The book was found

"The Useless Mouths" and Other Literary Writings (Beauvoir Series Book 1)

by
Simone de Beauvoir

Simone de Beauvoir

“The Useless Mouths” and Other Literary Writings

EDITED BY MARGARET A. SIMONS AND MARYBETH TIMMERMANN

Foreword by Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir

DOWNLOAD E-BOOK
Synopsis

"The Useless Mouths" and Other Literary Writings brings to English-language readers literary writings—several previously unknown—by Simone de Beauvoir. Culled from sources including various American university collections, the works span decades of Beauvoir’s career. Ranging from dramatic works and literary theory to radio broadcasts, they collectively reveal fresh insights into Beauvoir’s writing process, personal life, and the honing of her philosophy. The volume begins with a new translation of the 1945 play The Useless Mouths, written in Paris during the Nazi occupation. Other pieces were discovered after Beauvoir’s death in 1986, such as the 1965 short novel "Misunderstanding in Moscow," involving an elderly French couple who confront their fears of aging. Two additional previously unknown texts include the fragmentary "Notes for a Novel," which contains the seed of what she later would call "the problem of the Other," and a lecture on postwar French theater titled Existentialist Theater. The collection notably includes the eagerly awaited translation of Beauvoir’s contribution to a 1965 debate among Jean-Paul Sartre and other French writers and intellectuals, "What Can Literature Do?" Prefaces to well-known works such as Bluebeard and Other Fairy Tales, La Bâtarde, and James Joyce in Paris: His Final Years are also available in English for the first time, alongside essays and other short articles. A landmark contribution to Beauvoir studies and French literary studies, the volume includes informative and engaging introductory essays by prominent and rising scholars. Contributors are Meryl Altman, Elizabeth Fallaize, Alison S. Fell, Sarah Gendron, Dennis A. Gilbert, Laura Hengehold, Eleanore Holveck, Terry Keefe, J. Debbie Mann, Frederick M. Morrison, Catherine Naji, Justine Sarrot, Liz Stanley, Ursula Tidd, and Veronique Zaytzeff.
Look inside the book

“THE USELESS MOUTHS” AND OTHER LITERARY WRITINGS

THE BEAUVOIR SERIES
Coedited by Margaret A. Simons and Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir

Editorial Board
Kristana Arp
Debra Bergoffen
Anne Cordero
Elizabeth Fallaize
Eleanore Holveck

A list of books in the series appears at the end of this book.

Simone de Beauvoir

“THE USELESS MOUTHS” AND OTHER LITERARY WRITINGS
Edited by Margaret A. Simons and Marybeth Timmermann
Foreword by Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir

The Useless Mouths © Éditions Gallimard, 1945
“It’s Shakespeare They Don’t Like” © Éditions Gallimard, 1979
“The Novel and the Theater” © Éditions Gallimard, 1979
“The American Renaissance in France” © Éditions Gallimard, 1979
“New Heroes for Old” © Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir
“Existentialist Theater” © Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir
“A Story I Used to Tell Myself” © Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir
“Preface to La bâtarde” © Éditions Gallimard, 1966
“What Can Literature Do?” © Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir
“Misunderstanding in Moscow” © Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir
“My Experience as a Writer” © Éditions Gallimard, 1979
“Preface to Bluebeard and Other Fairy Tales” © Éditions Gallimard, 1979
“Preface to James Joyce in Paris: His Final Years” © Éditions Gallimard, 1979
“Preface to Amélie I” © Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir
“Preface to History: A Novel” © Éditions Gallimard, 1979
“Notes for a Novel” © Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir
© 2011 by the Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois
All rights reserved
Manufactured in the United States of America
C 5 4 3 2 1
This book is printed on acid-free paper.
Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Beauvoir, Simone de, 1908–1986.
[“Bouches inutiles.” English] The useless mouths, and other literary writings / Simone de Beauvoir; edited by Margaret A. Simons and Marybeth Timmermann; foreword by Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir. p. cm. — (The Beauvoir series)
Includes bibliographical references and index. 978-0-252-03634-7 (cloth : acid-free paper)
1. Simons, Margaret A.II. Timmermann, Marybeth.III. Le Bon de Beauvoir, Sylvie. IV. Title.
PQ2603.E362B613 2011842'.914—dc22 2011012405
The editors gratefully acknowledge the support of a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, an independent federal agency, and a Matching Funds grant from the Illinois Board of Higher Education. The volume also received a translation grant from the French Ministry of Culture.

