

MIRRORS AND WITNESSES: GABRIELLE ROY, MARGARET ATWOOD, AND  
*LE DEUXIÈME SEXE*

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The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in English.

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## DEDICATION

To Florence, Rae, Rae Jr., Ethyl, Valerie, Dennis, Jim, David, Omnia, Adam, and especially to  
Khadouj

Terre de nos aieux.

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## ABSTRACT

I propose an intertextual, cross-cultural study of the Canadian woman's experience from the Second War and Post-War era through examination of the existential crisis of the feminine situation as addressed by the fiction of Mme. Gabrielle Roy (*Bonheur d'occasion*, 1945, and *Rue Deschambault*, 1955), and Ms. Margaret Atwood (*Cat's Eye*, 1985), considered in relation to *Le Deuxième Sexe*, (1949) by Mme. Simone de Beauvoir.

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## From *Rue Deschambault* to the Whole Wide World

In "*Ély! Ély! Ély!*" (1979), Gabrielle Roy tells a semi-autobiographical, first-person tale of a trip she made across Canada in 1942. Mme. Roy retells the story of herself as a young reporter for Montréal's *Bulletin d'agriculture* through the protagonist, Christine. Attracted to the only light shining across the darkened, wind-blown fields of wheat, Christine walks in from the soft summer night through the open door of the Elie Hotel. It is the only place in town where it is legal to buy a drink, and the only place open late in Elie, Manitoba, a French-Canadian farming village to the West of Winnipeg. Christine appears as though from nowhere and startles all of the men in the staunchly masculine enclave of this prairie-town hotel lobby. When questioned, she claims that she is studying Canada. She shocks the men into awkward and disapproving mumblings when she asks: "Qu'est-ce que c'est que le Canada? Et d'abord, y a-t-il un Canada?" ("What is that, Canada? And first, is there a Canada?"; 113, N.B.: Translations are mine). In this scene that so clearly represents the interruption of the feminine into a place of masculine power, Mme. Roy seems to be posing a question central to her fiction: What is Canada? Christine's presence implies yet another question: Does a woman have a place here?

The year 2009 marks the centenary of the birth of French-Canadian author Gabrielle Roy, now lauded as a major literary voice, a celebrated author canonized in the literature of Québec and Canada. Roy published her first novel, *Bonheur d'occasion*, in 1945 and won both the 1947 *Prix Fémina* and international renown before 1949, when Simone de Beauvoir's *Le Deuxième Sexe* was published. *Le Deuxième Sexe* is an acknowledged authoritative theoretical articulation of modern feminism, certainly one of the most important feminist works of the twentieth century. According to Mme. de Beauvoir, a woman is a cultural construct. Mme. de Beauvoir states "...que dans la collectivité humaine rien n'est naturel et qu'entre autres la femme est un produit élaboré par la civilisation"

(...that in the human collective nothing is natural and, among others, Woman is a product elaborated by civilization”; II: 596). Cultural influence demands that a woman objectify her Self in order to be the feminine Other. Contemporary sociologist Deborah D. Sullivan echoes de Beauvoir when she observes that women’s “...identities as desirable women depend on the submission of their physical bodies to the dictates of social norms” (3). This cultural demand that a woman objectify herself defines the feminine situation. Sullivan's recent repetition of de Beauvoir's famous formulation of this condition suggests that the problem of "the second sex" has not yet been resolved. In the following pages, I explore the feminine situation as it is represented in Canadian literature of the mid-to late-twentieth century. More specifically, I establish intertextual relationships between *Le Deuxième Sexe* by Simone de Beauvoir, and Canadian literature, feminism, and society. I focus on three works of Canadian literature in order to show: first, how Gabrielle Roy in the mid-twentieth century uses fictional characters to explore what de Beauvoir articulates in philosophical and sociological terms; and second, how the popular Canadian author Margaret Atwood continues to grapple with the feminine condition in the late-twentieth century.

The heroines of *Bonheur d'occasion* (*Bonheur*) and *Rue Deschambault* (*Rue D*), Florentine, nineteen years of age, and Christine, fifteen, are girls moving into, through, and out of adolescence, a time of child development where identity is in flux, still forming. Christine and Florentine find themselves, as they approach woman-hood, faced with the cultural demand that they objectify themselves in order to become “feminine” young women. This choice before the adolescent protagonists between Self-hood, and Other-ness is explicitly articulated by Mme. de Beauvoir: “Et c’est pourquoi l’adolescence est pour la femme un moment si difficile et si décisif...un conflit éclate entre sa revendication originelle qui est d’être sujet...et d’autre part ses tendances érotiques et les sollicitations sociales qui l’invitent à s’assumer comme objet” (“Adolescence is for the woman a

moment so difficult and decisive...a conflict erupts between her original revindication which is to be a subject...and on the other hand her erotic tendencies and the social solicitations which invite her to accept herself as an object"; *Le Deuxième Sexe* II: 89). Mme. de Beauvoir is explicit: *subject* vs. *object* – self-actualization vs. self-objectification. Mme. Roy expresses the feminine situation fictionally in both *Bonheur* and *Rue D.* using common tropes of role-playing and mirrors to represent scenes wherein girls are strongly tempted to objectify themselves, to create and portray themselves as the Other – Self as Other. Mme. Roy, and Simone de Beauvoir in *Le Deuxième Sexe*, thus, show this paradigm in common. Whether considering the gravel road with two houses on it that was Mme. Roy's *Rue Deschambault*, or all the sweep and tumult of international Francophonie and twentieth century feminism somehow associated with *Le Deuxième Sexe*, the feminine situation is shown as shared by women across linguistic and national traditions, and this common situation is the key that allows my study: exploring the feminine situation gives me common ground to consider and examine possible intertextual relationships of *Le Deuxième Sexe* with the writing of Gabrielle Roy and Margaret Atwood.

*Bonheur d'occasion* and *Rue Deschambault* seem perfectly placed to consider a possible influence on Québec and Canada of *Le Deuxième Sexe*. As Mme. Roy (1909-1983), a contemporary peer of Mme. de Beauvoir (1908-1986), was one of Québec and Canada's few major authors then addressing herself to stories of women's lives both before and after *Le Deuxième Sexe* was published, can one, by considering the feminine situation as experienced by Florentine, the heroine of 1945's *Bonheur d'occasion* (*Bonheur*, four years prior to *Le Deuxième Sexe*), and then the situation of the character Christine from 1955's *Rue Deschambault* (*Rue D.*, six years after *Le Deuxième Sexe*), show a *before-and-after-Le Deuxième Sexe* effect? Will the two novels, a decade apart, allow one to "frame" *Le Deuxième Sexe*; its arrival, its influence; either in time, in context, in *épanouissement*?

And if influence of *Le Deuxième Sexe* cannot be shown, might not Gabrielle Roy's *oeuvre* be considered, in fact, a profound vision of feminism native to Saint-Boniface and Montréal, not influenced by, but rather contemporary to that of Mme. de Beauvoir on the continent?

Further, I consider Mme. Atwood's Cat's Eye to give a broader Canadian context. In Cat's Eye we find the feminine situation again, with the protagonist Elaine, but her particular situation is so unique to her, and differentiated from the situation as articulated by Mmes. de Beauvoir and Roy that, even though Atwood specifically mentions de Beauvoir as an influence (Second Words 143, 370), one cannot show a strict, direct, genealogical influence on the fiction. Nonetheless, whether 1940 in Montréal, 1949 in Paris, 1955 in Saint Boniface, or 1960s and '70s Toronto, all three writers, Mmes. Roy, Atwood, and de Beauvoir, show in common a literary articulation of the feminine situation – the cultural demand that a woman objectify herself, as moments of choice between self-objectification vs. self-actualization.

