Misreading Nonmonogamy in Beauvoir's *She Came to Stay*

JESSICA KEAN

Simone de Beauvoir's novel She Came to Stay *follows Françoise and her partner Pierre as their intimacy becomes increasingly entangled with the young and tempestuous Xavière. Many readings of the novel explain Françoise's bad feeling and eventual violence as symptoms of sexual jealousy. The book has also been read as a veiled autobiography of Beauvoir and Sartre's similar entanglement with Olga Kosakiewicz, so that, very often, Françoise's jealousy is assumed to stand in for Beauvoir's own. This article is about misreading in two ways. First, I argue that the common view that this is a story in part or in whole about sexual jealousy reflects a radical simplification of the emotional and interpersonal dynamics of the "trio." Second, I argue that this interpretive simplification is in fact common in mainstream readings of nonmonogamous relationships, where "jealousy" is used to name any and all bad feelings in the vicinity of the nonmonogamous relationship, and where that bad feeling is interpreted as caused by the nonmonogamy itself. To conclude, I suggest that* She Came to Stay, *and particularly its notorious ending, can be seen as Beauvoir's depiction—and refusal—of the misreadings that constitute the "situation" of nonmonogamy in everyday life.*

This is a story about stories that are hard to tell. Or rather, this is a story about stories that, however well you tell them, are hard to hear. It is the story of the critical and philosophical reception of Simone de Beauvoir's first novel, *She Came to Stay*[1] (Beauvoir 2006)—a complex and moving tale of an emotionally turbulent, nonmonogamous "trio"—and the way that critical reception has systematically failed to provide a satisfying account of the nonmonogamy at the heart of the narrative. In their diverse and politically attentive close readings of the novel, feminist philosophers and literary critics have teased out a number of its key themes in keeping with the philosophical project developed by Beauvoir in her other work, especially *The Second Sex*[2] (Beauvoir 2011). In this scholarly context, I argue that the story of nonmonogamy has been "misheard" not through piecemeal gaps in the reading of *She Came to Stay*, but through a generic and pervasive cultural tendency to take monogamy for granted as normal, natural, and right.

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In particular, those readings of *She Came to Stay* that describe the bad feeling experienced by Beauvoir's protagonist, Françoise, or that attempt to account for the novel-ending violence that that bad feeling causes, at best ignore and at worst distort the relationship between the characters' nonmonogamy and this character's actions. The existing scholarship fails to consider the complexity of nonmonogamy as a "situation," a term Beauvoir uses to capture the way common existential experiences are inevitably filtered through contingent, historical, and social circumstances (Simons 2000, 89). Instead, it has tended to sideline the nonmonogamy, seeing it as secondary to the recognized philosophical themes of the novel, or to focus on the nonmonogamy while damagingly simplifying the emotional landscape surrounding it, most often in order to furnish a reading of Beauvoir's own experience of nonmonogamy in her relationship with Sartre.

Although the form said distortions take varies, there is a clear underlying pattern. Nonmonogamy is frequently seen as the obvious, and perhaps inevitable, cause of any and all bad feeling that happens in its vicinity. Despite arising from the specific fictional and meta-fictional circumstances of *She Came to Stay*, these misreadings will likely feel all too familiar to readers with experience in publicly negotiating nonmonogamy. In a context of what scholars of negotiated nonmonogamy have come to call "mononormativity,"[3] depictions of even the most blissful and functional nonmonogamous relationships risk being overridden by culturally dominant narratives about the inevitability of jealousy, immorality, and guilt. Given that dominant strong reading, it is perhaps no surprise that, among practitioners and advocates of nonmonogamy, depictions of *actually feeling bad* while in nonmonogamous relationships are few and far between.

This makes *She Came to Stay* rare, and the task of rereading it vital. In this article I look again at the story Beauvoir is offering us—a story about a woman who is nonmonogamous and feels terrible—acknowledging that nonmonogamy informs the "situation" her feelings emerge in without assuming that nonmongamy is solely at fault. This approach enables me to highlight aspects of *She Came to Stay* that have been neglected or warped by mononormative readings. Ultimately, *She Came to Stay* and its reception provide significant object lessons in the difficulty that practicing nonmonogamists like Beauvoir face when trying to have their stories heard. I conclude this article by arguing that the problems of misrecognition that shape the reception of *She Came to Stay* are in fact explicitly worked through within the novel itself, offering a rereading of the concluding murder. In doing so I suggest that *She Came to Stay* offers us these lessons twice—first through Françoise's violent struggle against the misreading of her situation within the text, and second through the systematic repetition of that misreading in the critical literature surrounding it.

