helps to understand how the positioning of male and female viewed narratives in *Tous les hommes sont mortels* creates new representations which affirm a woman's viewpoint. Discussing the patriarchal nature of discourse concerning sexuality, Spender points out that sexual penetration might be called "enclosure" if women were in charge of language (178). The importance of using a woman's desire to advance her independence and self-realization is symbolically highlighted by housing the female point of view in the embedding text which surrounds the male focalization in the embedded narrative. Regarded as a female form embracing the male body, the two narrative strands in this novel represent a new sexual economy in which female desire takes precedence: the female is no longer penetrated by the male but on the contrary engulfs him.

The Oedipal myth is another recurring theme which implies that Régine's present story is more important than the tale of Fosca's past. Repeatedly the embedded text offers images of fathers and children competing for power. Tancrede, who attempts to assassinate his father Fosca in order to rule the lands, is killed by him (162-63). Fosca tries to persuade Béatrice to love him instead of his son Antoine (205-06) and subsequently forces her to marry him after Antoine's death. In risking his life to escape his father's rule, Antoine dies happy. The discourse constantly foregrounds the similarity between Fosca's real and symbolic children by drawing attention to the likeness of their glances in his presence to emphasize his implicit signification as the father of all: "Il y avait dans ses yeux [ceux d'Antoine] le même feu qui brillait jadis dans les yeux de Tancrede."

. . . Mais je me rappelais d'autres yeux: ceux de Carlier, ceux de Béatrice, ceux d'Antoine. J'avais peur de voir changer son regard" 'There was in his eyes [Antoine's] the same fire which burned long ago in the eyes of Tancrede (196). . . . But I remembered other eyes: Carlier's, Beatrice's, Antoine's. I was afraid of seeing the look in her eyes change' (423). This common thread similarly evokes the patriarchy, the societal force that oppresses women, children, and the marginal. As the dominant ideology, the patriarchy presents itself as if it is making its laws for the good of all individuals.³ Patriarchal discourse and its system of representation are very persuasive and it is only after experiencing the inequities of the system that the oppressed individual becomes conscious of the injustices and thereby embittered.⁴ This is why the warmth and passion in the eyes of Fosca's loved ones repeatedly transform to horror in his presence: "j'avais vu cette expression dans d'autres yeux: c'était de l'horreur" 'I had seen that expression in other eyes: it was horror' (427). For psychoanalysts, patriarchal literature has clearly defined woman as the feared and damaged being without a visible sex organ who consequently fills every man with the subconscious terror of potential castration.⁵ Like the female genitals, Régine's narrative is less visible than its male counterpart. Yet, her tale still threatens figurative castration by its position, which engulfs Fosca's text/sex organ. By thematically establishing the patriarchy as the cause of horror or the destroyer of Fosca's real and figurative sons as well as his daughters, Beauvoir thus rewrites the psychoanalytic equation whereby woman is the scapegoat. It is not woman who represents a castrating force to other men but the dominant ideology and legends lauding man's greatness.

Similarly, the structure of the text mirrors the psychoanalytic view of language while simultaneously undermining it. Lacan, for example, postulates that woman cannot enter the world of the symbolic formed by words because upon acquiring the linguistic system she learns that she lacks the phallus, the emblem around which language organizes difference. Adopting the patriarchal mentality, woman sees herself negatively, as lack, as other, and as outside male discourse (E. Ann Kaplan 310). *Tous les hommes sont mortels* places Fosca's patriarchal world at the middle of the text and the female universe of Régine on the periphery. As the active and always powerful center, Fosca embodies the phallus that causes all others to realize their insufficiency. Outside the phallic arena in which Fosca's story unfolds, Régine, the actress perpetually seeking the proper

role or mask, incarnates the empty vessel known by patriarchy as woman who continually tries to find herself in the object position assigned to her.