Yet, though the feminine situation is portrayed as a constant, *common* to all women, the fiction does not portray it to be a *universal* condition. Indeed, considering the different individual manifestations of each particular character's situation reveals each as unique: from Florentine of *Bonheur*, who in Montréal in 1940 must get married as her one and only socially-approved avenue to material support; through the experience of Christine, the semi-autographical first person narrative voice of *Rue D.*, who during the War and Post-War years finds herself practically with an either/or choice: able to choose and pursue a career, but at the possible cost of marriage and family; compared with the later situation of the heroine of Atwood's Cat's Eye, Elaine, who by 1985 – forty-five years after Florentine's tale – had married, divorced, legally enjoyed material support from the father of her children, pursued a career, and re-married, all with social approbation. Each individual and unique situation, the singular adventure of each fictional soul who finds herself inevitably in the feminine

situation, reveals the feminine situation as *common* to women, but does not show women as destined to femininity. The feminine is a cultural manifestation – therefore malleable, subject to change. As Mme. de Beauvoir shows so forcefully in her chapter “*Destin: Les données de la biologie*,” Woman is not the Other as a result of a biological destiny; Women as Other is rather a common construction in every culture known to Anthropology. This is reflected in the fiction, for we are shown the feminine situation as a cultural constant, yet each character’s situation is unique, and changes throughout the course of the narrative. The feminine situation is culturally common, but not therefore a universal femininity.

These fiction writers represent the choice implied by the feminine situation as, in fact, an existential crisis, and present, existentially speaking, an intersubjectivity that is specifically feminine. In this thesis I specifically examine these scenes of girl’s temptations as existential crisis, moments of choice between Self and Other. Other feminist scholars might take exception to the existential underpinnings of my examination, not being certain that self-actualization is necessarily an answer to the feminine. To pretend that there might be some readily-attainable solution to the feminine situation would be a reductionist conception of the feminine, a myriad intertextual phenomenon. However, I propose that the fiction writers I am considering seem to agree, at least in part, and that Mme. de Beauvoir’s articulation of the feminine situation is overtly existential. According to Mme. de Beauvoir, the contrast between self-actualization as existential transcendence, and self-objectification into immanence is succinctly expressed: for a man “C’est en s’accomplissant comme indépendance et liberté qu’il acquiert sa valeur sociale” (“It is in actualizing himself in independence and liberty that he gains social esteem” II: 89) – transcendence, then, definitively, whereas for a woman “Ce n’est pas en effet en augmentant sa valeur humaine qu’elle gagnera du prix aux yeux des mâles : c’est en se modelant sur leurs rêves” (“It’s not by making herself into a great human being that she will gain

esteem in the eyes of men, it's in modeling herself after his dreams" II: 88) – definitively immanence. For my study then, within the context of these three writers, the existential is appropriate.

## MIRRORS AND WITNESSES

### – *Les Bijoux* –

I've chosen to begin by considering Christine, the heroine of *Rue D*, from a story called *Les Bijoux*, because the story portrays the feminine situation so closely to the situation as articulated by Mme. de Beauvoir that one might certainly wonder if Mme. Roy had not been influenced by *Le Deuxième Sexe* in writing it. Beginning with *Les Bijoux* emphasizes just how strikingly similar both Mme. Roy and Mme. de Beauvoir's portrayals of the feminine situation are; afterward, we will consider Florentine from *Bonheur*, and then Elaine of Cat's Eye.

Ten years before we meet Christine in the lobby of the Elie Hotel, while she is still a school-girl living with her family in Saint-Boniface, *Les Bijoux* stages a moment of choice for her. At fifteen years of age, she collects junk jewellery and steals her older sister's make-up to play dress-up. But the game is not so much innocent fun as a rite of passage, as Christine finds herself troubled, questioning what she is, or might be, *à propos de sex* roles; her role-playing informs the adolescent choices she will make which will form her adult identity, her very Self. It is the cultural demand that a "real woman" make herself an object – self-objectification – that Gabrielle Roy's young heroine, Christine, is trying to fulfill with her big sister's make-up and her costume jewellery. Adolescent Christine is being tempted to make herself into something that she is not: the Other, as opposed to her Self.

The staging of the scene begins when Christine recounts that "du jour au lendemain, je devins amoureuse folle des bijoux" ("from one day to the next, I became crazily in love with jewellery"; *Rue D*. 209). She describes her state as being a "passion," but her excitement does not represent

enthusiastic happiness; it seems rather nervous tension or worry, and an ultimate dissatisfaction with her collection is illustrated by her statements “Jamais je n’en eus assez pour me satisfaire”; (“Never did I get enough of it to satisfy me”), and the drolly ironic “le bijou manquant à ma collection toujours me paraissait le plus désirable” (“the jewel lacking from my collection always appeared to me the most desirable”; 209).

In fact, in contrast to a playful and happy collecting of pretty things, her passion for jewellery is symbolically associated with slavery when she recalls herself before the jewellery counter: “C’est là qu’un jour m’a prise cette folie, comme j’essayais à mon cou un collier qui avait le poids et faisait le bruit d’une chaîne” (It was there that one day I was taken by this folly, as I tried on a necklace that had the weight and made the sound of a chain”; 209). The costume necklace being tried on by a girl is presented as having the weight and sound of a chain around her neck – a chain around her neck representing symbolically the collar of a slave. She is also tempted by “des bracelets lourds comme des menottes” (“bracelets as heavy as hand-cuffs”; 210-11). Handcuffs, like a chain around the neck, are dis-empowering restraining devices used on slaves and prisoners. Symbolically, Christine’s bejewelling herself to fulfill some cultural standard of feminine beauty – self-objectification – is enslaving herself. Indeed, rather than costume jewellery pleasing a playful girl, Christine is anxious about her jewellery. For though she is not sure exactly what she does want, she is under the impression that jewellery is a desirable and valuable thing – though she doesn’t know why. This is shown by her musing “je ne pense pas que la qualité ait compté beaucoup alors à mes yeux ; j’étais trop avide de tout ce que brillait” (“I don’t think that the quality really counted a lot for me back then – I was too avid for all that shone” (209). As well, she recalls that “ En cas de doute, je résolvais habituellement la question en m’achetant le bijou le plus orné ; ainsi croyais-je ne pas faire d’erreur!” (“In case of doubt, I usually resolved the question by buying myself the most ornate jewel – thus I

believed that I wouldn't make a mistake!"; 210) So, far from care-free play, Christine's jewellery collection has assumed an importance that leads her to dread making "a mistake," though still, she is not really sure what it is that she does want. Her resulting miserable indecisiveness shows in the succession of verbs used in a sentence describing herself before the jewellery counter at Woolworth's department store in downtown Winnipeg: "J'inclinai d'abord vers...puis me tentèrent...ensuite j'eus envie de... mon indécision m'entraîna...pour y faire le tour douloureux" ("I inclined at first toward...then I was tempted by...after that, I wanted...my indecision led me...to wander about unhappily"; 210, Ellipses mine). Emphasizing her indecision, Christine narrates that, by herself at home "J'épinglais parfois presque toutes ces pieces ensemble sur ma poitrine..." ("Sometimes I used to pin almost every one of these jewels together onto my chest..."); and the sentence expresses again her ultimate feeling of dissatisfaction in ending "et je n'arrivais pas à décider laquelle me plaisait" ("but I could never really decide which one I liked"; 209). No action or decision is indicated by these verbs; indeed, an inability to decide is emphasized – symbolic of a state of on-going adolescent suspension between girl and young woman that awaits her decision – awaiting a decision between self-objectification or self-actualization.