I. The Anatomy of a Misreading

In *She Came to Stay*, Beauvoir tells the story of the emotionally charged entanglements among Françoise, her long-term partner Pierre, and their young protégés and

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would-be lovers, Xavière and Gerbert. Many aspects of this story have been explored in the commentary and scholarship surrounding the novel, and yet the nonmonogamy of its characters, which in many ways makes up the bulk of the narrative action, has not been sufficiently accounted for. This lack takes two key forms: there are those who fail to pay serious critical attention to Beauvoir's depictions of nonmonogamy in the novel, and those who attend to it in ways that reproduce harmful mononormative ideas about the relationship between nonmonogamy and bad feeling. In order to understand what misreadings of the nonmonogamy in *She Came to Stay* might have in common with misreadings of nonmonogamous relationships in general, we must first account for the aspects of the scholarly lacunae that might be particular to this novel itself.

The first of these factors is that scholars of *She Came to Stay* rarely read the novel in isolation from Beauvoir's oeuvre. This tendency, combined with the fact that Beauvoir is best known for her nonfictional work, means that the themes of the novel are often discussed insofar as they reflect aspects of the author's philosophy or personal life as it emerges in those other texts. A closely related factor contributing to the lacunae is that although most scholars acknowledge that the novel has both philosophical and loosely autobiographical aspects, they nonetheless tend to prioritize one of these aspects at a time.

Scholars of Beauvoir's life most often privilege her memoirs and her posthumously published journals and letters, using those texts as a key for *She Came to Stay*, and occasionally using *She Came to Stay* as the basis for speculation about the real-life circumstances that the novel most closely resembles. This textual legacy may go some way toward explaining the relatively high level of attention these scholars pay to the nonmonogamy in the novel: the memoirs, journals, and letters are where Beauvoir actively describes and theorizes her practice of nonmonogamy. Indeed, the novel-as-autobiography readers frequently appear preoccupied with the depiction of Françoise and Pierre's "trio" with Xavière. Although some scholars read the depiction of Françoise's intimacy with Xavière as an occasion to consider Beauvoir's own experiences of same-sex attraction (Simons 1992; Altman 2007b), many commentators mine this fictional nonmonogamous relationship for the insight it might give us into Beauvoir and Sartre's real-life nonmonogamy, and, more particularly, their "trio" with Olga Kosakiewicz (see, for example, Weldon 2006).

Scholars of Beauvoir's philosophical thought also read across her oeuvre, but their points of departure and return tend to be Beauvoir's formal philosophical essays and scholarly monographs, texts that do not include extended consideration of nonmonogamy. These scholars are likely to restrict their interest in Beauvoir's memoirs, novels, and posthumously published material to those aspects of the texts that might provide them with insight into her core philosophical work. The novel-as-philosophy method has produced insightful readings of *She Came to Stay* in relation to ontology (McWeeny 2012), temporality (Secomb 2006), existential ethics and reciprocity (Evans 1983; Ward 1999; Anderson 2014), and gender and sexuality (Evans 1986; Cataldi 1999; Bove 2002; Altman 2007b; Bjork 2010; Lucey 2010). Scholars in this tradition have also mobilized scenes and themes from the novel as evidence of

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Beauvoir's philosophical independence from her long-term lover and intellectual companion, Sartre (see, for example, Fullbrook 1999; Simons 2000) and to point toward her engagement with ideas from Hegel (Altman 2007a) and Bergson (Simons 2003). To the extent that nonmonogamy is mentioned in these accounts, however, it serves as a backdrop for the discussion of aspects of the novel understood to be more philosophically urgent.

These readings of *She Came to Stay* are not plucked from the ether. Beauvoir herself has offered readings of the novel that fall into both camps: sometimes narrating the "metaphysical" and other times the autobiographical impetus for the text. The lingering presence of the author's own, sometimes contradictory, commentary on *She Came to Stay* also might account for the nonmonogamy in the novel remaining under-theorized. As Mary Evans argues, scholars approaching an analysis of *She Came to Stay* can feel unusually burdened by the need to measure their reading of the novel against Beauvoir's own for a number of reasons. First, the sheer volume of this commentary means that any analysis of *She Came to Stay* must "tangle with" the interpretations provided by Beauvoir herself:

> The very attempt to read these crossed and double messages in her fiction is a project loaded with aggression by Simone de Beauvoir's peremptory reading of her own texts.... This pre-emptive move by Simone de Beauvoir in respect to the interpretation of her fictions turns the task of the critic, whose place has already been taken by the author, into an act of antagonism. (Evans 1986, 70)

Although it might be easy enough to dismiss on theoretical grounds the question of authorial *intention*, the presence of such a large body of direct authorial *interpretation* by such a prominent public intellectual is another ball game entirely. When this body of auto-commentary is combined with the widespread understanding that the novel draws heavily on Beauvoir's own experience of a "trio" with Sartre and Kosakiewicz, the sense that one owes Beauvoir the last word on the interpretation of her story can be hard to shake.