IN MEMORY OF HAZEL BARNES, ELIZABETH FALLAIZE, AND ELEANORE HOLVECK

Contents
Foreword to the Beauvoir Series
Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir
Acknowledgments
Introduction
Margaret A. Simons
1. The Useless Mouths (A Play)
Introduction by Liz Stanley and Catherine Najjé
2. Short Articles on Literature
Introduction by Elizabeth Fallaize
3. Existentialist Theater
Introduction by Dennis A. Gilbert
4. A Story I Used to Tell Myself
Introduction by Ursula Tidd
5. Preface to La Bâtarde
Introduction by Violette Leduc
6. What Can Literature Do?
Introduction by Laura Hengehold
7. Misunderstanding in Moscow
Introduction by Terry Keefe
8. My Experience as a Writer
Introduction by Elizabeth Fallaize
9. Short Prefaces to Literary Works
Introduction by Eleanore Holveck
10. Notes for a Novel
Introduction by Meryl Altman
Contributors
Index

Foreword to the Beauvoir Series
Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir
TRANSLATED BY MARYBETH TIMMERMANN
It is my pleasure to take this opportunity to honor the monumental work of research and publication that the Beauvoir Series represents, which was undertaken and
brought to fruition by Margaret A. Simons and the ensemble of her team. These volumes of Simone de Beauvoir’s writings, concerning literature as well as philosophy and feminism, stretch from 1926 to 1979, that is to say throughout almost her entire life. Some of them have been published before, and are known, but remain dispersed throughout time and space, in diverse editions, diverse newspapers or reviews. Others were read during conferences or radio programs and then lost from view. Some had been left completely unpublished. What gives them force and meaning is precisely having them gathered together, closely, as a whole. Nothing of the sort has yet been realized, except, on a much smaller scale, Les écrits de Simone de Beauvoir (The Writings of Simone de Beauvoir), published in France in 1979. Here, the aim is an exhaustive corpus, as much as that is possible. Because they cover more than 50 years, these volumes faithfully reflect the thoughts of their author, the early manifestation and permanence of certain of her preoccupations as a writer and philosopher, as a woman and feminist. What will be immediately striking, I think, is their extraordinary coherence. Obviously, from this point of view, Les cahiers de jeunesse (The Student Diaries), previously unpublished, constitute the star document. The very young 18-, 19-, 20-year-old Simone de Beauvoir who writes them is clearly already the future great Simone de Beauvoir, author of L’invitée, (She Came to Stay), Pour une morale de l’ambiguïté (The Ethics of Ambiguity), Le deuxième sexe (The Second Sex), Les Mandarins (The Mandarins), and Mémoires (Memoirs). Not only is her vocation as a writer energetically affirmed in these diaries, but one also discovers in them the roots of her later reflections. It is particularly touching to see the birth, often with hesitations, doubt, and anguish, of the fundamental choices of thought and existence that would have such an impact on so many future readers, women and men. Torments, doubt, and anguish are expressed, but also exultation and confidence in her strength and in the future—the foresight of certain passages is impressive. Take the one from June 25, 1929, for example: “Strange certitude that these riches will be welcomed, that some words will be said and heard, that this life will be a fountain-head from which many others will draw. Certitude of a vocation.” These precious Cahiers will cut short the unproductive and recurrent debate about the “influence” that Sartre supposedly had on Simone de Beauvoir, since they incontestably reveal to us Simone de Beauvoir before Sartre. Thus, their relationship will take on its true sense, and one will understand to what point Simone de Beauvoir was even more herself when she agreed with some of Sartre’s themes, because all those lonely years of apprenticeship and training were leading her to a definite path and not just any path. Therefore, it is not a matter of influence, but an encounter in the strong sense of the term. They each recognized themselves in the other because each one already existed independently and intensely. One can all the better discern the originality of Simone de Beauvoir in her ethical preoccupations, her own conception of concrete freedom, and her dramatic consciousness of the essential role of the Other, for example, because they are prefigured in the feverish meditations, pen in hand, which occupied her youth. Les cahiers constitute a priceless testimony.I will conclude by thanking Margaret A. Simons and her team again for their magnificent series, which will constitute an irreplaceable contribution to the study and the true understanding of the thoughts and works of Simone de Beauvoir.