In the miserable indecision, and self-questioning doubt of Christine's agonizing over costume jewellery, the reader sees the indecision of an adolescent girl, a fifteen-year-old coming out of puberty and facing choices as she starts to head toward woman-hood. She knows that she will have some value as a woman, but she is not sure what that value is, or will be, anymore than she is sure what value jewellery has. As an adult narrator, looking back at herself as a girl, Christine exclaims, "Du reste, comment aurais-je su alors qui j'étais!" (Besides, how could I have known back then who I was!"; 211). The exclamation mark at the end of a sentence whose structure implies a question alerts the reader that it is a rhetorical question – it is not to be answered; it is a statement. The adult narrator



Christine is stating that at fifteen years of age, she had no firm identity; she could not know who she was, nor when she was playing at a role.

The climax of *Les Bijoux* stages the choice between Self and Other when one night, with make-up stolen from an older sister, Christine painted herself with “une bouche sanglante, des joues fiévreuses” (“blood-red lips and feverish-red cheeks”), and, wearing a skirt, high-heeled shoes that she had “à force de supplications” (“relentlessly begged”) from her mother, and almost every piece of her large junk jewellery collection, she recounts that she descended the stairs – holding onto the bannister, being unsteady on new high-heels – and “Je m’élançai hardiment, d’une singulière démarche, me montrer au miens. Je m’étais exercée à faire tinter à la fois tous mes bracelets, et je parus, scintillante des pieds à la tête, le visage hautain, comme absent” (“I boldly sashey’d in, displaying myself to my family. I had practiced to learn to jangle all of my bracelets at the same time, and I appeared, glittering from head to feet, visage uplifted, distant and remote, as though absent”; 211).

“Absent” is a *double entendre* here: firstly the sense that “visage uplifted, distant and remote, as though absent” suggests the facial expression and air that Christine assumes, and, secondly, the absence of the real girl Christine, in that Christine, as she presents herself to her family that night, is a persona, an absence of Christine. She is playing the role of a gendered object. Dramatically jangling her bracelets and bejewelled from head to high-heeled foot, she brings to mind a caricatural image of a glamorous and striking Marlena Dietrich entrance scene -- a distant and desirable siren. Christine is trying to be a fifteen-year-old *femme fatale*. Her family bursts out in laughter. Obviously Christine cuts, with adolescent excess, a ridiculous figure, a caricature of a woman, an in-authentic pretence. Though her persona is ridiculously over-done, she has done her adolescent best, with fore-thought and care, to objectify herself – she has chosen to make her *Self* into the *Other*.

Simone de Beauvoir's *Le Deuxième Sexe* explains in strikingly similar fashion – so similar that one might question whether Mme. Roy had read and been influenced by *Le Deuxième Sexe* – the Self/Other dichotomy with which Christine finds herself faced, for defined culturally, according to Mme. de Beauvoir, women are *not* accorded the status of Selves; women are *definitively* Other, so that a woman finds herself a particular individual Self, bound necessarily to culture – as the culturally defined Other. Christine, in objectifying and displaying her Self, is attempting to conform to the cultural norm, is attempting to *be* a woman, in making her Self the Other.

Mme de Beauvoir begins with the Cartesian idea that every woman is a Self. As a human being, she is a centre of consciousness, a self-aware subject, and a moral agent – “Si on admet que la conscience...est...une subjectivité translucide, capable d’opérer le cogito, on admet qu’elle est en vérité souveraine” (“If one admits that consciousness is a translucent subjectivity, capable of operating the *cogito*, one admits that she is in truth sovereign”; I: 390). If this is Self-hood is granted, then any credible female character, in literature, or in life, will in her words, choices, and actions reveal her Self-hood. A woman must exhibit the existential authenticity of a self-aware critical consciousness called to transcendence in order to be credible -- there must be a real person in there. Christine evinces Self-hood: her self-questioning doubt is evidence of a self-aware critical consciousness – juvenile, but believable.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Critic Josephine Donavan defines this approach to analyzing a female literary character as the “Images-of-Women” School. Crediting the images-of-women to Mme. de Beauvoir’s existential phenomenology, Ms. Donovan, in an article entitled “Beyond the Net: Feminist Criticism as a Moral Criticism”, defines that “Feminist criticism is rooted in the fundamental *a priori* intuition that women are seats of consciousness; are selves, not others,” more specifically explaining that “Through the ‘images-of-women’ approach the critic determines how women characters are presented in literature. Usually the critic discovers that the images [of the women characters] are *Other*” (Donavan 40). Donovan continues that “The primary assumption a critic in the ‘images-of-women’ school must make is an evaluation of the *authenticity* of the female characters” (41), continuing that “Such judgments [of authenticity] are made according to whether the character

Mme. de Beauvoir says that the instant one becomes Self-aware, one simultaneously and conversely becomes aware of what is not-Self: the *Other* – “La catégorie de *l’Autre* est aussi originelle que la conscience elle-même” (“The category of the Other is as original as consciousness itself”; *Le Deuxième Sexe* I: 16), for Mme. de Beauvoir declares that “le sujet ne se pose qu’en s’opposant” (“The subject posits him or her Self only by opposing his or her Self”; I: 18). As subjects, we perceive the world around us from the vantage point of the immediate and radical subjectivity of a perceiving Self. As perceiving subjects, our subjective limits are where the *Self* encounters *Not Self*, i.e., *Other*. *Self* is thus defined by *Other* – and vice-versa, in a binary opposition. One defines one’s Self by contrasting oneself against all that is the Other: everyone else, and all of material creation. Thus, furthers Mme. de Beauvoir, do our patriarchal societies define Self-hood as male and, contrastingly, define women as Other, for men define man-hood itself by opposing men to women, and then defining women as “not-men.” Mme. de Beauvoir explains this mutually-defining binary opposition – the male as Self, and the female as Other – as an encultured ideological paradigm: “L’humanité est mâle et l’homme définit la femme non en soi mais relativement à lui...Il est le Sujet, il est l’Absolu : elle est l’Autre” (“Humanty is male, and man defines women not as given, but relative to himself...He is the subject, he is the absolute, she is the Other”; I: 15-6).

Now, defined culturally, women are *definitively* Other, so that a woman finds herself a particular individual Self, bound necessarily to culture – as the Other. These distinctions – male as Self, female as Other – are culturally dictated, and as a woman participates in culture – which she must – she is bound to, identified with, and, defined by Other-ness, whether she will or no. As Mme de Beauvoir ironically puts it, “Elle est femme sans avoir été consultée” (“She finds herself a woman

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has a reflective, critical consciousness, whether s/he is a moral agent, capable of self-determined action, whether, in short, s/he is a *Self*, not an *Other*” (42).

without ever having been consulted about it”; II: 319); for she is observed by other Selves – and perceived as Other. Being defined as the Other changes women’s situation from that of men, which is culturally considered the “universal” human situation of Self-hood, for Mme. de Beauvoir specifies that the feminine condition, an inter-subjectivity specifically feminine, includes this condition of gendered Other-ness, emphasizing both a woman’s bound-upness with culture and her culturally defined Other-ness, in saying : “...ce qui caractérise fondamentalement la femme : elle est l’Autre au coeur d’une totalité dont les deux termes [Self/Other] sont nécessaires l’un à l’autre” (“That which fundamentally characterizes woman: she is the Other in the heart of a totality in which the two terms, Self and Other, are necessary for each other”; I: 21).

Not only does culture view the male as the definitive norm, the *Self*, and view women as Not-Self, i.e. : *Other*, but, speaking further of the cultural objectification of women, Mme. de Beauvoir claims that it is not enough to simply have the physical body of a woman, nor to assume as a lover, or a mother, the physical function of the female in order to be seen as a “vraie femme” (“real woman,” emphasis hers); patriarchal culture sees as a “vraie femme” she who makes herself into, and accepts herself as the Other. Mme. de Beauvoir defines, “la ‘vraie femme’ est celle qui s’accepte comme Autre...on demande à la ‘vraie femme’ de se faire objet, d’être l’Autre” (“the ‘real woman’ is she who accepts herself as Other...It is requested that the ‘real woman’ make herself into an object, that she be the Other”; Other one I: 394). Thus, patriarchal culture demands the complicity of women in their own objectification.