This textual haunting is compounded by stylistic factors within the book itself. Ann Curthoys argues that the similarity in tone and content between Beauvoir's novels and memoirs invites readers to consider the texts side by side. Indeed, Curthoys narrates her own surprise at finding that a scene she believed was included in a volume of Beauvoir's memoirs was in fact a scene from her other novel, *The Mandarins*, using this confusion to suggest the ease with which the line between fiction and autobiography might blur for people reading across Beauvoir's body of work (Curthoys 2000, 8).

Evans suggests a more specific stylistic reason that readers of *She Came to Stay* often remain preoccupied with the figure of Beauvoir herself. The novel is narrated with a mixture of third-person limited and free indirect discourse, with occasional, brief outbursts of narration in the first person. According to Evans, the abrupt and unmarked transitions between these styles of narration keeps the question of the author particularly alive for the reader:

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> By maintaining an indeterminate relationship to her discourse, flipping in and out between emotional fusion and moral judgment, Simone de Beauvoir as author finally displaces the text as object of desire. In order for the reader to take up a well-defined relationship to the text, we must finally interrogate, not the text, but the deflected reflections we find there of the mind and will of the author. (Evans 1986, 77)

Although we can retain a sense of Beauvoir's commentaries as significant para-texts, I follow Evans in assuming that this multilayered authorial entanglement does not compel us to give Beauvoir's accounts of her novel any automatic priority in our reading of it (82). Nonetheless, due to the range of factors described, Beauvoir's own accounts of the significance of the novel must be acknowledged as influencing the trajectory of scholarly interest in *She Came to Stay*.

The "biographers" read the nonmonogamy in the novel and see Beauvoir's thoughts on *her own* nonmonogamy, rather than Beauvoir's thoughts on nonmonogamy in general. This maneuver is often justified through Beauvoir's regularly paraphrased comments about the effect of writing the novel on her feelings toward Olga Kosakiewicz (see, for example, Weldon 2006). The philosophers, on the other hand, tend to interpret Beauvoir's thinking in the novel as serious and scholarly insofar as it speaks to questions raised in her broader scholarly project, an emphasis often justified by highlighting thematic similarities among the texts, and occasionally through Beauvoir's commentary on the philosophical value of fiction in general (Moi 2009) and of *She Came to Stay* in particular (Fullbrook 1999, 61).

These twinned approaches have produced a great deal of valuable reflection on Beauvoir's life and philosophical thought. An attempt to do justice to the subtlety of Beauvoir's depiction of nonmonogamy, however, may require a departure from the paths offered to us by her direct commentary on the novel. But we need not depart from Beauvoir entirely. Indeed, her use of the concept "situation," which underpins her analysis of femininity (Beauvoir 2011), reminds us of the ways in which the particular, contingent circumstances of people's lives are indivisible from their experience of the world. This aspect of Beauvoir's thought is already recognized within the philosophical scholarship on *She Came to Stay* insofar as it discusses Beauvoir's approach to femininity as a "situation" (Ward 1999; Simons 2000; Secomb 2006, 352). Extending this approach to an analysis of the nonmonogamy depicted in the novel would enable us to combine an interest in the nitty-gritty of those relationships with an analysis of how that nitty-gritty shapes the existential experience of the characters. I would argue that the particular "situation" of nonmonogamy in a mononormative society is characterized by regular, harmful misunderstanding or "misreading."

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed suggests that "emotions can move through the movement and circulation of objects. Such objects become sticky, or saturated with affect, as sites of personal and social tension" (Ahmed 2004, 11). She argues that we transform the effect of the encounter with such objects into a quality of those objects—so that some objects are imagined to "be" happy, sad, or fearsome inherently: "in other words" says Ahmed, "'feelings' become 'fetishes', qualities that

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seem to reside in objects, only through an erasure of the history of their production and circulation" (11). Nonmonogamy is one such "sticky" object.

Very often, nonmonogamy will be encountered as a cause of bad feeling in advance of itself, in the same way that marriage is very often encountered as a cause of happiness in advance of itself. Rather than see this as the spontaneous, identical, and thus likely inevitable response of individuals to shared circumstances, we could borrow from Ahmed to see this pattern as the result of the circulation of those objects as sites of feeling, so that marriage and nonmonogamy are seen as relationship practices heavy with histories of affective investment.