Acknowledgments
Simone de Beauvoir’s “The Useless Mouths” and Other Literary Writings is dedicated to the memory of Hazel Barnes, Elizabeth Fallaize, and Eleanore Holveck for their pioneering contributions to our understanding of Beauvoir’s literary-philosophical work. This volume would not have been possible without the generous support of a Collaborative Research Grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), an independent
federal agency; a Matching Funds grant from the Illinois Board of Higher Education allocated by the Graduate School of Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE); and a translation grant from the French Ministry of Culture. We are very grateful to Michel Rybalka for directing us to Beauvoir’s texts housed in the Margaret Clapp Library, Wellesley College, and the Department of Special Collections, Memorial Library, University of Wisconsin-Madison; and to Ezio Vailati for his assistance with the Leibniz quotes in “Notes for a Novel.” We would like to thank the SIUE students from France who worked on the audio transcriptions, and Sarah Gendron for transcribing the fragmentary “Notes for a Novel.” We would like to give special thanks to Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir, coeditor of the Beauvoir Series, for her laborious work on transcribing the Notes and continuing encouragement; and to Joan Catapano, our longtime editor, for her unwavering support of the Beauvoir Series.

“THE USELESS MOUTHS” AND OTHER LITERARY WRITINGS

INTRODUCTION
Margaret A. Simons
This volume of literary writings by Simone de Beauvoir (1908–86), the renowned French existentialist author of The Second Sex, opens with a drama. Beauvoir wrote her 1945 play, The Useless Mouths, during the final year of the Nazi Occupation of France when food shortages were acute. Her story of the anguish of choice for a besieged medieval town facing starvation is also a surprisingly feminist tale of courageous women who stare down death and inspire the male leaders of the town to do the same. The play doesn’t provide the only drama in the volume: there are lots of surprises including several texts discovered only after Beauvoir’s death. Her short novel from 1965, “Misunderstanding in Moscow,” not published in France until 1992, seems destined to become one of Beauvoir’s most popular works of fiction. Set in Moscow during the era of détente, “Misunderstanding” is an unconventional love story of an elderly French couple as they confront their fears of aging and reaffirm their love. The surprising discovery by the renowned Sartre scholar, Michel Rybalka, of two of Beauvoir’s previously unknown texts housed in American university libraries is another source of drama. “Notes for a Novel,” tentatively dated from 1928, was found in the University of Wisconsin at Madison library. Described by Meryl Altman as notes for a “heroine’s text” and “a love story that is also a Bildungsroman or novel of development,” this early fragmentary text shows Beauvoir working out her own ethics and epistemology focusing on what she will later call “the problem of the Other.” The Wellesley College library was the site of another discovery: a set of 78 rpm records containing Beauvoir’s 1947 lecture, Existentialist Theater. Accompanied by readings from plays by Sartre and Camus (not included here), Beauvoir’s lecture invites comparisons with Sartre’s discussion of The Useless Mouths in his 1946 New York lecture, “Forgers of Myths.”1 Another recording transcribed here for the first time is “A Story I Used to Tell Myself,” a 1963 interview on Beauvoir’s autobiography in which, as Ursula Tidd observes, Beauvoir writes herself into a tradition that was still “a predominantly male preserve.” Together, the transcriptions of these recordings bring us, as Dennis Gilbert remarks, Beauvoir’s “true, living voice.” Clues in Beauvoir’s posthumously published Lettres à Sartre led to my discovery of another previously unknown text, “New Heroes for Old.”2 In this 1947 article on postwar French literature, originally published in English for American readers, Beauvoir describes how the various schools of French writing from the French revolution to World War II have been shaped by their times—an historical analysis reflective of the wartime transformation in Beauvoir’s own philosophy. Such insight into her own thought is often provided by Beauvoir’s prefaces to works by other authors, several of which are included here. Beauvoir’s 1964 “Preface” to La Bâtarde, for example—in which she reads Violette Leduc’s