It is exactly this demand, that the “real woman” make herself an object, that our heroine, Christine, is trying to fulfill with her big sister’s make-up and her displaying of herself before her family as an alluring siren. Adolescent Christine is being tempted to make herself into “la vraie femme”: the Other, as opposed to her Self. This temptation of girls and women in the feminine

situation is defined by Mme. de Beauvoir as: “Or, *ce qui définit...la situation de la femme*, c’est que...elle se découvre et se choisit dans un monde où les hommes lui imposent de s’assumer comme l’autre” (“Now, *that which defines...the feminine situation*, it is that...she discovers herself and chooses herself in a world where the men impose upon her to accept herself as the Other”; I: 31, emphasis mine). This universally experienced temptation to self-objectification implicit in, indeed, defining the feminine situation, offers young women the specific choice of Self vs. Other, the choice between being or non-being. This moment of crisis – that of engagement with the world in inter-textual self-creation vs. a culturally demanded self-objectification – defines the feminine situation – both in *Le Deuxième Sexe*, and in *Les Bijoux*.

*De tous ces mythes, aucun n’est plus ancré dans les cœurs masculins que celui du « mystère » féminin.* <sup>2</sup>(I : 386)

Christine, appearing in the kitchen before her family at the climax of *Les Bijoux*, “visage uplifted, distant and remote, as though absent,” is publicly displaying her Self as a created persona. She specifically recounts that she has come “me montrer aux miens” (“to show myself to my family”; *Rue Deschambault* 211). With her big sister’s make-up, her high heels, her jewellery collection, and her striking of a pose, she has objectified herself – but that object is an illusion to be perceived by others. Christine specifically intends to be perceived by others; she intends to be seen. As a matter of fact, it is necessary that she be seen by others. Christine is creating her Self as an object; an object is a thing, a thing to be perceived by a Self who perceives of him or herself as the perceiving subject. Since Christine’s portrayal of her Self-as-Object is an in-authentic pretence, an illusion, that Other will not seem to Christine to exist unless someone *else* – someone other than Christine – perceives it to exist. A choice for self-objectification thus makes a young lady depend on the perception of others to constitute her personage, the personage she poses as her “Self” – the Self-as-Other depends on

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<sup>2</sup> Of all these myths, none is more anchored in the male heart than that of feminine “mystery.”

witnesses in order to – seemingly – exist. Christine goes through a progression of three stages during her search for acknowledgement of her Self-as-Other in the gaze of witnesses: her self as witness, an inanimate personification as witness, and lastly real people as witnesses. In each stage, the witness is more Other.

Christine first tries to serve as her own witness in the mirror. She tells that for some time before the climactic night that she descended to the kitchen, she used to dress up for herself, alone in her room upstairs. Made-up and bejewelled, she would consider herself in the mirror. She describes her reflected face as “Cette fille méconnaissable à mes propres yeux, que je voyais dans ma glace, à laquelle je demandais conseil, de qui j’attendais milles surprises, cette fille énigmatique, chaque jour plus folle...” (“That girl unrecognizable to my own eyes who I saw in my mirror, from whom I asked advice, from whom I expected a thousand surprises, that enigmatic girl, every day more crazy”; 211). Reflected in her mirror she saw an *a priori* unknowable Other. Mme. Roy’s use of the word *méconnaissable* means “un-know-able”, not “unknown” (*méconnue*); this Other who Christine seeks in her reflection, because it is non-existent, *cannot* be known -- one cannot, no matter how much time and effort one dedicates to the task, come to know this Other, as though this reflected visage were rather an as-yet unknown girl, whom one might befriend and come to know. This unrecognizable – unknowable – girl who Christine sees in the mirror with her own face is not Christine’s Self; it is explicitly Not Self, and will always be so: definitively Other. This contrast between Christine-as-Self and Christine-as-Other is emphasized by her mother, Éveline’s gentle reprimand: “Tu étais bien mieux avant, simple et naturelle, toi-même!” (“You were better before, simple and natural, yourself!”; 211).

The Other that Christine sees in her mirror is the mysterious Other that patriarchal culture projects onto women. For woman, incarnating for man the Other, is a tableau upon which he projects

his conscious and unconscious longings; as Mme. de Beauvoir puts it, “Il projette en elle ce qu’il désire et ce qu’il craint, ce qu’il aime et ce qu’il hait” (“He projects upon her that which he wants and that which he fears, that which he loves, and that which he hates”; *Le Deuxième Sexe* I: 310).

Christine has so internalized cultural expectations to make herself into the Other that, firstly, she unconsciously knows how to make herself appear Other, and secondly, she has specific conceptions of the personality traits expected of this mysterious feminine other. This “enigmatic” and “every day more crazy” girl of “a thousand surprises” which she sees in her mirror represents feminine mystery, described by Mme. de Beauvoir as “Le ‘mystère féminin’...Il faut que la femme reste secrète, inconnue, pour qu’on puisse l’adorer comme une princesse lointaine; une femme dont la première vertu était de paraître inaccessible...Décevante, fuyante, incomprise, duplice, c’est ainsi qu’elle se prête le mieux aux désirs contradictoires des hommes” (“Feminine mystery...It is necessary that the woman stay secret, unknown, so that one can adore her like a distant princess; a woman has to have the virtue of appearing inaccessible... Deceiving, flighty, misunderstood, tricky, thus she suits best the contradictory desires of men”; I: 304). This mysterious, unknown, and inaccessible Other is who Christine seeks in the mirror. She projects the mysterious Other onto her own reflection, from whom she awaits “a thousand surprises.” Because Christine sees her reflection as an Other, she expects this Other to assume independent existence. But Christine is looking at her own self in the mirror; how will she surprise herself? Who will assume the initiative if not her own Self? It will not happen; Christine’s Self-as-Other will not come to life before her eyes in the mirror.

Christine moves on to the next stage; she poses before an inanimate witness, a figurine of the Buddha. Christine says, “Il me regardait ; je le regardais. J’avais besoin d’un témoin...” (“He looked at me; I looked at him. I needed a witness...”; 211). Christine’s admission that “I needed a witness” explicitly shows that she has realized that she will not do, herself, as a witness of her Self-as-Other;

the witness must be outside of herself. The Buddha figurine has eyes and a face that are not hers, and so is less Self than is her own reflection in the mirror; in this way, he is a better witness of her Self-as-Other than she is herself – he is more Other. Nonetheless, Christine is not yet ready to expose herself to *real* people, though she needs a witness, for though she says, “I needed a witness...”, she continues with “...et il me paraissait impossible de me montrer aux personnes vivantes telle que je devenais” (“...and it seemed to me impossible to show myself to real, living people such as I was”; 211).

Christine’s role-playing is still an on-going process – her identity-forming decision(s) have not yet been finally made; her identity as an object is still tentative. Teetering in indecision, though she has acquired all the material accoutrement necessary for her self-objectification, and goes through what might be called “dress rehearsals” by herself in her room, she is evidently not yet certain enough of her persona -- or perhaps not yet absolutely decided that she *is* this persona -- to hazard it to public exposure. She expresses again her continued unease, her miserable indecisiveness before the Buddha, naming it “mon inquiétude, ma quête folle” (my worried apprehension, my foolish quest”; 211).