Bad feeling around nonmonogamy tends to be read as "jealousy," even if that bad feeling is strenuously articulated otherwise by those involved. It becomes hard to publicly tell a story about feeling bad in a nonmonogamous situation without that being read as evidence of the feeling (jealousy) that is imagined as inevitably attached to the object (nonmonogamy). In what follows, I argue that this broad pattern of misreading should inform analyses of *She Came to Stay* in two ways. First, I will demonstrate that accounts of the nonmonogamy in the novel have been flavored by mononormative readings of the emotions surrounding it. Second, I will argue that Beauvoir foreshadows exactly this misreading within *She Came to Stay* itself—movingly demonstrating the anguish it can cause.

II. Why Does Françoise Feel Bad?

I know something of this anguish. I first felt it years ago, as friends and family regularly mischaracterized the polyamorous "trio" that I was a part of. Their misrecognition ranged from failure to note the degree of care and commitment we shared, to much more hurtful assumptions of foul play. The anguish was repeated, albeit indirectly, when I finished reading the Harper Perennial Modern Classic edition of *She Came to Stay* and turned to Fay Weldon's afterword, "The Pain of Freedom" (Weldon 2006).

In *She Came to Stay*, Beauvoir has sketched an emotionally and philosophically complex inner landscape for her characters—especially Françoise, our main focus. This complexity is radically impoverished by Weldon, who seems to argue that both Françoise's painful psychological experiences and the violence that concludes the novel should be understood as depictions of the jealousy inherently caused by nonmonogamy. Although this is just one reading of the novel, I want to spend time closely rereading it for two reasons. First, it is written by a prominent, if controversial, feminist author and published as part of a canon-building Modern Classics series. Its use in the framing of the novel as a "classic" demands a response. Second, as I have already suggested, this type of "strong" reading haunts nonmonogamous relationships and people, both fictional and nonfictional, always threatening to impose itself on one's experience or narration of intimacy. Although academic readings of *She Came to Stay* tend to offer more complex diagnoses of Françoise's emotional state than Weldon does, they nonetheless cite Françoise's jealousy as part of the synopsis far

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more frequently than is called for by the text itself. Weldon's candor about her distaste for the nonmonogamy of the novel lays bare the way a reading of Françoise's jealousy draws on (and reinforces) mononormative ideas about sex, love, and gender. I am not turning to Weldon's afterword as an exemplar of academic readings of *She Came to Stay*. Instead, I argue that Weldon's frank address to a reading public provides a concrete example of the everyday epistemic injustice done to nonmonogamous people and practices and the texts that depict them.

The novel follows the course of a romantically entangled trio. Françoise and Pierre are a happy couple in their 30s when we meet them, enjoying the shared aspects of their intellectual and intimate lives, and their "freedom"—including a mutually agreed upon openness to sexual and romantic intimacies outside their partnership. Enter Xavière, a young woman Françoise wants to take under her wing. With the encouragement of Françoise, Pierre also becomes involved with Xavière, at first as a professional mentor and later as a romantic interest. Françoise herself experiences moments of confused desire for Xavière, and, despite some ambivalence, decides to throw herself into what becomes their shared project: building a happy and fulfilling life as a "trio." This project does not end happily.

The third-person limited narration gives us almost uninterrupted insight into Françoise's thinking, and some of Françoise's favorite things to think about are her own thoughts. The pages are full of sometimes exhilarating, other times devastating dissections of Françoise's psyche, giving us ample material for producing an account of the specific nature of her bad feeling. Although Françoise's bad feeling is undeniable, interpreting it is by no means straightforward.

In Weldon's account, Françoise is suffering from sexual jealousy produced by a man behaving badly.

> I read de Beauvoir's novel when I was a student—I remember to this day the shock of recognition: this is what life for a clever woman in a man's world is like. Youthful appeal and looks are valued above all other qualities. What use is intelligence when there's a pretty girl about? (Weldon 2006, 6)

This reading suggests that *She Came to Stay* is a story of mature, intelligent Françoise losing her partner to a younger woman. A story, perhaps, of generational rivalry between women, and of Woman's betrayal by Man—a sad but predictable story about the damage of patriarchy. This is a remarkable misrepresentation of the content of *She Came to Stay*. Though Françoise does, from time to time, ruminate on her relative lack of attention to her body as an object, "youthful appeal and looks" do not end up being "valued above all other qualities" by any single character in the novel, nor is that interpretation licensed in any way by the narrative arc or narrator. In order to come to this description, one would also have to read past the fact that Françoise actively chooses to extend or intensify Pierre's involvement with Xavière several times, and the fact that neither Pierre, nor the younger Gerbert, ultimately chooses Xavière over Françoise.