In the relationship between Régine and Fosca, the role of phallic symbols such as the gaze and the hand helps to understand this analogy better. E. Kaplan argues that "men do not simply look; their gaze carries with it the power of action and of possession that is lacking in the female gaze. Women receive and return a gaze, but cannot act on it." Man's stare, Kaplan continues within a psychoanalytic framework, sexualizes and objectifies a woman primarily to annihilate the threat that she poses because of her castration and possession of a sinister and hidden genital organ (311). Upon learning language, the little girl discovers her place as the recipient of male desire and of his gaze. She can only have sexual pleasure from being objectified. Within these limits, she can only desire to be desired. Beauvoir makes a similar point in discussing psychoanalytic theories and the relationship of each sex to its subjectivity. Feeling alienated, all children attempt to obtain the sense and unity of their existence in mirrors or in their parents' eyes. Because boys have a visible sex organ, they begin to view it as their double or as something which is simultaneously there and not there but which guarantees them unity or an alter ego. Lacking an obviously visible sex organ, girls have a tendency to feel as though they are only objects. They attempt to experience subjectivity through their dolls or through society's view of them (*Sexe* 90-91). Thus males see their penis as representative of themselves whereas females recreate themselves as marvelous dolls only worthwhile if they are able to capture the attention of others:

Tandis que le garçon se recherche dans le pénis en tant que sujet autonome, la fillette drolote sa poupée et la pare comme elle rêve d'être parée et drolotée; inversement, elle se pense elle-même comme une merveilleuse poupée. . . . À travers compliments et gronderies, à travers les images et les mots, elle découvre le sens des mots "jolie" et "laide"; elle sait bientôt que pour plaire il faut être "jolie comme une image"; elle cherche à ressembler à une image, elle se déguise, elle se regarde dans les glaces, elle se compare aux princesses et aux fées de contes.

Whereas the boy seeks his autonomy in his penis, the girl pampers her doll and adorns it as she dreams of being pampered and

adorned; inversely, she thinks of herself as a marvelous doll. . . . Through compliments and scoldings, through images and words, she discovers the meaning of the words “pretty” and “ugly”; she soon knows that in order to please, she must be “as pretty as a picture”; she seeks to resemble a picture, she disguises herself, she looks at herself in mirrors, she compares herself to fairytale princesses and fairies. (*Sexe* 2: 27-28)

Moreover, in her letters to Sartre, Beauvoir indicates that it is quite important to her to be seen and judged by men:

A la suite des conversations avec Védrine, j’ai ouvert une enquête touchant l’opinion des hommes sur mon physique: car ce sont les femmes seulement qui me trouvent jolie, d’ordinaire—Kanapa trouve que je suis bien, mais pas dans le joli. Lévy . . . trouve que je suis jolie et même assez belle—l’homme lunaire me trouve très bien.

Following conversations with Védrine, I started conducting a survey on men’s opinions of my physical appearance because it is usually only women who find me pretty—Kanapa thinks I’m good looking but not what one would call pretty. Lévy thinks that I am pretty and even rather beautiful—the lunar man thinks that I’m very good looking. (*Lettres* 1: 339)

Although this information suggests that Beauvoir values the male gaze more than that of the female, she also indicates the force and even the danger of the gazes of both sexes in her other writings. Kate and Edward Fullbrook emphasize that Beauvoir’s concept of the Look “is the idea that to perceive or to imagine someone looking at oneself is to experience oneself as the other’s object and hence the other as a conscious being” (111). In effect, it is to avoid Xavière’s stare and subsequent judgment and narrations that Françoise kills her in Beauvoir’s first novel *L’Invitée*. Yet in her third novel, *Tous les hommes sont mortels*, it is decidedly the power of the male stare which grants both sexual power and subjectivity to Régine.

This is why Régine can only feel alive if she realizes herself as the ultimate desired object. To foreground the importance of her objectification, the text opens with an image of Régine reveling in being seen by the masses as she takes a curtain call: “dans chaque face, il y avait des yeux, et au fond de tous ces yeux, Régine s’inclinait

et souriait . . . une force impétueuse l'arrachait à la terre, la précipitait vers le ciel" (13) 'In every face there were eyes, and reflected in each pair of eyes was Regina, bowing and smiling . . . an impetuous force ripped her from the earth and sent her soaring toward heaven' (3). Her interest in Fosca likewise stems from her need to be the object of the male gaze: "elle eut envie soudain de troubler son repos et d'exister pour lui" (20) 'She had a sudden desire to upset his tranquillity, to exist for him' (8). At the very moment when she approaches him for the first time, the text overflows with images emphasizing patriarchal power which debilitates woman. Régine, the readers learn, feels passion for Fosca because he reminds her of her father, who abandoned her. Not only does Régine feel that Fosca renders her non-existent by looking at her, but she also simultaneously remembers the moment when her father (the original patriarchal figure) viewed her in the same way:

son regard se posa sur elle et elle ébaucha un sourire. Les yeux de l'homme la fixaient avec une insistance qui aurait dû paraître insolente; mais il ne la voyait pas . . . elle pensa: est-ce que je n'existe pas?. . . Une fois elle avait vu ces yeux, quand son père tenait sa main, couché sur son lit, avec un râle au fond de la gorge; il tenait sa main et elle n'avait plus de main. Elle resta figée sur place, sans voix, sans vie: une imposture.