Christine describes the Buddha as an ambiguous witness, personifying the figurine as “complice peut-être – mais peut-être aussi indulgent censeur” (“accomplice maybe – but maybe as well an indulgent disciplinarian/critic.” In fact, the adult narrator Christine, recalling, projects sarcasm and mockery onto him, describing his facial expression as “sarcastique tel qu’il me paraît maintenant” (“sarcastic is how he would seem to me now”; 212). Perhaps this perceived sarcasm from the perceiving Buddha expresses something of a projected dissatisfaction that she felt concerning her Self-as-Other. But, ultimately, the Buddha is an unsatisfying, inadequate witness, for though he is one level further separated from Christine’s Self than she is looking at herself in the mirror, being inanimate he cannot bring Christine’s self-created Other to life in his life-less eyes. Christine describes herself sitting unsatisfied before the Buddha: “des bijoux dans mes cheveux, des bagues aux



doigts, je surveillais mes propres songes ; non sans quelque ennui sans doute, j'attendais de moi quelque autre invention à satisfaire" ("jewels in my hair, rings on my fingers, I watched my own thoughts; not without some boredom, no doubt, I expected of myself some other invention to satisfy"; 211). Christine, again face-to-face with her Self, has expressly realized that the figurine of the Buddha will not do as a witness either.

The narrative shows the reader a progression in Christine's need to be witnessed. Now, Christine's miserable adolescent role-playing is flirtation with a possible identity-forming self-objectification. Having created her Self as an object, Christine's Self-as-Other must be witnessed by other perceiving consciousnesses to seem to come into being. First trying her own gaze in the mirror as witness of her Self-as-Other, Christine discovers that she needs an Other as witness. Then, having next tried the gaze of the inanimate Buddha as a witness, she finds that, because the figurine is not really a perceiving subject, she needs a living witness. In the end she must present her self-created persona before Others, and, in the story's climax, she does this before her family. The progression of witnesses is such that, each time, Christine has exposed her Self-as-Other more publically; her perceivers are progressively more Other, as witnesses.

Through Mme. de Beauvoir's theory, we can understand that it is inevitable that Christine, making herself a "real woman", thus an object, would in the end find herself exposing her Self-as-Other publicly, for Mme de Beauvoir notes, "[E]lles ont besoin de regards pour les contempler, d'oreilles pour les écouter ; à leur personnage, il faut le plus large public possible" ("They need gazes to contemplate them, ears to hear them; for their character, it is necessary to have the biggest public possible"; II: 365). A public recognition of the "real woman's" personage makes that personage seem real, and the greater the public acclamation, the more real seems the personage. As Mme. de Beauvoir says, "Mieux que dans les miroirs, c'est dans les yeux admiratifs d'autrui qu'elle aperçoit

son double nimbé de gloire” (“Better than in mirrors, it is in the admiring eyes of other people that she perceives her double crowned in glory”; II: 365) for, ultimately “Le personnage qu’elle propose à l’admiration d’autrui; il dépend de ces consciences étrangères” (“The personage that she proposes for the admiration of other people, it depends on the perceptions of others”; *Le Deuxième Sexe* I : 417).

Thus we find Christine, in self-objectification to personify Mme. de Beauvoir’s “real woman”, clambering down the stairs, trying not to lose her balance on her new high heels, dressed up like a chintzy hallowe’en costume Marlena Deitrich, to strike a dramatic pose before her family in the kitchen – as Mme. de Beauvoir explains: “[F]aisant de sa vie une pièce offerte aux applaudissements du public” (“Making of her life a theatrical piece offered to the applause of the public”; II: 366). Christine’s family, surprised by their fifteen-year-old baby sister suddenly appearing in the family kitchen outlandishly made-up, jangling her bracelets, and striking an exaggerated pose, burst out in laughter. Christine says nothing at all about how this made her feel, but it is quite possible that she felt some embarrassment, being brusquely laughed at after having agonized and after having so carefully prepared herself for this public display. The first thing that Christine recounts after the outburst of hilarity is that her big brother, Robert, gave her a dollar while encouraging her to buy yet more jewellery -- thus masculine encouragement of self-objectification, of the persona of the mysterious Other so tempting, yet so dissatisfying to Christine. So, in *Les Bijoux*, Mme. Roy presents men as agents of gender socialization, and, as well, here *Les Bijoux* stages the feminine situation as expressed by Mme. de Beauvoir, wherein the woman “...discovers herself and chooses herself in a world where the men impose upon her to accept herself as the other” (I: 34): Robert’s encouragement of Christine’s adolescent self-objectification constitutes masculine cultural approbation of Christine’s acceptance of herself as the Other – even if half in jest, even if not consciously intended, it reinforces the norm, especially to the impressionable adolescent perceptions of his little sister. Mme. Roy emphasizes the

masculine influence – and specifically the intimate influence of the family, not that of the impersonal, the general, nor the strange man – in using the phrase “my brother” twice in the sentence that describes Robert giving Christine the money to buy yet more jewellery: “Mon frère Robert...mon frère mit la main dans sa poche et tira un autre dollar” (My brother, Robert...my brother put his hand in his pocket and took out another dollar”; *Rue D.* 211). So, Christine’s own brother betrays her in encouraging her self-objectification, and, as well, the cultural pressure for a young lady to objectify herself can, indeed, be said to stem, as Mme. de Beauvoir claims, from men.

Christine overhears Éveline, her mother, upbraid Robert, formally staging the existential choice with which Christine is faced, as she slowly negotiates her way back upstairs unsteadily on her high-heels. Éveline’s words are lent force, in that her voice has the sharp snap of a mother justifiably giving her own son a good piece of her mind. “Pourquoi flattes-tu un si cruel penchant, Robert?” (“Why do you flatter such a cruel penchant, Robert?”; 212). Already, Éveline has begun to debunk in the mind of Christine, Robert’s, and the masculine approbation of Christine’s self-objectification, for if Robert enjoyed some prestige in his little sister’s eyes as her big brother and as a man, Éveline, from the position of authority of his mother, undermines that prestige, and the questioning of a “cruel penchant” casts doubt on the social standards which he has reinforced.

Éveline next debunks the prestige accorded by men to the mysterious Other, telling Robert “Vous autres, les hommes...vous adorez...Celle qui se joue de vous, celle qui se prepare à milles jeux durs et impitoyables, oui, c’est celle-là que vous encouragez...vous prizez les femmes pour leurs détours, leurs caprices. C’est très mal, d’abord pour vous-mêmes qui êtes les premiers à en souffrir” (“You guys, men...you adore...she who plays with you, she who is prepared to play a thousand hard-hearted and pitiless games, yes, it is her that you encourage...you value capricious women who lead you on. It is very bad, and you [men] are the first to suffer from it”; 212).

Éveline's fictional observations that men demand of a woman that she be *rusée* are propositionally articulated by Mme. de Beauvoir, who observes "C'est l'homme qui l'encourage à ces leures en réclamant d'être leurré" ("It is men who encourage her in these lures in demanding to be lured"; I: 415), and Éveline's moral criticism: that the ruse of the "real woman" is "very bad", and that men are "the first to suffer from it" is emphasized – and explained – by Mme. de Beauvoir's noting that women, "Comme tous les opprimés...dissimule[nt] délibérément...leurs vrais sentiments, leurs vrais conduits ils les cachent soigneusement. A la femme aussi on apprend depuis l'adolescence à mentir aux hommes, à ruser...Elle les aborde avec des visages d'emprunt; elle est prudente, hypocrite, comédienne" ("Like all of the oppressed...disguise deliberately...their real feelings, their real conduct they hide carefully. From adolescence, women are taught to lie to men, to ruse...She interacts with them wearing borrowed faces; she is prudent, hypocritical, a comedian"; I: 390). Christine, ridiculously made-up, having just presented herself publically as a "real woman" – to the best of her ability and understanding – and having been laughed at by her family, now listening on the staircase, overhears every word of Éveline's forceful critique of the male demand that the "real woman" make herself into the mysterious Other, further undermining Robert's encouragement of her self-objectification. Éveline then goes on to directly contrast the guile and ruse of self-objectification against the virtues of self-actualization – and goes one step further: she straitly links virtue to freedom and equality: "Au fond, il n'y a pas d'égalité entre les hommes et les femmes. Les belles vertus : la loyauté, la franchise, la droiture, l'admirable simplicité, vous [les hommes] les revendiquez pour vous, alors que vous prizez les femmes pour leurs détours, leurs caprices" ("When it comes down to it, there is no equality between men and women. The beautiful virtues: loyalty, frankness, righteousness, an admirable simplicity, [men] claim those for [themselves], while [they] prize capricious women who lead [them] on"; 212). Éveline thus contrasts the ruse of the idealized "real woman" against the

virtues of an ideal man, and implies that women are victims of a patriarchal and culturally-enforced sexual discrimination impeding women from choices leading to virtue. Unable to freely assume their Self-hood as moral agents, as self-aware critical consciousnesses pursuing transcendent projects in intersubjectivity, women are relegated to the role of Other because they are not allowed *virtue* – virtue and freedom are therefore necessarily linked.