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Weldon supplements this Sad Older Woman story by a second extremely gendered story—that of men hurting women through nonmonogamy:

> Existentialism is all very well—a life in which the values are to do with exactitude of thought and the minute examination of emotion and action —but is all too easily interpreted as an elaborate excuse for predatory male behaviour in which women collude. Françoise and Pierre's relationship with Xavière is monstrous—exploitative, voyeuristic and sadistic— when seen through the eyes of the twenty-first century. (Weldon 2006, 8–9)

For Weldon, it seems, the agreement Françoise and Pierre share—to be free and have relationships (which they call "affaires") as they please, without compromising their union—is an elaborate ruse, a mechanism for manipulating both Françoise and Xavière into a relationship structure that makes them unhappy, again reading past or even *against* the women's repeated choosing of this nonmonogamy for themselves. Through Weldon's eyes, *She Came to Stay* becomes a too-familiar tale: an unfaithful man pursuing a younger lover at the expense of his long-suffering partner who must struggle to "subdue" her jealousy in the face of his infidelity (9).

To get a sense of the scale of this misreading, it is necessary to consider in more detail the emotional landscape of Françoise, which is minutely observed, described, and worked over in *She Came to Stay*. Over the course of the novel, Françoise feels bad for a number of pretty good reasons, including dynamics with Xavière, dynamics with Pierre, dynamics within the trio, and her own existential crises. Some of the most frequently recurring causes of bad feeling include becoming achingly aware of other people's consciousness (Beauvoir 2006, 26, 61, 96, 118, 249, 250, 284, 296–97, 302, 322, 398, 408), feeling her consciousness displaced from the center of her world (114–15, 116, 118, 145, 355), Pierre's wavering conviction about the value of his work (123, 168–69, 170, 171, 181, 228), Xavière's complete lack of interest in work or study (170, 171, 181, 243–44, 274, 339, 342), the worry that Pierre's love exists nowhere except in the stories they tell each other about it (123, 126, 131, 190, 193, 304), fearing Pierre's independence from her while recognizing it as a condition of their mutual freedom (57, 97, 146, 173, 192, 239, 303), feeling bound and restricted by dynamics in the trio (230, 231, 235, 237, 273, 277, 303, 320, 323, 356), and, crucially, finding her sense of self increasingly commandeered by Xavière's stubborn and unaccommodating consciousness (237, 238–39, 249–50, 274, 279, 286, 292–93, 297, 302, 319, 345).

All of this is not to say that Françoise never thinks of her emotions in terms of "jealousy"; once or twice she does consider whether she is jealous, sometimes accepting the term, but more often moving through it to a more nuanced diagnosis of her emotional states (60, 201). Nor is it to deny that she sometimes experiences bad feelings that may fit into common conceptions of "jealousy." She does, for example, worry about the idea that Pierre and Xavière have a bond that occasionally excludes her (125, 129, 171, 172, 287), is sometimes concerned that Pierre seems more easily moved by Xavière's emotions than her own (147, 155, 275, 304, 305), feels pangs of

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loss at the realization that she no longer is first in Xavière's heart (112, 137, 148, 169, 175, 201, 238, 248), and feels squeamish at the thought of Pierre and Xavière embarking upon a sexual relationship (208, 300–301).[4] But an account that looks at Françoise's wide-ranging, clearly sketched, complex emotional landscape and sees it all in terms of jealousy is buying into the story of jealousy as an inherent consequence of nonmonogamy, and nonmonogamy's most salient feature.

A number of Françoise's bad feelings emerge directly or indirectly because of Xavière, but the fact that there is a third party involved in these crises does not mean that they are all adequately described by the term *jealousy*. Françoise experiences emotional and existential crises because of Xavière's "small, hostile, stubborn mind" (26), which is regularly dishonest (326–27, 398), fails to recognize people as anything more than objects (303, 343, 392, 400, 408), and seems to be incapable of loving Françoise in any way approaching reciprocity (231, 340, 355).

Likewise, the fact that a number of these crises appear to arise in relation to the emergence of the "trio" does not mean that the *nonmonogamy* is causing them, at least not in the way suggested by Weldon. Barker cautions against this tendency to confuse correlation with causation in an article that uses the life and writing of Beauvoir to explore issues arising for existential therapists working with nonmonogamous clients:

> For the majority of openly non-monogamous people seeking therapy (as with any other non-normative group), their relationship structure will be no more pertinent to their presenting issues than it is for monogamous people. So, whilst it is useful to be aware of all aspects of the client's lived experience (including their relationship set-up and their experience of difference if it is outside mononormativity), therapists should be careful not to focus overwhelmingly on this. (Barker 2014, 10)

In the case of Françoise we should keep in mind that, even after she breaks things off with Xavière, she does not renounce nonmonogamy in general. Indeed, she manages to establish an extremely pleasurable sexual relationship with Gerbert, her young colleague, who is also Xavière's lover. To suggest this is a story about a woman being coerced or tricked into nonmonogamy that is no good for her is to refuse to listen to Françoise's own accounts of both her active desire for the "freedom" she shares with Pierre, and the specific and varied causes of her misery.