autobiography as demonstrating “the reworking of one’s destiny by one’s freedom—” has been described as more reflective of Beauvoir’s philosophy than of Leduc’s life. This preface, which brought a wider audience to Leduc’s work, also sheds light on Beauvoir’s life and her relationships with women. As Alison S. Fell writes, the preface is “the culmination of a collaboration that had begun more than twenty years earlier,” a period during which Beauvoir became Leduc’s mentor and literary advisor in a nurturing relationship that deserves to be better known. Beauvoir’s confrontation with her critics is another source of drama in this volume. A criticism that spans the decades of these texts is the charge that the existential novel, with its focus on action and philosophical questions, forsakes the aesthetic function of literature. In her 1947 article, “American Renaissance in France,” Beauvoir responds to critics “scandalized” by the popularity of American novels in France. She defends the admiration of postwar French writers for American novels that “express the truth of life in its crude materiality.” In the traditional French novel, she explains, language had come “to be regarded as an end in itself” and “literature had become a purely abstract domain” reducing life to analytic or poetic concepts and leading to the “dead-ends” of “academicism and preciousness.” For Beauvoir, “the true mission of the writer” is “to describe in dramatic form the relationship of the individual to the world in which he stakes his freedom.” Beauvoir responds to a similar attack almost twenty years later, in the eagerly awaited translation of Beauvoir’s contribution to a 1965 debate on the topic, “What Can Literature Do?” In this case her critics are proponents of the “new novel” who see literature as an end in itself, an exploration of language, and who attack the goal of communication in “engaged literature” as a merely instrumental use of language to convey information. Beauvoir emphasizes the value of communication in her response, arguing that literature is “the privileged place of intersubjectivity” and the only form of communication “capable of giving me the incommunicable”—“the taste of another’s life.” Beauvoir makes an analogous defense of autobiographical writings as a literary work and not simply a communication of facts, in her 1966 Japan lecture, “My Experience as a Writer.” Here she argues, in part, that only the “literary quality” of an autobiography can overcome the problems of a chronological account, by capturing the interest of the reader who, alone, can realize a “living synthesis” of the discrete moments of the author’s life. One of the first criticisms leveled against Beauvoir’s existential novels is that she used literature to merely illustrate a philosophical thesis. An October 1945 review article, for example, praised her 1943 metaphysical novel, She Came to Stay, for describing a discovery (of the existence of the Other), the meaning of which remains ambiguous at the novel’s conclusion. But the review condemned her 1945 novel, The Blood of Others as a “thesis novel,” in which we witness not the discovery of an ambiguous truth but a definitive moral “conversion” to political responsibility. In a December 1945 interview Beauvoir was asked about the risk that characters in a philosophical novel would be reduced to “incarnated ideas,” to which she replied: “I know well that this is the pitfall [l’écueil] of the metaphysical novel.” Beauvoir addresses this criticism in Existentialist Theater (1947); she argues as she does in her 1946 article, “Literature and Metaphysics,” that authentic philosophical literature, like a scientific experiment, does not illustrate a preexisting theory but leads to discoveries for the author as well as the reader. “New Heroes for Old” (1947) also addresses the charge, denying that the philosophical novel is a “thesis novel.” “To describe a novel as ‘metaphysical’ is not to define it as the pure exemplification of a theory; it is only to indicate that the author [ . . . ] gives his heroes a metaphysical dimension—defines them [ . . . ] primarily according to their attitude in the presence of the great realities: death, the existence of others, suffering, life.” In her 1966 Japan lecture, “My Experience as a Writer,” Beauvoir implicitly challenges the traditional