Éveline claims that a woman, choosing and acting with virtue and freedom in intersubjectivity, creates her Self as a transcendent and existentially authentic text, an intertextually created Self actualized. Existential personhood is concretely realized through the virtuous practise of liberty, generosity, friendship, an honest self-expression in an egalitarian and just intersubjective arena of mutual and reciprocal recognition of freedom, these are the virtues and humanist ideals claimed by Éveline while Christine listens on the stairs, and they point to transcendence: women’s Self-hood, not Other-ness. *Liberté, Égalité, et Fraternité*.

The last phrase that Christine overhears on the stairs as she climbs up to her room, Éveline’s rhetorical reclamation “Oh! Quand donc...les mêmes qualités seront-elles bonnes pour tous!...” (...And when will those same qualities be good for everybody!”; *Rue D. 212*) again directly links Éveline’s “beautiful virtues” to equality, for only when both men and women are encouraged to pursue their own transcendent development in the pursuit of these ennobling, these personally liberating virtues, will there be equality. Virtue and freedom are *neccessarily linked*, and equality between men and women necessitates the relinquishment of the cultural demand that “real women” objectify themselves.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In the Western feminist philosophical tradition, this link between freedom, virtue, and the flowering of women’s character has deep humanist roots, and is powerfully expressed by Mary Wollstonecraft, when she claims that “...the attainment of those talents and virtues, the exercise of which ennobles the human character” (80), leads to “the end, the grand end [to]...acquire the dignity of conscious virtue” (Wollstonecraft 109).

Éveline thus, all of her *propos* taken together, debunks the cultural demand that the “real woman” objectify herself, and offers a succinct, powerful, multi-faceted, and profound definition of equality between the genders in a *scène synthèse* unifying humanism and existentialism. Those virtuous qualities explicitly named: loyalty, frankness, righteousness, an admirable simplicity, so lauded by Éveline, stand in direct contrast to the pretentiousness of the mysterious Other assumed by Christine. Mme. Roy, with the voice of Éveline, has formally staged the existential choice – self-actualization vs. self-objectification – with which Christine is faced. Self-hood and Other-ness are contrasted, and upon this choice – explicitly articulated, thus posed clearly before the eaves-dropping Christine by Éveline and Robert’s exchange overheard – depends Christine’s very person-hood, her existential authenticity.

Christine recounts that she walked to her room, “Songeuse et oubliant de faire balancer ma jupe comme je l’avais appris tant bien que mal” (“Thoughtful, and forgetting to make my skirt sway like I had learned to do a little bit”; 212). Her thoughtful forgetfulness indicates that what she has overheard fully occupies her thoughts – she is coming to a moment of realization. The first thing that she sees in her room is the Buddha figurine, and she rejects it out of hand: “Je retrouvai mon bouddha...un gros petit homme laid, répugnant au fond” (“I found my...Buddha, an ugly little fat man, repulsive, when it came down to it”). She then sits down before the mirror as she did before, and searches her reflection for anything that it might have to offer: “Je me rassis comme auparavant...mon regard se cherchant dans la glace...” (“I sat down like before...my gaze searching itself in the mirror...”) but she finds that the Other, the “real woman” she sees in the mirror, has “plus rien à m’offrir. Quoi, était-ce donc là tout ce qu’elle attendait de moi : voler un peu de fard, me peindre la bouche, m’entourer d’un petit cliquetis maussade, pour ensuite me laisser bâillante, oisive et déçue!” (“nothing more to offer me. What, was that all that she wanted of me, steal a little make-up, paint my

lips, surround myself with a little depressing jewellery, finally leaving me yawning, lazy, and disappointed!”) She rejects her Self-as-Other in the mirror, and the role of “real woman” – “Et comment avais-je pu être cette sauvage, cette enfant, cette esclave!” (How could I have been this savage, this child, this slave!”; 212). Disabused by Éveline’s debunking of the cultural demand that the “real woman” objectify her Self, and disappointed with the empty non-being of the Other that she sees in the mirror, the role of the “real woman” is unacceptable. Christine rejects Self-objectification.

Reflecting movement toward her Self, the narrative reverses the order of the progression of witnesses that Christine experienced before. As opposed to the vain witnesses of her Self-as-Other becoming progressively more Other – firstly her Self as witness, then the inanimate Other of the Buddha, and finally public exposure of her Self-as-Other before her family – the progression now is such that she comes from before her family to the Buddha figurine, then to her own reflection in the mirror. The progression of witnesses, which first moved away from her Self toward the Other, each witness more Other, is now reversed, and this time, symbolizing her realizations and choice, she progresses toward her Self.

Happily, Christine, our young heroine, shows courage and budding character in her moment of choice. Christine, in her moment of existential crisis, rejects the feminine condition, and chooses a transcendent Self-actualization. She threw all of her jewellery, and the Buddha, into the bottom of a basket, and tells that, “Tout à coup, oui, je voulus l’égalité sur terre, et j’ai tant frotté mes joues au savon qu’elles brûlèrent” (“All of a sudden, yes, I wanted equality on the Earth, and I washed my face with so much soap that my cheeks burnt”; 213). Christine’s reclamation of equality rejects the feminine condition – the cultural demand that she objectify her Self. Christine’s rejection of self-objectification, and her reclamation of equality represent a choice to work toward transcendent Self-actualization.

– Florentine –

I've chosen to begin with Christine, though the character is a later creation than Florentine in *Bonheur* ('45), because I feel that *Les Bijoux* emphasizes just how strikingly similar both Mme. Roy and Mme. de Beauvoir's portrayals of the feminine situation are. The similarity might make one wonder if *Le Deuxième Sexe*, '49, had influenced Mme. Roy while she wrote *Les Bijoux*, '55. I propose, though, that any sort of strict, genealogical influence *cannot*, in fact, be shown, for Florentine of *Bonheur* experiences the feminine situation – defined clearly, and named expressly – in Mme. Roy's first novel, 1945s *Bonheur d'occasion* – four years before *Le Deuxième Sexe* was published.

Much as Christine in *Les Bijoux* feels led to objectify herself, creating herself as the other, *Bonheur*'s heroine, Florentine, finds herself culturally pressured to objectify herself in an attempt to attract a man – a man is the only socially acceptable way for a woman to provide for herself materially. Poverty is the setting for the life of Florentine, our heroine, and a powerful theme of *Bonheur* is Mme. Roy's materialist eye: a recurring description of poverty as part of the setting. The hardship as described by Mme. Roy weighs like a constant threat, and materially, is a determining factor in the protagonist's lot. The poverty-driven insecurity reflects the constant financial pressure suffered by the working-class poor in Saint-Henri, a suburb of Montréal. Set in the year 1939, the depression has not yet lifted from the backs of the *Canadien*, for neither has the war really kicked in with the full ferocity of the Spring of '40 and the Battle of the Atlantic, nor yet built and harnessed the industrial & manufacturing structures and effort later given by the Canadian people to defeat the Hun. Jobs are hard to get; in fact, Florentine, with her nowhere waitressing gig, is the only one in her large family to have a regular job. Florentine brings her pay home to her mother, but they all live in crowded poverty, renters moving from crowded apartment to crowded apartment every year. Living



among the economically disadvantaged, urban poor French-Canadians of Montréal, Florentine is further culturally disadvantaged because of her socially prescribed situation as a woman.