Weldon seems to justify the exclusion of this testimony by pointing to jealousy as an unacknowledged, and perhaps *unacknowledgeable*, underpinning for bad feeling at the site of nonmonogamy:

> Throughout the novel Françoise struggles to subdue jealousy, seen as the most despicable of emotions almost to the point of denying its existence —let alone as a justification for thought or deed. (Weldon 2006, 9)

This reading is quite common in discussions of nonmonogamy from the outside; let's call it the Invisible Jealousy Hypothesis. In the Invisible Jealousy Hypothesis any nonmonogamous individuals who suggest that they don't experience jealousy,

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or don't consider jealousy a major part of their emotional lives, are assumed to be bound by in-group social pressure to deny this supposedly inevitable feeling. According to a vaguely Freudian, pop-psychological logic, "jealousy" denied becomes a repressive force to be reckoned with. This version of events often implicitly relies on what has been dubbed the "instinctive paradigm" of jealousy—whereby "human jealousy" is understood to be an instinctive, natural, and thereby inevitable consequence of sexual nonexclusivity (Bernard 1977, 143). But even those subscribing to the "derivative paradigm" of jealousy, a more constructivist account, whereby our emotional reactions are, in some way or another, shaped by society around us (143–44), might end up attributing a conditional inevitability to jealousy. This logic might appear as an opinion along the lines of "society being what it is, humans are bound to feel jealous."

Whether jealousy is seen as inevitable because of nature or nurture, the more strenuously one denies feeling it the more obvious its presence will appear to those on the lookout for Invisible Jealousy. In the context of *She Came to Stay* this means that, for a reader like Weldon, the presence of nonmonogamy is evidence in and of itself of the presence of jealousy—all that remains is to determine whether Françoise is going to own up to it. Weldon's Invisible Jealousy Hypothesis also extends to Beauvoir herself, who Weldon suggests is using the novel as a way of expressing the real-life jealousy she couldn't confess to directly (Weldon 2006, 7).

Perversely, the prevalence of this type of logic may in fact have a hand in creating the repression it imagines it is uncovering. If any description of "jealousy" is read as the eruption of an underlying body of true, but repressed, emotion, and any other bad emotion is *also* read as evidence of jealousy's pervasive, but unspeakable, hold on the psyche, then people in nonmonogamous relationships have to choose between being read as jealous, and attempting to hide any and all bad feeling about their relationship in a (perhaps futile) attempt to thwart this reading through sheer lack of evidence (Barker 2014, 10). Of course, this denial is very likely to produce the exact symptoms of repression that will be reimagined as evidence of jealousy in the first place. Worse, the impulse to hide bad feelings that occur around nonmonogamy comes to be seen as individual dishonesty, or a consequence of peer pressure within a community of practice, rather than a reasonably predictable consequence of the pervasive, mononormative determination to see jealousy everywhere nonmonogamy is.

As is too often the case, Weldon's reading of *She Came to Stay* is not only mononormative, but feeds back into mononormativity. Any and all bad feeling in the presence of nonmonogamy is bullishly added to the pool of evidence of nonmonogamy as a bad object. Weldon first converts all of Françoise's (and, by extension, Beauvoir's) bad feeling into "jealousy," and then uses that conversion to argue that nonmonogamy is a failed existential experiment that modern feminists have thought better of. The fact that this kind of misreading could be done of *She Came to Stay*, in spite of the vast and detailed cataloguing of emotional nuance that is its primary feature, should give us a sense of the scale of this problem in everyday life.

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III. Why Does Françoise Kill Xavière?

Debates about the exact nature of a character's bad feeling take on an urgent tone in discussions of *She Came to Stay*. The first and most immediate reason for this urgency is the act of violence that concludes the novel.[5] Your account of why Françoise feels bad is likely to affect your reading of why Françoise kills Xavière. The imagined motivation for this fictional act of murder comes to matter in turn because of the sheer stature of Beauvoir as a feminist and a philosopher: the motivations for the murder of Xavière are mined for insight into Beauvoir's politics, philosophy, or personal experiences.

Many commentators single out this particular scene for insight into Beauvoir herself because, in narrative terms, they find it clunky. Linnell Secomb, for example, suggests that the novel ends "shockingly and unsatisfactorily," failing "to convince," and disrupting the philosophical themes developed in the novel up until that point (Secomb 2006, 352). Likewise, Evans variously describes the abrupt "switch to allegory in a realistic novel" as a "cop-out," an "abdication" on the part of the author, and "a cheat and a lie" (Evans 1986, 82–83). For those who find the escalation to violence at the end of *She Came to Stay* implausible, this is a moment in the text where the hand of the author becomes particularly visible: "Why did you do that, Françoise?" is often quickly overlayed with "Why did you do that, Simone?"

