Rhythmic Reciprocity in Beauvoir’s Philosophy of Love

Abstract: Simone de Beauvoir’s theory of romantic love is one of the key aspects of *The Second Sex*. On Beauvoir’s view, patriarchal society positions women to seek out validation and vicarious transcendence through relations with men. Women take love more seriously than men do because their transcendence depends on it. Yet Beauvoir also envisions a future in which men and women need not experience such romantic asymmetry. A key feature of this future is the destruction of traditional monogamy: for Beauvoir, romantic love in the future might look much like friendship. It would involve preserving the other’s freedom, and in many cases would involve open relationships (such as Beauvoir’s own with Sartre).

In this paper, I argue that the translations of *The Second Sex* into English have elided the profound originality of Beauvoir’s theory of romantic love. One example is this is the inconsistent translation of the term ‘réciprocité’ and its variants in the Parshley translation. Parshley frequently translates as ‘mutual’ what should be ‘reciprocal,’ overlooking the fact that reciprocity is a technical term for Beauvoir that signals the ethical relationship between freedoms: this is the case, for instance, in the famous passage toward the end of the book about the genuine sexual encounter. While this is corrected in Borde and Malovany-Chevallier’s translation, their version conspicuously lacks Beauvoir’s lyricism (as noted by Margaret Simons upon the translation’s publication). This is especially problematic for the sections on romantic love, where Beauvoir’s original syntax effectively performs the play between separation and union that she finds essential in this relation.

Bio: Ellie Anderson is currently Visiting Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Pitzer College in Claremont, CA. She works at the intersection of phenomenology, existentialism, and feminist theory, with special emphasis on the work of Beauvoir and Derrida. She received her Ph.D. in Philosophy from Emory University in 2016. Ellie has published articles on Beauvoir in *Continental Philosophy Review*, 2019 and the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*. She has presented on Beauvoir at SPEP, the International Simone de Beauvoir Society, and numerous other conferences. She is currently working on a project engaging Beauvoir’s ethics of romantic love and theories of polyamory.