reading of She Came to Stay as merely an illustration of Sartre's philosophy, by recounting
the novel's origination in her own “concrete psychological experience.” When “a friend I was very
fond of [ . . . ] was somewhat hostile to me. [ . . . ] I discovered something that everyone knows,”
she writes, “the other's consciousness exists; [ . . . ] in his world I am an object with which he
can more or less do as he likes.” Beauvoir's continuing work on the philosophical novel is
evident in her 1966 lecture, “My Experience as a Writer,” where she rejects the charge that her
prize-winning 1954 novel, The Mandarins, is a thesis novel “which preaches a lesson.” “I gave
Henri the sense of an action to be done, the taste for life, the taste for engagement. [ . . . ] On
the contrary, I gave Anne, the female protagonist, a sense of nothingness, death, the futility
of all things. [ . . . ] In the end I do not prove either of them right. [ . . . ] [The novel] says nothing but
rather shows a whole set of difficulties, ambiguities and contradictions which constitute the
lived meaning of an existence."The most intriguing drama in this volume may come not from
Beauvoir's responses to critics but from the clues found here to a puzzle that has baffled
scholars for decades: how to understand Beauvoir's denials that she was ever a philosopher or
wrote philosophy, given that she earned a graduate degree in philosophy, taught philosophy for
many years, and wrote existentialist novels and essays. Beauvoir's denials of her philosophical
work apparently begin in 1958 with the first volume of her autobiography, Memoirs of a Dutiful
Daughter, where Beauvoir states that she “preferred literature to philosophy” and would not
have been pleased “if someone had prophesized that I would become a kind of female [Henri]
Bergson; I didn’t want to speak with that abstract voice which, whenever I heard it, failed to
move me.” In the next volume of her autobiography, The Prime of Life (1960), she writes of
her interests in 1935: “Why was I not tempted to try my hand at philosophy? [ . . . ] I did not
consider myself a philosopher. [ . . . ] I wanted to communicate what was original in my
experience. In order to succeed in that, I knew that I had to orient myself towards literature.”
Beauvoir continued to deny her philosophical work, drawing a sharp line between literature and
philosophy, and between her work and that of Sartre, throughout the remainder of her life, as in
our 1979 interview: “Sartre was a philosopher, and me, I am not; and I never really wanted to
be a philosopher. [ . . . ] I have not constructed a philosophical work. I constructed a literary
work. [ . . . ] On the philosophical plane, I was influenced by Sartre. Obviously I was not able to
influence him, since I did not do philosophy. [ . . . ] When I wrote my novels, I was never
influenced by Sartre, because it was my lived and felt experience that I rendered.” But the
texts in this volume, along with other recent posthumously published texts, show that
Beauvoir's autobiographical writings and post-1955 interviews misrepresented her work in
philosophy. An entry from Beauvoir's recently published 1926 diary, for example, reveals
Beauvoir's admiration for Henri Bergson's philosophy. She describes his philosophy in his 1889
essay, Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness, where he
defines reality as a temporal becoming, as a “great intellectual rapture. Whereas in reading
other philosophers I have the impression of witnessing more or less logical constructions, here
finally it is palpable reality that I touch, and I find life anew.” Several texts in this volume
demonstrate Beauvoir's continuing work in philosophy and her enduring admiration for
Bergson's philosophy. Beauvoir's “Notes for a Novel” (1928), draws deeply on Bergson's
philosophy. As Meryl Altman observes: “questions about the stability of the self, the relation
between the social self and the deep self, and the persistence and coherence of the self
through time, are Henri Bergson's questions.” Bergsonian themes run throughout Beauvoir's
works from the 1960s as well, including “Misunderstanding in Moscow,” with its descriptions of
the ways in which one's experience of time changes with one's situation. Beauvoir's definition
of the authentic function of literature as an activity “to disclose the world” to men, in the