his eyes settled on her, and she advanced a faint smile. The man's eyes were staring at her so insistently that it should have seemed insolent. But he wasn't seeing her . . . and for one moment she thought: "Don't I exist?". . . Once before she had seen these eyes, when her father was holding her hand, lying on his bed, the rattle of death in his throat. He was holding her hand and she no longer had a hand. She stayed frozen to the spot, without voice or face or life: an imposture. (21)

Functioning as a Freudian representation of the phallus, the hands in this memory stress the societally dictated masculine and feminine or subject and object positions which effectively castrate woman.⁶ The patriarchy, by claiming to possess the only sex organ (symbol of power), negates the reality of female desire as a positive and active term. In Régine's mind, her father has the phallus and symbolically destroys her phallic power: he holds her hand, not the reverse, and subsequently renders it and her powerless.

The foregrounding of this scenario points to a woman's nemesis in patriarchal society. A woman in modern society, Régine's text proposes, cannot succeed by accepting the passive role, that of being a desired object. Paradoxically, Régine transgresses the feminine category of passivity by excelling in her career and seeking her goals which originate in the socially inculcated desire to be desired. Yet the cultural need to obtain a symbolic phallus by eventually seducing the father that Fosca embodies causes her to denounce all other achievements. Although Régine plays a very active role that focuses on the present and the future instead of on the past, Beauvoir implies that even females who actively affirm their selfhood and independence are still often influenced by the societal expectations learned in youth which teach women to be passive: "on lui apprend que pour plaire il faut chercher à plaire, il faut se faire objet; elle doit donc renoncer à son autonomie" 'one teaches her that in order to please, one must seek to please, one must make oneself into an object; she must therefore give up her autonomy' (*Sexe* 2: 30). Thus Beauvoir sketches in fictional form what she will clearly articulate in *Le Deuxième Sexe*: the rules of the dominant ideology will continue to encourage even emancipated women to subordinate themselves to men:

Que la femme se propose trop hardiment, l'homme se dérobe: il tient à conquérir. . . . il faut qu'elle devienne une chose passive, une promesse de soumission. Si elle réussit, elle pensera que cette conjuration magique, elle l'a effectuée volontairement, elle se retrouvera sujet. Mais elle court le risque d'être figée en un objet inutile par le dédain du mâle. . . . en effet, selon l'opinion publique, c'est l'homme qui vainc, qui a la femme. On n'admet pas qu'elle puisse comme l'homme assumer ses désirs: elle est leur proie.

If the woman offers herself too boldly, the man slips away: he insists upon conquering. . . . She must become a passive thing, a promise of submission. If she succeeds, she will think that this magic spell, she voluntarily willed it, she will recognize herself as a subject. But she runs the risk of being frozen into a useless object by male disdain. . . . In effect, according to public opinion, it is the man who vanquishes, who *has* the woman. One does not admit that she could, like man, assume her desires: she is their prey. (609-10)

Like structure and content, the use of time in this novel also indicates the interplay among the patriarchal hierarchy, the embedding text, and woman's emancipation. Because Fosca's narrative recounts his past and, more specifically, his previous relationships with women, the textual time devoted to Régine increases in importance. Just as Fosca's inability to die makes him superior to all other men, so the patriarchy's strength and glorious acceptance resides in its control of ancient society. In the post-World War II France, in which this novel was written, the changing laws opposed the male right to dominance. It was in 1944 that French women obtained the vote and in 1946 that the French Constitution recognized the equality of women in most domains (Marks 22-23). By having immortal man focus primarily on his past, the text implies that the patriarchy's superiority resides in yesteryear. Achieving little in the present, Fosca can only reminisce about his former glory. His prior achievements are further undermined by the rapidity of his narration: his six centuries of accomplishments take slightly more than one day to recount. Correspondingly, the novel omits Fosca's thoughts in the primary text although furnishing them in the embedded narrative to create a distance between Fosca and the present. Never seeing him from the inside during his interactions with Régine, one sympathizes with him much less than with her. In contrast, one experiences her anguish and problems with her. The text thus suggests that the patriarchy should be abolished, by silencing the immortal voice and viewpoint of a man while stressing and prolonging the perception of a woman.