Weldon's insistence that Françoise was driven to the deed by "sexual jealousy" (Weldon 2006, 7) is thus supplemented by her sense—shared by many academic critics—that the final scene doesn't ring true. Amusingly, or perhaps tellingly, Weldon denounces Beauvoir's ending in phrasing that seems to echo her reading of the character's consensual nonmonogamy, stating, "It's cheating: it's gross" (7).[6] Jealousy, or jealousy-denied, is assumed to provide plausible motivation for a deed that would otherwise seem inexplicable. Weldon also mobilizes jealousy to explain what she experiences as a lack of narrative subtlety, suggesting that the ending reflects Beauvoir's desire to simultaneously protest Sartre's nonmonogamy and win his attention through an "existentialist" ending (8). Beauvoir does suggest in *The Prime of Life* (Beauvoir 1965) that killing the fictional Xavière allowed her to cleanse herself of "every twinge of irritation and resentment" she had previously felt toward her young intimate Olga Kosakiewicz (Beauvoir, quoted in Hengehold 2002, 202). Beauvoir's own commentary notwithstanding, the proposal that the end to this remarkable novel is best described as the ill-conceived product of the author becoming lost in service to her emotions is indicative of the pervasive and embedded nature of both sexism and mononormativity in society at large.

Some accounts of the role of jealousy in the murder are more nuanced. Jennifer McWeeny's account also relies heavily on jealousy, but suggests that Xavière could be read as an externalized aspect of Françoise herself, so that the murder becomes a suicide motivated by "auto-jealousy": the jealousy of a woman toward her younger self (McWeeny 2012, 62). Secomb reads the murder as a depiction of "the devastating effects of jealousy," "the consequences of failed recognition," and as a gesture of "antipathy to 'immanent' time" (Secomb 2006, 352).

Not all accounts implicate jealousy in the murder, however. Ellie Anderson and Julie Ward both see the act as Françoise's response to the threat of annihilation she

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feels in the face of Xavière's unassimilable consciousness, a consciousness that refuses reciprocity (Ward 1999, 41; Anderson 2014, 384). Evans suggests that the murder—which she describes as driven by Françoise's sense that Xavière is "depriving the couple of their 'freedom'" is Beauvoir demonstrating the morally dubious consequences of the existential program (Evans 1983, 344), whereas in a later reading she accounts for the murder through the author herself: as a mechanism for carving out a place for herself as a woman writer wrestling with the apparent either/or of male and female discourse (Evans 1986, 82, 84). I agree that the murder occurs following a long buildup of existential frustration and periods of serious crisis in the face of the Other. I also agree that the particular dynamics between Françoise and Xavière are gendered, and bound up in their broader dynamics with Pierre and Gerbert. But there is one other line of argumentation that I find particularly compelling as an account of the immediate causes of the violence.

Ulrika Bjork suggests that the act has "psychological" motivations, and can be seen as Françoise's attempt to "[expiate] her guilt" upon having "betrayed" Xavière with Gerbert (Bjork 2010, 50), a reading shared by William Poster (Poster 1954, 418–19). This is supplemented in Bjork's account by a recognition of an additional "metaphysical" motivation. Bjork notes that we could understand the murder as an attempt to regain control over her self-image in the face of Xavière's radical otherness and the threat that it represents to Françoise's sense of self (Bjork 2010, 50, 52). Bjork is not alone in noting this aspect of Françoise's motivation. Carol Bove suggests that the murder can be understood as an attempt to "destroy the anguish" caused by Xavière's "partially correct perception that Françoise betrayed her friendship by sleeping with Gerbert" (Bove 2002, 120); Hengehold attributes the murder to Françoise's desire to "annihilate the Other whose hateful interpretations" drain away her strength and joy; and McWeeny follows Elizabeth Fallaize in suggesting that killing Xavière allows Françoise to "wrest back the right to narrate her own story" (Fallaize, quoted in McWeeny 2012, 69). It is this line of interpretation that I want to follow.