Her one avenue to socially-approved material stability would be an advantageous marriage. Representing the internalization of the closed horizons of a childhood among the poverty-stricken and patriarchal *Canadien*, for Florentine “Il ne lui arrivait pas de croire que son destin, elle pût le rencontrer ailleurs qu’ici” (“She could not believe that her destiny, she could find it anywhere but here”; *Bonheur* 9). Florentine has no transcendent projects, she is not a plan aware of itself; passively, she awaits, with “Une sorte d’énervement mêlé au sentiment confus qu’un jour, dans ce magasin grouillant, une halte se produirait et que sa vie y trouvera son but” (“A sort of nervousness mixed with the confused sentiment that one day, in this grumbling store, time would come to a halt and that her life would thereupon find its end”; 9), which casts doubt on her authenticity as a Self, and emphasizes her immanence. Awaiting a man to marry her as her one path to transcendence, at the restaurant she waits on, and falls for, Jean. That a man is her one available path to transcendence is suggested when the narrative voice notes that Jean, like the Prince in “Sleeping Beauty,” has awakened her: “C’était bien lui qui l’avait tirée de ce sommeil lourd...hors la vie.... C’était lui qui avait donné un expression à [d]es espoirs” (“It was he that had torn her from her heavy sleep...outside of life.... It was he who had given an expression to hopes”; 14-15). Jean, grammatically-speaking, is the subject of the sentence, who tears her from sleep and gives hope; Florentine is not the subject who acts in the sentence, or in her own life, but the direct object. Before there was a man, her life was naught but a waking sleep, and her very hopes are shown to awaken via a man.

In the patriarchal culture of WWII Montréal, Florentine, as the feminine Other, enjoys no initiative in her search for a mate; Jean holds all the initiative. The initiative of Self-hood associated with the male, and the lack of initiative accorded Florentine as the feminine Other is emphasized by

Florentine's noting of "Le pouvoir qu'il [Jean] avait...de l'abandonner comme un objet...Pourtant c'était lui qui...la poursuivait de ses avances" ("The power he had...to abandon her like an object...However, it was he who...pursued with his advances"; 14). Jean, as the male, enjoys all the initiative and the power to advance or abandon his suit; Florentine, as the Other, must passively wait for advances. Mme de Beauvoir explains Florentine's situation: "Pour la jeune fille, la transcendance érotique consiste afin de se faire proie. Elle devient un objet ; et elle se saisit comme objet" (For the young girl, erotic transcendence consists in making herself prey. She becomes an object, and she perceives of herself as an object"; II; 90). Connivance in self-objectification is culturally demanded of Florentine – definitively the feminine situation, just as portrayed in the case of Christine.

Jean takes advantage of Florentine having to "se faire proie," has sex with her, and then he leaves her behind, pregnant – he simply disappears on her without any contact. A central scene presents her coming to terms with her plight: becoming aware that she has lost Jean, and disabused of illusions of transcendent hope by her powerlessness, in this next passage she explicitly recognizes herself in the feminine condition. She has been encouraged to make herself an object to attract a man, she has been used sexually, impregnated by impersonal biological processes for the benefit of the species, and been left alone and completely responsible for that baby with very little chance of socially acceptable material support.

C'était donc pour ça que le monde tournait, que l'homme et la femme, deux ennemis, accordaient une trêve à leur inimitié, que le monde tournait, que la nuit se faisait si douce, qu'il y avait, tracé devant soi, soudain, comme un chemin reserve au seul couple. Ah! c'était donc pour ça que le coeur refusait la paix! Misère! Elle oubliait les instants d'égarément, les instants de bonheur suspendu, elle ne voyait plus que le piège qui avait été tendu à sa faiblesse, et ce piège lui paraissant grossier et brutale, elle éprouvait, plus fort encore que sa peur, un indicible mépris pour *sa condition de femme*, une inimitié envers elle-même qui la déroutait.

So it was for that that the world turns, that men and women, two enemies, permit a truce to their hatred, that the world turns, that the night makes itself so sweet, that there is, traced out before oneself, suddenly, a seeming pathway especially and only for a couple. Oh, it is for this that the heart refuses all peace! Misery! She forgot the moments of losing herself, the instants of suspended happiness yet to be. She no longer saw anything but the trap that had been laid out to tempt her weakness, and that trap seemed vulgar and brutal, she felt, even more powerfully than her fear, an unspeakable despite for *her condition as a woman*, a hatred toward herself that left her beside herself. (308, Italics mine.)

The cultural inducements to self-objectification, the “trap held out to tempt her weakness,” is an illusion held out by patriarchal culture that a man is a woman’s pathway to love, status, and security – if only she can somehow get him to fall in love with her, then he will be hers, and through him, because he enjoys initiative in intersubjectivity, the world will be hers, as well. Florentine’s condition as a woman leads her to self-objectification in order to hope to get a desirable man – her only socially acceptable path to material security, and to an ersatz transcendence. The feminine situation, as illustrated by Florentine, is precisely to find oneself tempted culturally to self-objectification vs. self-actualization – a self-actualization that would be well-nigh impossible in Florentine’s society, thus not a real option, some might suggest, probably with reason. Indeed, Florentine’s desperate plight as a pregnant and unmarried woman emphasizes the powerlessness of the feminine Other in a patriarchal society: for material support and social acceptance she’s got to get married – and fast! She feels forced to ruse – ruse as well is associated with the feminine Other – and tricks a young man, Emmanuel, into marrying her.

That Mme. Roy so explicitly, formally defined the powerless role of women as the Other in intersubjectivity, and portrayed Florentine’s having connived in her own self-objectification to attract Jean, indeed, Mme. Roy using the very words “her condition as a woman,” in 1945s *Bonheur d’occasion*, which predates Mme. de Beauvoir’s *Le Deuxième Sexe* by four years, suggests that Mme. Roy is *not* showing direct influence of *Le Deuxième Sexe*. Though both Mmes. Roy and de Beauvoir

address themselves to the same feminine situation forcefully, I propose that one cannot show any sort of direct, clear-cut, genealogical influence of *Le Deuxième Sexe* on Mme. Roy's work; Mme. Roy was already expressing the ideas when Mme. de Beauvoir published. This would suggest that Mme. Roy's work is a feminism native to Canada.

In *Les Bijoux* and in *Bonheur d'occasion* the feminine situation portrayed appears consistent with the female experience as articulated by Mme. de Beauvoir – a woman is culturally demanded to objectify her Self. Mme. Roy explores the feminine situation fictionally with Florentine and Christine, formally presenting Self-as-setting where dynamic lines of intertextual power intersect with gender and identity formation in particular perceiving and reflective Selves. How, in the feminine situation, are Christine and Florentine to actualize themselves as authentic human beings? The question is remarkably similar whether posed by Mme. de Beauvoir or Mme. Roy.

