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# Telling the Truth in Simone de Beauvoir's Autobiography<sup>1</sup>

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In a well-known passage from Jean-Paul Sartre's *La Nausée*, Roquentin records the following observation in his diary:

For the most commonplace event to become an adventure, all you have to do is start recounting it. This is what fools people: a man is always a teller of tales, he lives surrounded by his stories and the stories of others, he sees everything that happens to him through them, and he tries to live his life as if he were recounting it. But you have to choose: to live or to recount.<sup>2</sup>

In Roquentin's view, life should not be confused with narrative, for the essentially contingent quality of life is destroyed by any attempt to capture it in language.

Readers of Simone de Beauvoir's extensive autobiographical writings might conclude that she did not experience Roquentin's difficulties with the narrative process. It seems that she effectively refused to choose between living and recounting, and instead opted for both. Few events occurred in Beauvoir's life which did not appear in some written form at some time. The scope of her autobiographical project and the diversity of autobiographical forms employed by Beauvoir suggests an interesting relationship to the narration of identity which merits discussion. In this article, therefore, I will examine how Beauvoir negotiates some of the issues involved in the narration of her own life, focusing particularly on her memoirs.<sup>3</sup>

In 1958, when only *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* had been published of Beauvoir's autobiography, the psychoanalyst, Octave Mannoni observed in a lecture at the Collège de philosophie that 'one only has to read her memoirs to realise that since childhood she has always lived in an autobiographical relationship with herself'.<sup>4</sup> Mannoni claims not to be interested in the factual content of Beauvoir's autobiography, but rather in what her autobiography reveals to us about her perception of her life. The notion that Beauvoir has 'an autobiographical relationship with herself' suggests that the existence of the Beauvoirian self is characterised by its activities of living and writing. The tautological notion of having an autobiographical relationship *with oneself*, implies a fragmented, somewhat narcissistic self, who observes, who records and who then observes herself recording.

In terms of what is to be recorded by this narcissistic self, Octave Mannoni reminds us that Beauvoir's project in the *Mémoires* is 'to tell all and to allow nothing to be lost', and observes:

But we've known for a long time that objectivity of this kind doesn't mean anything. Facts don't shape themselves independently into a narrative and memories don't spontaneously become a story. A life cannot be related in the same way one films the growth of a plant in accelerated motion.<sup>5</sup>

Mannoni argues that such a project inevitably involves a conscious structuring of material. This structuring relies on two features: first, the ever-present notion of the protagonist's future, which projects the narrative forward, and second, the narrator's self-positioning vis-à-vis the unsaid. He argues that a psychoanalytic influence appears to shape Beauvoir's autobiographical narrative, which he characterises as a stance of 'I don't know, but I *do* know' in relation to the life related.<sup>6</sup>

If we return to Roquentin's problems with narrative, we might agree with Mark Freeman, who, in his discussion of *La Nausée*, suggests that Roquentin suffers from a refusal to accept the narrative dimensions of life, confusing narrative with fiction and fiction with deception.<sup>7</sup> Freeman argues, *contra* Roquentin's position, that producing narratives is one way in which we make sense of our experience. Narrative does not aim to reproduce

the experience lived, but acts as a frame within which that experience can become intelligible.<sup>8</sup> Thus, in Beauvoir's case, we might view her production of autobiographical narratives as an attempt to render her experiences intelligible to herself and to others. A brief examination of how Beauvoir negotiates autobiography in statements of autobiographical intention may help us to understand why she envisages writing autobiography in this way.

In *La Force des choses*, she includes some notes she made about her autobiographical project in the late 1950s which express her desire for total self-documentation. She writes:

I have always secretly imagined that my life was being recorded down to the last detail, on some giant tape recorder, and that one day I would be able to play back the whole of my past. I'm almost fifty, it's too late to cheat: soon everything will sink into the abyss. Only the broad outlines of my life can be recorded on paper and by my own hand, so I shall make a book out of it. When I was fifteen I wanted people to read my biography and find it interesting and moving; this is why I hoped to become a "well-known author". Since then I have often considered writing it myself.<sup>9</sup>

After completing *La Force de l'âge*, the second volume of her memoirs, Beauvoir comments again on her desire for self-documentation, in an interview with Madeleine Chapsal. She said: 'I would like to have a vast amount of documentation about my life. I'd find it fascinating.'<sup>10</sup> Asked by Chapsal whether she was adopting a psychoanalytic approach, Beauvoir replied:

No. It would have obviously been necessary to start from my childhood in order to study things from a psychoanalytic perspective. I was not very interested in seeking out the childhood origins of my adult life when I related it afterwards. I should have talked about them in the first volume, if it is necessary to talk about them at all. When I've finished writing these memoirs, maybe I'll have to think about them from a different point of view. For the moment I'm only concerned with my conscious life, and not with its unconscious motivations. I point out aspects

of my life which remain incomprehensible to me and where necessary, I try and explain them. But it's not the most important thing as far as I'm concerned.<sup>11</sup>

Yet as Octave Mannoni observes, one of the ways 'an autobiographical relationship with oneself' might manifest itself in autobiography is through a psychoanalytic form. This might ideally entail the elements of the unconscious and the unsaid being acknowledged and expressed. However, in Beauvoir's autobiography, as Mannoni points out, she respects the unconscious for being precisely unconscious, and as constituting an aspect of her existence which is not available to her. Thus he argues that the type of truth at which Beauvoir aims is of a different order to that which might be provided by a psychoanalytic autobiographical method. It is rather a form of clarity and sincerity in the narration of her story or, as Josyane Savigneau has noted, 'the determination to assess herself lucidly' in the production of a narrative which assumes a truth in its totality rather than in isolated incidents.<sup>12</sup>

A number of hypotheses may be offered for Beauvoir's rejection of a psychoanalytic method in favour of a project of testimony, some of which pertain to what Michel Contat has referred to as the ethical dimension of Beauvoir's autobiography. Contat has described Beauvoir's memoirs as 'texts which aim at moral edification rather than truth' and has accused her of sacrificing literature to ethics.<sup>13</sup> However, I would argue that Beauvoir's autobiographical project is not merely a slavish attempt to edify her readers and to idealise her past. In her autobiography, a notion of truth as testimony, as a narrative of experience which relies on self-presence and presence, appears to operate rather than a juridical notion of truth as an absence of falsehood.<sup>14</sup> This testimonial notion of truth may explain why Beauvoir envisages the narrative task as 'telling all'.

In many ways the memoirs may be viewed as a narrative concerned with Beauvoir's different experiences as a survivor - a survivor of her bourgeois upbringing, a survivor of the death of her friend Zaza, a female survivor within a predominantly male and non-feminist intellectual peer group, and as a survivor of, and witness to, some of the most traumatic events in twentieth-century history. In the face of such experiences, to

remain silent, to abandon narrative and to proclaim that 'true stories' do not exist, as Roquentin does, at one point in *La Nausée*, appears to be an unethical stance if Beauvoir's autobiography is to function on a testimonial level. In this context 'telling all', as an act of speaking out in autobiography, assumes a moral rather than a sensationalist or a naïve dimension.

However, testimonial autobiography places a different set of demands on the reader as the receiver of the testimony. Dori Laub has argued in his work on testimonial accounts of the Holocaust that:

Insofar as they [survivors] remind us of a horrible, traumatic past, insofar as they bear witness to our own historical disfiguration, survivors frighten us. They pose for us a riddle and a threat from which we cannot turn away. We are indeed profoundly terrified to truly face the traumas of our history, much like the survivor and the listener are.<sup>15</sup>

It may be this fear of the survivor (both on a personal and a collective level) and of the female subject as witness to history that, in part, explains 'the striking hostility' among critics which Toril Moi has exposed in her survey of Beauvoir's reception.<sup>16</sup>

Telling all is an ambitious project, and one which finds its roots in Beauvoir's bourgeois Catholic childhood. As a child, Beauvoir had been well-trained by her pious mother in religious practice: she went to confession twice a month, prayed between classes at her private Catholic school, went on annual retreats, received communion three times a week and read a chapter of *L'Imitation de Jésus-Christ* every morning. Frequently in her autobiography Beauvoir likens her literary vocation to religious belief. In the interview with Madeleine Chapsal at the end of the 1950s, Beauvoir explained how she envisaged her literary vocation: 'As far as I was concerned, writing was a mission, it was salvation, it replaced God'.<sup>17</sup> As a child, Simone was trained in confession, in the production of narratives which not only served to make sense of her experience before a confessor, but which also had a disciplinary function in that they were subject to moral censure.