In the immediate buildup to the final scene, Françoise discovers that Xavière has been spreading stories about her. Specifically, Xavière has been telling Gerbert that she had sacrificed her own relationship with Pierre for the sake of Françoise, who was too jealous to handle it (Beauvoir 2006, 398). At first Françoise fiercely rejects Xavière's account, which we know to be false, but then she feels it go to work on her despite herself. The story that Xavière is spreading about her pulls Françoise inside it—she finds herself besieged and ensnared in Xavière's version of events:

> In the impersonal and tragic night, the anger, which was overwhelming Françoise's heart, was her sole preoccupation. The Black pearl, the precious one, the sorceress, the generous one. "A bitch," she thought, enraged. She climbed the stairs. She was there, crouching behind the door, in her nest of lies; once again she was going to batten on Françoise and force her to become part of her story. This cast-off woman, armed with a bitter patience, will be me. (Beauvoir 2006, 399)

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In the face of Xavière's stubborn refusal to listen to Françoise, and their corresponding incapacity to come to a common understanding of events, Françoise feels the "jealous woman" narrative eating away at her sense of self:

> She must speak, but what would she say? She could not make use of Gerbert's confidences, and yet, she could not live in this poisonous atmosphere. Beneath the smooth blue windows, in this oppressive smell of *Ambre Solaire*, there was ample evidence of Pierre's rejected passion, and Françoise's base jealousy. They must be eradicated. Xavière alone could eradicate them. (399)

And yet Xavière persists in her misreading—a determined, "stubborn," unimpressionable consciousness (401). The scene shifts. Xavière discovers evidence of Françoise's relationship with Gerbert and again accuses Françoise of acting out of jealousy:

> "You were jealous of me because Labrousse [Pierre] was in love with me. You made him loathe me, and to get better revenge, you took Gerbert from me. Keep him, he's yours. I won't deprive you of that little treasure." The words poured from her mouth with such vehemence that they seemed to choke her. Françoise contemplated with horror this woman at whom Xavière's flashing eyes were gazing: this woman was herself. (405)

Faced with Xavière's stubborn certainty, Françoise finds herself convinced that the relationship with Gerbert was a jealous act of betrayal: a "crime." In the midst of resigning herself to her new self-image, however, memories of her "innocent love" with Gerbert resurface, challenging Xavière's accusation of "sordid betrayal" (406):

> She turned away, and switched on the light. Her image suddenly sprang from the depth of her looking-glass. She faced herself. "No," she repeated, "I am not that woman." (406)

It is this battle for the right to narrate her experience of nonmonogamy that leads Françoise to the idea of killing Xavière:

> "Isn't that I?" She had often hesitated, spellbound. And now, she had fallen into the trap, she was at the mercy of this voracious conscience that had been waiting in the shadow for the moment to swallow her up. Jealous, traitorous, guilty. She could not defend herself with timid words and furtive deeds. Xavière existed; the betrayal existed. "My guilty fact exists in flesh and bone." It would exist no more. (407)

IV. Jealousy After All

This abrupt murder is often described as an affront to the reader: a writerly crime as well as a fictional one. What would it mean if we read the murder as a violent protest, within the novel and through the novel, of bad readings of nonmonogamy so

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stubborn in their certainty that they are impossible to reason with? Françoise the character and Beauvoir the author each answers this epistemic violence of mononormativity with a violence of her own. Françoise murders Xavière, and Beauvoir breaks faith with her readers.

Françoise's violence—and Beauvoir's, if we experience the ending as an affront—could thus be seen as an extreme expression of the frustration of having the nonmonogamy of your relationship systematically misread, of facing assumptions of jealousy and guilt so strong that they are capable of marshaling even your explicit statements to the contrary as evidence of their claim. Françoise's story, and Beauvoir's, both demonstrate the risks associated with living and describing a nonmonogamous life. The stubborn weight of cultural narratives about jealousy can cast even a "modern classic" by one of the foremost feminist thinkers of the twentieth century as a four-hundred-page jealous tantrum depicting a fictional jealous tantrum.

So, in the end I find I am arguing that this story, and this murder, are about jealousy after all. In *She Came to Stay* Beauvoir powerfully describes the fury that can result from having your complex subjectivity systematically explained away with lazy recourse to gendered narratives of desperate, jealous women. The fictional murder can be read as a gesture of protest against the violence of these systemic misreadings—a protest that has not prevented exactly the same misreading of the novel itself. Françoise and Beauvoir both attempt to defend themselves against this common, determined, inadequate narration of nonmonogamy, a narration that is central to the epistemic "situation" of nonmonogamous relationships in mononormativity, a narration that will swallow you whole if you let it.

Notes

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1. Originally published in 1943 as *L'Invitée*.
2. Originally published in 1949 as *Le Deuxième Sexe*.
3. For a discussion of the origins and theoretical utility of "mononormativity," see Kean 2015.
4. However, I would challenge whether any of these feelings are best understood through the rather blunt tool that is the term *jealous*.
5. Or *intended* violence, depending on your reading (see Evans 1986, 83; McWeeny 2012, 71).
6. Thanks to my colleague Adam Gall for this observation.

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