

PREFACE

Feminist Studies is deeply grateful to Jessica Benjamin who urged us to commemorate and celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the publication of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. On her initiative, we published a call for papers on the subject; the result is the cluster of articles that opens this issue. The works of Michèle Le Doeuff and Jo-Ann Fuchs were presented at "The Second Sex—Thirty Years Later," a conference held at New York University in September 1979. We thank the conference committee for encouraging these papers.

Mary Felstiner's "Seeing *The Second Sex* Through the Second Wave" provides an inspired and political reading of this uniquely valuable text, arguing for a movement between today's feminist questions, and those that initially shaped the book. Michèle LeDoeuff's "Simone de Beauvoir and Existentialism" probes the existentialism upon which *The Second Sex* is founded, examining what a feminist methodology might have to encompass. Sandra Dijkstra contrasts the denatured politics of *The Feminine Mystique* with those of *The Second Sex*, illuminating the sea change involved in filtering the French classic into the heart of American reformist feminism. And Jo-Ann Fuchs's discussion of female eroticism in *The Second Sex* offers a close textual reading of the book to underline both the advances and the limitations of de Beauvoir's analysis. Taken together, the four articles signal the immense excitement *The Second Sex* continues to generate for the current generation of feminists, and the ongoing debt we owe to de Beauvoir. Our only repayment lies in the work—both theoretical and applied—we perform in light of her achievements.

Women writers who take hold of the "scripts" or "plots" for action, character, motivation, meaning, and resolution in order to construct wholly new relations to them are very much in the de Beauvoirean "tradition," if such a term may be permitted. For as Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron state in *New French Feminisms*, Simone de Beauvoir's objective "was to demonstrate the inadequacies of all existing systems of thought when they addressed themselves to the woman question." ([Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980], p. 8).

Recent creative and speculative work by feminists has indeed found modes of fictional discourse inadequate. Hence, when some writers begin to tell women's stories, they begin well beyond narrative scripts as we know them. This is the enterprise that joins the

otherwise astonishingly different work by Beverly Dahlen and Carol Ascher. The one, “from A Reading,” uses the tactics of free writing and free association to maximize contact with preparadigmatic thought, swamping any already existing lines of thought or lines of force. The other, the minimalist “documentary” called “Evening Out,” coolly challenges us all to understand the Tupperware women without the drapery of appropriate sentiments, without attitudinal clues. Faced with the inadequacies of norms of scholarship, Gloria Hull takes the lack of “story” about black women writers and their careers as a challenge to her to invent a personally and socially useful engagé mode of literary criticism.

The feminist challenge to prior modes of expression and analysis informs our understanding of women’s history. Mary Ann Clawson’s “Fraternalism in Early Modern Europe” breaks new ground in our understanding of patriarchy by examining the social uses of kinship idioms among men in public activities. Analyzing the well-developed uses of fraternalism as an organizational form and metaphor for male sociability, she adds nuance to our understandings of men’s power. Her contribution reminds us that the connections between rituals of power in the domestic and public arenas are ongoing; we cannot situate female solidarity and constraint without acknowledging the part that male bonds play in shaping women’s social worlds. But Laurel Thatcher Ulrich’s examination of women’s relationships as servants and mistresses, kinsfolk, and, above all, neighbors in Colonial northern New England also reinforces the continued focus we still must bring to bear on a specifically female-centered history. “‘A Friendly Neighbor’: Social Dimensions of Daily Work in Northern Colonial New England” re-presents evidence enabling us to see Colonial American women not only as the helpmeets of men, but also as weavers of their own social networks within and between households.

Finally, we are honored and pleased to publish the artwork of Betye Saar.

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for the editors