opening passage of “What Can Literature Do?” reflects Bergson’s philosophy as well as Husserl’s phenomenology, as does her claim that “Each of us grasps but a moment” of truth. In “What Can Literature Do?” Beauvoir’s description of reality is profoundly Bergsonian: “reality is not a fixed being; it is a becoming. It is, I repeat, a swirling of singular experiences that envelop each other while remaining separate.” The texts in this volume show that Beauvoir continued to write philosophy and to present herself as a philosopher, despite the sexism that prevented public recognition of her original philosophical work in She Came to Stay. Beauvoir’s decades-long response to the “thesis novel” criticism discussed above demonstrates that her efforts to resolve the problems of writing philosophy in a novel continued through 1954, while her work on the philosophical problem of communication evident in her writings from the 1960s can be traced back to the larger problem of the Other that she began working on in her 1926 student diary and her 1928 “Notes for a Novel.” In She Came to Stay, Beauvoir portrayed the collapse of metaphysical solipsism in the realization of the existence of other, separate consciousnesses. With that realization came a new problem of how to establish connection with the Other and overcome the threat of isolation—a problem that gained urgency for Beauvoir during the Occupation. In the texts in this volume (“New Heroes” is one example), Beauvoir often cites the existence of other consciousnesses, along with death, life, and suffering as examples of metaphysical realities, of universals in human existence. Communication emerges as an important theme in her postwar writings (The Useless Mouths is one example) as a means of overcoming isolation and establishing connection with others. In Existentialist Theater, Beauvoir could be describing her own wartime transformation in recounting Orestes’ move away from a rootless, abstract freedom to a situated awareness of his social responsibility in Sartre’s play, “The Flies.” Communication is an important theme of the texts from the 1960s as well, not only as the central problem of “Misunderstanding in Moscow,” but also in Beauvoir’s discussions of literature. In Beauvoir’s preface to Leduc’s autobiography, for example, she writes of Leduc’s writing that “The failure to connect with others has resulted in that privileged form of communication—a work of art.” In “What Can Literature Do?” Beauvoir writes that “If literature seeks to surpass separation at the point where it seems most unsurpassable, it must speak of anguish, solitude, and death, because those are precisely the situations that enclose us most radically in our singularity. We need to know and to feel that these experiences are also those of all other men. Language reintegrates us into the human community; a hardship that finds words to express itself is no longer a radical exclusion and becomes less intolerable.” If there is a lesson to be learned from the clues in this volume to Beauvoir’s autobiographical misrepresentation of her work in philosophy, it might be, as Elizabeth Fallaize observes in her introduction to “My Experience as a Writer”: “the writing of autobiography is indeed a construction rather than a recording of meaning.” Ursula Tidd, in her introduction to “A Story I Used to Tell Myself,” makes a similar point about Beauvoir’s constructing herself in her memoirs. A fitting conclusion to these remarks may be drawn from Meryl Altman’s observation about interpreting Beauvoir’s fragmentary “Notes for a Novel”: “To a large extent these are puzzle pieces which the reader’s conjectures must reassemble: a good reminder perhaps of the extent to which despite her voluminous texts ‘Beauvoir’ remains a character we (readers and feminists) create, assembling dispersed fragments and collating versions in a process of interpretive collaboration that can never be completely finished.”

NOTES

*Download to continue reading...*

"The Useless Dallas Cowboys

Philosophical Writings (Beauvoir Series Book 1), "The Useless Mouths" and Other Literacy Writings (Beauvoir Series Book 1), Diary of a Philosophy Student: Volume 2, 1928-29 (Beauvoir Series), The Ethics of Ambiguity, What Is Existentialism? (Penguin Great Ideas)

The book by Simone de Beauvoir has a rating of 5 out of 5.0. 2 people have provided feedback.