In *La Volonté de savoir*, Michel Foucault describes confession as one of the main rituals we have relied on for the production of truth about the self since the Middle Ages.<sup>18</sup> Confession is at the heart of enforced individuation and functions as a disciplinary practice in numerous domains to produce the truth of the self. Foucault argues that confession is so profoundly entrenched in our concept and production of identity that we no longer recognise it as a disciplinary effect.

Following Foucault, we might therefore view Beauvoir's project of 'telling all', given her particularly pious upbringing, as evidence of her acting as a 'jeune fille rangée' or 'dutiful daughter', by conforming with the injunction to confess. However, such an interpretation would, in my view, be rather facile, because it overlooks the specific conditions in which autobiographical discourses are produced, and (to articulate a Foucauldian criticism) it assumes that power operates in a monolithic, rather than in a local, generative way. 'Telling all' is never possible, for the narrative is always produced within a given context, fixed by time, place and the listening position of one's interlocutor. As such the operation of power within the confessional scenario is always, as Beauvoir might say, 'en situation' or limited by the context in which it occurs.

If we consider the project of telling all within autobiography, it can be argued that autobiography's historic links to confession and truth-telling and its considerable investment in Western bourgeois androcentrism, frequently reinforced by autobiography criticism, make it hard to envisage autobiography as simply a contingent narrative organisation of anyone's experience. Autobiography constitutes a highly politicised form of writing, at the intersection of competing notions of truth, authority, identity, subjecthood and literature.

In Beauvoir's case, I would argue that the combination of her use of a traditional autobiographical form, her concern to represent the truth of her experience, and her stance of discursive mastery has provoked a suspicious and sceptical response from traditional liberal humanist critics, as well as from critics influenced by psychoanalysis and poststructuralism. This may be the result of Beauvoir's determination to play the role of witness, both publically and privately. In a traditionally patriarchal Western

culture which has historically aligned men's role with objective truth and authority, and women with subjectivity and lying, it is difficult for the female witness's testimony to be received as authoritative.<sup>19</sup> Thus, even Jane Heath, who offers a feminist, Lacanian reading of some of Beauvoir's fiction and autobiography, describes her own critical approach to the autobiography as 'suspicious' and as 'an attempt to demystify the "cultural phenomenon"', created largely by Beauvoir's autobiography, according to Heath.<sup>20</sup> However, if we consider how the narrator positions herself in relation to the life to be told, there is evidence that the truth at which the narrator aims is not a mimetic truth which aims to reproduce events exactly and objectively, as Mark Freeman describes Roquentin's 'true stories', but rather a testimonial truth, which relies on the narrator's presence and experiences of the events related.<sup>21</sup> Being there and recording one's subjective experience of the event appears to be ultimately more important for Beauvoir. Thus in the light of this particular testimonial truth, we might usefully assess her project of telling all.

From *La Force de l'âge* onwards, she negotiates the telling of her story regularly with the reader in the prologues, mid-textual reflections or epilogues of her texts.<sup>22</sup> Beauvoir describes the long-standing need she had to relate her life story in order to record something of her past selves in the prologue to *La Force de l'âge*. Yet, she makes clear that she will not confess all. Any omissions or slight errors will not detract from the overall truth in Beauvoir's view. Later in *Tout compte fait*, writing about André Malraux's *Antimémoires*, Beauvoir describes omission as 'the most insidious form of lying' and condemns Malraux for his silence and mythomania.<sup>23</sup> This illustrates an interesting conflict in Beauvoir's autobiographical methodology: on one hand she is drawn to the complete confession à la Rousseau, yet on the other, she seems to be aware of the impossibility of this desired self-totalisation, this 'telling all', particularly as a woman writer who had caused some outrage among members of the French establishment by writing *Le Deuxième sexe*. Her method seems to be to represent a testimony of experience by relating the life largely chronologically in its contingent detail.