It is not, however, only time that subverts male predominance but also the reliability of Fosca as narrator. An unreliable narrator is one who recounts a tale undermined by features of that account such as inconsistency between the narrator's actions and words or self-interest of the narrator (Smith). As the narrator of his own life, Fosca often draws conclusions which clash with his deeds. The embedded text thereby foregrounds the hypocrisy of his acts in the embedding text by showing conflicts between his proclamations and his behavior. Although he eventually accepts the blame for Béatrice's ruined life, he immediately discounts her importance because she is only mortal (226-28). The same society which he yearns to save from chance and man's caprices he subjects to his own whims, which he calls reason: "Rien ne sera livré aux caprices des hommes ni aux hasards du sort. Ce sera la raison qui gouvernera la terre; ma raison." "Nothing will be left to the capriciousness of men

or the accidents of fate. It will be reason which will govern the earth: my reason' (237). Similarly, in the embedding text, his will to see Régine contradicts the narrative of his past development in which he claims to have learned that he should not make decisions for others. The generosity and the ability to let others choose their own happiness which he expresses verbally do not correspond to his conduct: "On ne pouvait rien leur donner. On ne pouvait rien vouloir pour eux si l'on ne voulait rien pour soi-même avec eux. Il aurait fallu l'aimer. Je ne l'aimais pas. Je ne voulais rien" 'One couldn't give them anything. One couldn't want anything for them if one didn't want something for oneself with them. It would have been necessary to love her. I didn't love her. I didn't want anything' (512). Had he been truly concerned about Régine's well-being, he would neither have pursued her after she had tired of him (39-40) nor forced her to hear the rest of his story once her interest in it had disappeared (318). Furthermore, his continual enigmatic comments concerning his greatness and Régine's ordinariness and imminent death do not support his supposed effort to hide his tale of immortality from her: "Bientôt vous serez morte et toutes vos pensées avec vous. . . . Comment faites-vous pour vous croire installée dans le monde, alors que vous allez le quitter dans si peu d'années et que vous venez à peine d'y arriver?" (44-45) 'Soon you'll be dead and all your thoughts with you. . . . How on earth can you feel so permanently settled in the world when you've just hardly come into it and when you're going to leave it again in so few years?' (23-24). On the contrary, his actions suggest an attempt to catch her in his narrative trap by hinting at his own mysterious superiority: "Pourquoi m'abandonnez-vous? . . . Pourquoi vous occupez-vous de ces moucheron et jamais de moi? . . . Ces petits hommes d'un jour" 'Why are you abandoning me? . . . Why do you spend your time with those insects and never with me? . . . Those ephemeral little men' (45). Although Régine had originally decided to entice Fosca into loving her and thereby into wanting to live, she ironically loses her power to leave him once her goal is accomplished. The narrative tactics helping Fosca to dominate evoke those of the French patriarchal order during Beauvoir's adolescence and early adulthood, which proclaimed that it wanted only the best for a woman in order to obtain her acquiescence to its desires and which then abandoned the needs of the real woman. For example, in the 1920s, due to fear of population stagnation after the First World War and in order to bolster the birthrate, the French government and church entreated a

woman that giving up her independence was the best way to realize freedom. In 1930, Pius XI argued that women should not be able to terminate a pregnancy in even the most grave of circumstances: "Venerable Brethren, however much we may pity the mother whose health and even life is gravely imperiled in the performance of the duty allotted to her by nature, nevertheless what could ever be a sufficient reason for excusing in any way the direct murder of the innocent?" (qtd. in Bell 311). Yet he offered no advice for women, who, convinced by his rhetoric, suffered the consequences of childbirth. Pius XI further condemned women's quest for social, economic, and physiological equality with men and claimed that to allow a woman "to be freed at her own good pleasure from the burdensome duties properly belonging to a wife as companion and mother" would be "not an emancipation but a crime" (qtd. in Bell 313, 14). He told women that they must remain subservient and obedient to their husbands for the sake of Christianity and themselves:

More than this, this false liberty and unnatural equality with the husband is to the detriment of the woman herself, for if the woman descends from her truly regal throne to which she has been raised within . . . the home by means of the Gospel, she will soon be reduced to the old state of slavery (if not in appearance, certainly in reality) and become as among the pagans the mere instrument of man. (qtd. in Bell 314)

Just as once Fosca had seduced Régine, his negative effect on her no longer concerned him, so too once a woman of the 1930s had agreed to her own subordination, the church worried little about offering rewards for the sacrifice of her self-esteem.

Other elements of Beauvoir's biography as well as contemporary cultural events further support Régine's prominence and the importance of the embedding text to this novel. Some critics maintain that Beauvoir wrote this novel in order to ease her pain and jealousy over Sartre's other lovers or supposedly greater talents.⁷ Although declaring in *La Force des choses* (*The Force of Circumstances*) that she did not try to suggest anything in this novel (1: 98), in *La Force de l'âge* (*The Prime of Life*), Beauvoir indicates that her experiences with Sartre influenced all of her narratives. He affected her so powerfully that she almost abandoned her freedom to

consort with him.

Je me reprochais, à l'égard de Sartre, comme de Zaza autrefois, de ne pas m'en être tenue à la vérité de nos rapports et d'avoir risqué d'y aliéner ma liberté. Il me semblait que je me laverai de cette faute . . . si je réussissais à la transposer dans un roman: je commençais à avoir quelque chose à dire. Ainsi abordais-je un thème auquel je reviens dans tous les récits que j'ébauchai . . . le mirage de l'Autre.

In my dealings with Sartre, as previously with Zaza, I reproached myself for failing to hold onto the truth about our relationship, and for thereby risking the loss of my own freedom. It seemed to me that I would cleanse myself of this error . . . if I succeeded in transposing it into a novel: I was starting to have something to say. So it was that I approached a theme that I revisited in every plot that I sketched out . . . the mirage of the Other. (118)⁸

According to this rationale, by punishing Régine for having given up her successful career for Fosca, Beauvoir keeps herself from letting Sartre play a similar role in her life.

From a cultural standpoint, however, Beauvoir defies the political propaganda being popularized at the time of this novel's conception. Predominant current events during the creation of this novel were World War II and woman's changing status. The Vichy regime promoted traditional roles for women in the family, such as early marriage, many children, and domesticity for wives supported by the hard work of husbands (Fishman 186). Even a woman whose husband was absent, Vichy proclaimed, was expected to dedicate her life to keeping his memory alive and to prepare for his return as the master (Fishman 188-93). In short, Vichy worked hard to discourage women from creating new roles or images for themselves which did not include men as dominant figures.

The Liberation following the Vichy regime, Jane Jenson argues, created new social programs and benefits that reinforced traditional hierarchies and economically discouraged women from seeking employment outside the family (281-87). Childbearing was still perceived as a national duty (284). Thus, the Liberation, too, advocated that women deny their newly discovered self-reliance and resubordinate themselves to men.

Yet neither regime stole women's self-sufficiency in a straightforward manner. Rather, these political discourses often focused on women's rights while unobtrusively taking them away. In a similar manner, Beauvoir's embedding techniques seemingly foreground a man's importance while actually belittling him. Women of the forties

can speak for themselves as long as they continually filter themselves through men and try to become the images which men have created for them. Analogously, although Fosca tells his own story for over 400 pages, it is through Régine that readers see his current situation. His version of the past remains forever embedded in her view of the present. Writing during a time of ideological propaganda and subversive speeches which work to incapacitate women, Beauvoir manages to illustrate the wrongs of such an ideology while mirroring its seductive techniques. Like many women of the war years, Régine had a successful life and career until the supreme patriarchal figure Fosca engulfed her with a discourse on her insignificance.

Furthermore, it is in examining how Régine reacted to Fosca's narratives that the primacy and value of her text is appreciated. As Shryock emphasizes, one aspect common to all embedded stories with receivers is the relationship between speaker and listener. The chief function of the embedded story (at least on the level of the embedding story) is to attempt to change the listener in some way (*Tales* 39). Fosca's original confession that he is immortal renews Régine's interest in him just as he had intended. His subsequent reported narrative is meant to erase the effect of his first narrative, to make Régine realize that he doesn't count, that she is the one who exists. Yet the textual interludes which show her reactions to his story question the effectiveness of his second telling of his tale. She perceives that death is good (230), that hearing his narrative is useless (318), that if she listens to him long enough, she will know that she must leave him (319). She learns that as long as she focuses on his words, even if she doesn't care about his version of events, she will not have to think about her own life or make decisions for herself (359). But somewhere his storytelling fails, for Régine loses her own sense of existence once she accepts the bleakness of Fosca's future: "C'était une pensée machinale, déjà ces mots ne voulaient plus rien dire; elle n'avait plus d'enfance, plus d'avenir, pour elle non plus il n'y avait plus ni couleurs, ni odeurs, ni lumière" 'It was a mechanical thought; already these words no longer meant anything; she no longer had a childhood or a future, for her neither, there were no longer any colors, odors, or light' (441). She comprehends that they must leave each other, but in losing the primacy of Fosca's opinions and visions, she is left without meaning. She realizes that once he stops narrating, she will have to create her own story anew: "Quand il aura fini, il faudra franchir cette porte et par

derrière il y aura encore quelque chose. Je ne pourrai pas m'endormir et je n'aurai pas le courage de mourir" 'When he finishes, it will be necessary to go through the door and behind it there will be something different. I will not be able to fall asleep and I won't have the courage to die' (526). Yet, while gaining knowledge of her own subjectivity and of the subsequent responsibility for self-creation, which constitutes the first step on the road to female independence, Régine cannot move beyond this; she does not understand how to let go of male-created images even if they are detrimental to her: "Elle fit un pas, et s'arrêta, clouée sur place; il avait disparu, mais elle demeurait telle qu'il l'avait faite: un brin d'herbe, un moucheron, une fourmi, un lambeau d'écume" 'She took a step and stopped, nailed to the spot. He had disappeared, but she remained just as he had made her, a blade of grass, a gnat, an ant, a bit of foam' (527-28).

Overall, the ultimate goal of the embedded narrative viewed and narrated by Fosca is to negate the influence of his initial account which, focalized by Régine, convinces a woman of a man's greatness and necessity to her existence. It is because of Régine's final reactions that her embedding text takes precedence: she successfully processes the intended communication, but her body's refusal to move past this first step signifies that she cannot progress beyond her discovery. The concluding message of the novel therefore has little to do with Fosca's immortality and adventures and depends rather on Régine's interpretation of his importance to her.

These few examples thus show how *Tous les hommes sont mortels* applies narrative techniques to illustrate and problematize the difficulties a woman encounters in trying to wield language or narrative to her own benefit. Like Fosca, historical men have produced so much more recorded discourse than their female companions that men are usually seen as the most important figures of the text commonly called history. Régine's text symbolically embodies history as viewed through the eyes and mind of a woman. Although dissatisfied with herself and the state of the world without knowing why, she has learned how to manipulate the male-dominated system to her own advantage. The repetition of male-authored narratives, which invariably result in the death of real women, cause her to realize her compliance with the patriarchal descriptions of women embedded in her psyche. Without these depictions, Régine's story becomes surprisingly short. Patriarchal images as represented by the lengthy autobiography narrated by Fosca are embedded into

Régine's brief female-engendered story to illustrate the scope and predominance of these portrayals in female development. Fosca's goals in narrating both his supremacy and his inutility, first to imprison Régine and then to free her, are stressed to show the efficacy of these intended messages upon a woman: like Régine, once a woman acknowledges the emptiness of the roles designed for her by society as well as the unimportance of male opinions and perhaps even male presence, she experiences horror, tries to abandon her masks, and cries out in protest and bewilderment, but she does not envisage how to embrace her existential freedom and to build her life anew.

In writing this novel, Beauvoir offers the first step to a solution. In fashioning a female self who simultaneously achieves subjectivity and objectivity, one must understand the ways in which female possibilities have been distorted by the patriarchy and have embedded themselves in the female mind in such a manner that males control representation of the world. Thus, like Fosca's portion of this novel, the male version of lived events is much longer than its female counterpart and firmly embeds itself into female-authored creations to deny their independence. Mirroring the embedded structure of the female psyche through the use of narrative allows Beauvoir to reappropriate the same narrative weapons that men most often control, to challenge the dominant ideology.