By the end of the first part of *La Force de l'âge*, Beauvoir's initial project of 'telling all' has been modified. Reaffirming her belief in Sartre's

early theory of a transcendental ego,<sup>24</sup> she concludes that a major reason for undertaking to write her autobiography was that one can never *know* oneself but can only offer an account of oneself.<sup>25</sup> Through the production of narrative, the autobiographical subject is able to gain a knowledge about her life as a sum of particular experiences. Asserting that self-knowledge is impossible, Beauvoir thereby relinquishes a certain authority within the confessional structure of traditional autobiography (which usually foregrounds self-knowledge as necessary for autobiographical authority). She effectively refuses to analyse her story in terms of any truth or epistemological value it might have and it is left to the reader to decide the value of her testimony.

In the prologue to *La Force des choses*, Beauvoir defends her documentary approach by saying that the inclusion of the minutiae of her life proves the veracity of her story. She also re-asserts her authoritative position as narrator, particularly in relation to psychoanalysis, (according to her notion of autobiography as providing a truth of experience rather than self-knowledge) saying, 'If I am describing myself, nothing frightens me'.<sup>26</sup> She concedes the existence of a number of errors in her story and declares, 'I repeat that I have never deliberately cheated'.<sup>27</sup> She claims her good faith here in offering a lucid account of her life.

In the final volume of her autobiography, *Tout compte fait*, Beauvoir temporarily abandons her chronological method for a thematic account of her life. She comments:

Building up a picture of myself: I am not interested in this pointless and in any case impossible undertaking. What I would like is to have an idea of my situation in the world. Being a woman, French, a writer, to be sixty-four years old in 1972: what does that mean?<sup>28</sup>

Here Beauvoir makes her interests clear: to situate herself within various networks of identification - gender, nationality, profession, age, historical location - rather than offering a self portrait.

Beauvoir's role as witness in her memoirs consistently takes pre-eminent importance. Ten years after finishing her autobiography, she commented



in an interview with Deirdre Bair that, 'the autobiographer has to be like a policeman writing his report: accuracy is paramount'.<sup>29</sup> She added that, unlike Colette's autobiographical writings, her memoirs could really be called autobiography because they were 'so total and complete, at least in the sense that they recount my entire life'. Here, Beauvoir attempts to locate her autobiographical practice somewhere between a juridical notion of autobiography, which relies on the production of facts and objective truth, and a notion of women's autobiographical practice (exemplified by Colette) which she represents as discontinuous and subjectively impressionistic. Once more, telling all takes priority over telling a mimetic truth. As Leigh Gilmore has noted in her discussion of autobiography:

The very act of confessing seems almost to conspire against the one bound to tell the truth. That is, in telling the *truth*, autobiographers usually narrate, and thereby shift the emphasis to *telling* the truth.<sup>30</sup>

As I have argued, Beauvoir's project of telling all in her autobiography does not claim to tell all in the sense of offering a definitive, objective truth of the life recounted. The Beauvoirian fantasy of self-totalisation, in which every contingent detail of life can be definitively and accurately recorded, is demonstrated to be blatantly fictive early in her autobiographical project. Nevertheless, as we have seen, there are tensions evident in Beauvoir's negotiations with the reader between the fantasy of telling 'the' definitive truth in autobiography and her recognition that she can only provide a narrative of experience.

In *L'Écriture et la différence*, Jacques Derrida, in his discussion of Lévi-Strauss and totalisation, suggests there is another option when faced with the inability to represent the world in language. He says we can try and come to terms with the non-possibility of language ever representing anything other than language. According to this view, there is no discrete encounter between language and the world, our experience always already exists in language.<sup>31</sup> There is, therefore, no finite interpretation or truth of correspondence to be obtained. Roquentin's dilemma of whether to live or to relate would therefore be illusory, for it assumes that there *is* a stance to take outside language. Yet in the meantime he has been producing narratives, like everyone else, by writing his diary in order to try and

make sense of his experience. In this context, Beauvoir's commitment to the narrative task of testimonial autobiography demonstrates the ethical importance of living *and* recounting.<sup>32</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> All translations from French are my own.

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *La Nausée* (Paris, Gallimard, 1938), 1968 edn, p.62. 'Pour que l'événement le plus banal devienne une aventure, il faut et suffit qu'on se mette à le raconter. C'est ce qui dupe les gens: un homme, c'est toujours un conteur d'histoires, il vit entouré de ses histoires et des histoires d'autrui, il voit tout ce qui lui arrive à travers elles; et il cherche à vivre sa vie comme s'il la racontait. Mais il faut choisir: vivre ou raconter'.

<sup>3</sup> I refer to *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* (1958), *La Force de l'âge* (1960), *La Force des choses* (1963) and *Tout compte fait* (1972) as the four volumes of Beauvoir's memoirs, because these are the volumes which she recognised and critics generally recognise as such. The authority of these volumes has been questioned by some since the publication in 1990 of Beauvoir's *Lettres à Sartre* and *Journal de guerre*, which offer, at times, a different account of certain events in Beauvoir's life to the version given in the memoirs.

<sup>4</sup> Octave Mannoni, 'Relation d'un sujet à sa propre vie', *Les Temps modernes*, no.528 (juillet 1990), 57-77 (p.60): 'Il suffit de lire des *Mémoires* pour s'apercevoir comment dès son enfance on peut dire qu'elle a toujours vécu dans un rapport autobiographique avec elle-même'. I would like to thank Michel Contat for alerting me to the existence of this article.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.61. 'Mais nous savons depuis longtemps qu'une telle objectivité n'a pas de sens, que les faits par eux-mêmes ne se groupent pas en récit, que les souvenirs spontanément ne font pas une histoire et qu'on ne peut pas raconter sa vie à la façon dont on filme, en accéléré, le développement d'une plante'.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, *op.cit.*, p.65.

<sup>7</sup> Mark Freeman, *Rewriting the Self: History, Memory, Narrative* (London and New York, Routledge, 1993), p.110.

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<sup>8</sup>. John Taylor has examined Sartre's use in *La Nausée* of Pierre Janet's work on psychasthenia and notes that the link between 'vivre' and 'raconter' derives directly from Janet's *L'Évolution de la mémoire et de la notion du temps* (1928). According to Taylor, 'for Janet, the reflexive production of a narrative contemporaneous with our acts is the key factor in the creation of 'le sens du réel' essential to mature and healthy existence'. (p.81) Taylor argues that Sartre's Roquentin demonstrates most of the symptoms of psychasthenia (such as the inability to produce a narrative to organise his life) on his journey to consciousness. John Taylor, 'Psychasthenia in *La Nausée*', *Sartre Studies International*, 1/2 (1995), 77-93.

<sup>9</sup>. Simone de Beauvoir, *La Force des choses II* (Paris, Gallimard, 1963), 1983 Folio edn, p.128. 'J'ai toujours sournoisement imaginé que ma vie se déposait dans son moindre détail sur le ruban de quelque magnétophone géant et qu'un jour je déviderais tout mon passé. J'ai presque cinquante ans, c'est trop tard pour tricher: bientôt tout va sombrer. Ma vie ne peut être fixée qu'à grands traits, sur du papier et par ma main: j'en ferai donc un livre. Je souhaitais à quinze ans que des gens, un jour, lisent ma biographie avec une curiosité émue; si je voulais devenir "un auteur connu", c'était dans cet espoir. Depuis, j'ai souvent songé à l'écrire moi-même'.

<sup>10</sup>. Madeleine Chapsal, 'Une interview de Simone de Beauvoir par Madeleine Chapsal' in *Les Écrits de Simone de Beauvoir*, ed. Claude Francis et Fernande Gontier (Paris, Gallimard, 1979), pp.381-396 (p.390): 'J'aimerais avoir une énorme documentation sur ma vie. Je trouverais cela passionnant'.

<sup>11</sup>. Ibid., p.390. 'Non. C'est évidemment en partant de mon enfance qu'il aurait fallu approfondir les choses du point de vue de la psychanalyse. Après, quand je raconte ma vie d'adulte, cela ne m'intéresse guère de chercher quelles étaient les racines infantiles. J'aurais dû en parler dans le premier volume, s'il fallait en parler. Quand j'aurai achevé d'écrire ces souvenirs, il faudra peut-être m'interroger à leur propos sur un autre plan. Mais pour l'instant je me soucie uniquement de ma vie consciente, et non de ses soubassements. J'en indique des implications qui me demeurent obscures, j'essaye à l'occasion de les élucider. Mais pour moi, ce n'est pas l'essentiel.'

<sup>12</sup>. In a productive re-reading of *La Force de l'âge*, Josyane Savigneau has identified 'l'acharnement à se regarder avec clarté' as a feature of Beauvoir's approach to writing autobiography. Cf. Josyane Savigneau, 'Beauvoir dans la force de l'âge', *Le Monde des livres*, 13 août 1993, p.9.