Notes

1. Toril Moi and Kate and Edward Fullbrook, among others, also focus on Beauvoir's stature as a great thinker and as a philosopher, who created systems quite independently of Sartre. The Fullbrooks argue that Sartre stole many of his most famous ideas from Beauvoir with her consent because she thought that society would not pay attention to the ideas of a woman despite their interest (125-47). Bair cites instances in which Beauvoir denied having lesbian relationships with other women although Beauvoir's letters and war journal, which were published posthumously, make specific references to her sexual activities and amorous relationships with other women (510-12). Margaret Simons has also found evidence in Beauvoir's unpublished manuscripts attesting to lesbian tendencies. Simons postulates that Beauvoir misrepresented herself to protect the societal status of her lovers (140-44). In *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* (*Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*), Beauvoir implies that she hides her true behavior and feelings in order to gain or keep the approval or love of society or her significant others (151).

2. The English translations for *Tous les hommes sont mortels* are taken from Friedman if page numbers appear in the text after both the original French and the translation. Unless otherwise indicated, all other translations are my own.

3. The term patriarchy more often means a system of male authority and domination which oppresses only women through its social, political, and economic institutions. It is primarily a system of social relations in which the class men have power over the class women because women are sexually devalued. Humm provides an excellent summary of other meanings of this term.

4. Bell Hooks writes, "Most black folks do not want to think critically about why they can sit in the darkness of theaters and find pleasure in images that cruelly mock and ridicule blackness. . . . And if we, black people, have learned to cherish hateful images of ourselves, then what process of looking allows us to counter the seduction of images that threatens to dehumanize and colonize" (5-6). Susan Faludi maintains, "The word may be that women have been 'liberated,' but women themselves seem to feel otherwise. . . . In poll after poll in the decade, overwhelming majorities of women said they needed equal pay and equal job opportunities, they needed an Equal Rights Amendment, they needed the right to an abortion without government interference, they needed a federal law guaranteeing maternity leave, they needed decent child care services. . . . From 'the man shortage' to 'the infertility epidemic' to 'female burnout' . . . these so-called female crises have had their origins not in the actual conditions of women's lives but rather in a closed system that starts and ends in the media, popular culture, and advertising—an endless feedback loop that perpetuates and exaggerates its own false images of womanhood" (xiv-xv).

5. Louise Kaplan, for example, provides a provoking analysis of Freud's use of the term "castration." She questions his assumption that "probably no male human being is spared the fright of castration at the sight of the female genital" by logically exploring whether a child would actually get a clear look at its mother's genitals and subsequently perceive them to be mutilated (45). In a more poetic way, both Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray mock the assumption that the female is only a castrated male. Irigaray explores the history of Western philosophy starting with Plato. Cixous parodies the myth of Medusa.

6. In a study on dreams and folklore, Freud and Oppenheim show that comic anecdotes often associate the hand or fingers with the penis (26-29; 60-64). For example, Rabelais appears to use one of these tales as a source for part of Chapter 28 of *The Third Book* of *Pantagruel*. Beauvoir also links hand-holding to seduction in her first novel *The Guest*: "Dans un autre recoin, une femme jeune, coiffée de plumes vertes et bleues, regardait avec incertitude une grosse main d'homme qui venait de s'abattre sur sa main"

'In another corner, a young woman with green and blue feathers in her hair was looking uncertainly at a man's fat hand which had just pounced on her hand' (72).

7. Deirdre Bair, for instance, reports that Beauvoir wrote this novel in order to rework her relationship with Sartre and her feelings about him after his first encounter with Dolores Vanetti Ehrenreich, a French woman married to an American doctor and living in New York. Dolores worked for the Office of War Information. Sartre was extremely attached to her for many years. Beauvoir, supposedly feeling even more threatened by Dolores than by Sartre's other lovers, sought comfort in fictionalizing her agony (307-12). Françoise D'Eaubonne hypothesizes that the distaste many of the women characters express about the immortality of Fosca reflects Beauvoir's anger at Sartre, the figurative immortal who makes her feel like an insignificant blade of grass (134-37).

8. This translation is mine but has been heavily influenced by the version found in Green on page 86.

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