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<sup>13</sup> Michel Contat, 'Sartre/Beauvoir, légende et réalité d'un couple' in *Literature and its Cults*, ed. Péter Dávidházi and Judit Karafiáth, (Budapest, Argumentum, 1994), pp.123-156 (pp.150-151).

<sup>14</sup> Beauvoir explained the testimonial dimension of her autobiographical project in 'Mon expérience d'écrivain', a lecture given in Japan in 1966. Cf. Claude Francis et Fernande Gontier, op.cit., pp.439-457 (p.450).

<sup>15</sup> Dori Laub, 'Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening', in Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (New York and London, Routledge, 1992), p.73-74.

<sup>16</sup> Toril Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1994), p.74. See especially pp.77-84 for Moi's astute comments on the reception of Beauvoir's autobiography.

<sup>17</sup> Francis et Gontier, op.cit., p.383. 'Ecrire, à mes yeux, c'était une mission, c'était un salut, ça remplaçait Dieu'.

<sup>18</sup> Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité I, La Volonté de savoir* (Paris, Gallimard, 1976), pp.78-90.

<sup>19</sup> For an interesting discussion of women's relationship to authority, identity and truth in autobiography, see Chapter Three of Leigh Gilmore, *Autobiographics. A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation* (Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1994), pp.106-130.

<sup>20</sup> Jane Heath, *Simone de Beauvoir* (Hemel Hempstead, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), p.49.

<sup>21</sup> Freeman, op.cit., p.111.

<sup>22</sup> Jane Heath has discussed the relationship between these meta-narrative sections and the main narrative, which she genders feminine and masculine respectively in her useful chapter on Beauvoir's autobiography. Heath, op.cit., pp.47-86.

<sup>23</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *Tout compte fait* (Paris, Gallimard, 1972), 1989 Folio edn, pp.215-216.

<sup>24</sup> Sartre explained this in *La Transcendance de l'ego*, (Paris, Librairie

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philosophique J.Vrin, 1988), originally published in *Recherches philosophiques* in 1936. He argues against the view that the ego is an inhabitant of consciousness and attempts to explain the relationship between the ego, the psyche and consciousness. Consciousness is an immediately apprehensible entity, whereas the psyche is a collection of phenomena which are not readily accessible to us. My ego, however, exists as a recognisable phenomenon for me in the same way it exists for anyone else. My ego is not within me, but in the world. Cf. Simone de Beauvoir, *La Force de l'âge* (Paris, Gallimard, Folio edn.), 1989, pp.210-211, and Peter Caws, *Sartre* (London, Routledge, 1979), especially the chapter on 'Consciousness and Subjectivity', pp.50-61.

<sup>25</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *La Force de l'âge* (Paris, Gallimard, 1960), 1989 Folio edn, p.419.

<sup>26</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *La Force des choses I* (Paris, Gallimard, 1963), 1988 Folio edn, p.10. 'Mais si c'est moi qui me peins, rien ne m'effraie'.

<sup>27</sup> *La Force des choses I*, p.10. 'Mais je répète que jamais je n'ai délibérément triché'.

<sup>28</sup> *Tout compte fait*, p.58. 'Construire une image de moi-même: cette vaine et d'ailleurs impossible entreprise ne m'intéresse pas. Ce que je souhaiterais c'est me faire une idée de ma situation dans le monde. Etre femme, française, écrivain, âgée de soixante-quatre ans en 1972, qu'est-ce que cela signifie?'

<sup>29</sup> Deirdre Bair, "'My Life....This Curious Object": Simone de Beauvoir on Autobiography' in *The Female Autograph*, ed. by Domna Stanton and Jeanine Parisier Plottel, *New York Literary Forum*, vols 12-13 (1984), 237-245 (p.242).

<sup>30</sup> Leigh Gilmore, op.cit., p.121.

<sup>31</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'La structure, le signe et le jeu dans le discours des sciences humaines' in *L'Écriture et la différence* (Paris, Seuil, 1967), pp.423-424. This passage is also cited by Mark Freeman, op.cit., pp.10-11.

<sup>32</sup> I would like to thank Claire Gorrara and the audience at the *New Readings* session in February 1996 for their helpful questions and comments on earlier drafts of this article.