Still, despite the striking similarities, I have shown that there is not necessarily any direct influence between the writers. Perhaps the similarity of vision is explained by Mme. de Beauvoir herself, who observed that “Il est frappant que l'ensemble de la littérature féminine soit animée de nos jours...par un effort de lucidité...ce livre est une tentative parmi d'autres pour faire le point” (It is striking that the whole of feminine literature these days is animated...by an effort toward lucidity...this book is an attempt, among others, to make the point”; I: 30). Perhaps Mme. de Beauvoir's observation represents a constructive way to consider the intertextual relationship between the writings: two independently conceived, but perceptive attempts at a lucid consideration of the feminine situation. Dr Lori Saint-Martin, in her book-length study of the feminism of Gabrielle Roy, *La Voyageuse et la Prisonnière* (2002), confirms this thought when she concludes: “Au lieu de lire *Bonheur d'occasion* à la lumière du *Deuxième Sexe*, il s'agit d'analyser en parallèle les deux visions féministes” (“Instead of reading *Bonheur d'occasion* in the light of *Le Deuxième Sexe*, rather it is a

matter of analyzing in parallel the two feminist visions”; 37). Perhaps Mme. Roy’s work is, after all, just as avant-garde as that of Mme. de Beauvoir, and intertextually considered, Mme. Roy ought to be appreciated as an original and profound thinker who, in her own way, as Dr. Saint-Martin says, “...a participé, dès les années 1940, à cette vaste réflexion critique sur les femmes qui à compté parmi les grands débats du siècle” (“...participated, starting during the 1940s, in that vast critical reflection upon women that figures among the great debates of the century”; 17).

## II: CAT’S EYE

*An eye for an eye only leads to more blindness.*

Let us now consider Margaret Atwood’s Cat’s Eye (1986) to give a broader Canadian context to our intertextual and cross-cultural study. Canada is a bilingual contact zone: Francophonie in intersubjectivity with the Anglophone world. Ms Atwood (b. 1939, Ottawa) is a native English speaker of the generation following that of Mmes. Roy and de Beauvoir, an author of profound women’s stories all through her on-going and brilliant career. In Cat’s Eye, we find the feminine situation fictionally portrayed again with the protagonist Elaine, but, raised in the Post-War years, her particular situation is remarkably nuanced from the situation as portrayed by either Mme. Roy or Mme. de Beauvoir; Elaine’s story is the unique situation of a particular Self. Ms. Atwood is portraying the Canadian woman’s experience, and Elaine’s situation reflects the evolving situation of Canadian women after the War. Nonetheless, in common with Mmes. Roy and de Beauvoir, Ms Atwood shows the common paradigm, a literary articulation of the feminine situation, of moments of choice between self-objectification vs. self-actualization.

Elaine, the heroine of Cat’s Eye, is, like Mme Roy’s Christine, a semi-autobiographical, first person narrative voice. Her father, an entomologist, conducts research in the wild, and so Elaine spends her young years camping with her transient family in the bush of northern Québec. Perhaps

reflecting something of Rousseau's Noble Savage, she has never been enculturated, never having known a family other than her own, nor having ever had a fixed home, thus a settled, ordered social milieu. Having been raised with a brother two years older as her one peer, she has tagged along exploring and living a happy childhood. She and her brother search for bugs and reptiles under logs (26), practice burping at will or making fart noises under their armpits (74), and are not squeamish about killing and gutting a fish (71). Her life changes drastically at about the age of seven or eight, and she experiences something of a loss of innocence, when her family settles in Toronto. Whereas she had up to this time lived in nature with her family as her primary agents of socialization, she henceforth lives in an urban environment with many and diverse socializing agents. "Until we moved to Toronto I was happy" (22), she says, erecting a barrier between, and contrasting, a natural life, a life in nature, versus an urban and social life, an encultured life. She emphasizes a sense of before-and-after, a separation between her idyllic childhood, natural and free as a Noble Savage, and her engagement with society and the human and feminine condition.

Enrolled in an urban, public school in the mid to late 1940s, she is bereft of her brother, her one peer up to this time, thus her major enculturating influence, who is separated from her into a different grade. Her institutional enculturation into sex roles begins immediately, for the school sexually discriminates, with specifically feminine attire being required: girls must wear skirts: "You can't wear pants to school, you have to wear skirts. I'm not used to this" (50), she admits to the reader. Cat's Eye fictionally portrays that female clothing tends to cut women off from transcendence through physical restraint and fear of social ridicule. A skirt is a gender-specific article of clothing, culturally assigned to girls and women, that limits freedom of movement, thus dis-empowering Elaine and the girls who must wear them. Elaine relates, "Now that I've changed...from pants to skirts, I have to remember the moves. You can't sit with your legs spread apart, or jump too high or hang upside-

down, without ridicule” (83). As a girl, Elaine is subject to a social demand that she wear a skirt, and she will be subject to social ridicule if she insists on freedom of movement. Between the social demand and the social ridicule, she has been socially bereft of the initiative of freedom of movement – and of care-free play. The school’s requirement that girls wear skirts constitutes a culturally imposed dis-empowerment of girls. As explained by Mme de Beauvoir, this physical restraining of girl’s and women’s bodies by culturally-imposed standards of gender-specific clothing is a trans-cultural and trans-temporal constant, forcing women into the feminine condition of engagement with the world in intersubjectivity as the Other: “Les coutumes, les modes se sont souvent appliquées à couper le corps féminin de sa transcendance : la chinoise aux pieds bandés peut à peine marcher, les griffes vernies de la star de Hollywood la privent de ses mains, les hauts talons, les corsets...étaient destinés moins à accentuer la cambrure du corps féminin qu’à en augmenter l’impotence” (“Customs, styles, have often been applied to cut the feminine body off from its transcendence: the Chinese woman with bound feet can hardly walk, the long, varnished fingernails of the Hollywood star deprive her of her hands; high heels, corsets...were destined less to accentuate the curves of the female body than to augment its weakness”; *Le Deuxième Sexe* I: 218) says Mme. de Beauvoir.

A telling scene symbolically portrays how female clothing cuts women off from transcendence through physical restraint and fear of social ridicule, when Elaine is playing with two of her new-found friends, Carol and Grace, at a construction site where a house is being built. While Carol won’t climb because she is scared, “Grace won’t climb either, but not because of fear: she doesn’t want anybody, any boy, to see her underpants.” So Elaine’s two friends stay on the ground while Elaine climbs up. Elaine recounts, “I sit on the top floor where there is no floor, among the rafters basking in the red-gold sunset...I don’t think about falling. I am not yet afraid of heights” (68). Symbolically representing transcendence, Elaine sits on high, basking in glorious light, without fear, while Carol,

held down by her fear, and Grace, held down by culturally-imposed gender-specific dis-empowering clothes – a skirt and fear of ridicule – sit down, below, unable to act.

As well as the dress code, school imposes a second sexually discriminating policy, and one that further separates Elaine from her brother: when the children come in from recess the girls and boys are separated before two doors, one marked BOYS and the other GIRLS. The boys and girls have to line up and must file into the building through these separate doors. The girls hold hands going through the door – emphasizing social roles of nurturing and cooperative nice-ness – while the boys don't – emphasizing independence, individuality, and a "masculine" physical distance. Symbolically, the children passing through the appropriate door represents passage to two different, culturally-defined life-paths, two different, gender-dictated destinies, reinforcing the norms of their patriarchal culture.

Why differentiate between staircases for the children on the basis of sex? Whatever the reasons proposed by the school administrators of the era for mandating BOYS and GIRLS doors, the latent function of this institutionalized sexual discrimination is that it teaches the children, themselves, to differentiate on the basis of sex. Rumour has it that going through the wrong door merits the strap. Elaine, "baffled", questions "How is going through a door different for a boy? What's in there that merits the strap, just for seeing it? My brother says there's nothing special about the stairs inside, they're just plain ordinary stairs" (51). There is no difference between the stairs. Enforcing BOYS and GIRLS staircases teaches the children to differentiate on the basis of sex. It illustrates to the children that "boy/girl" constitutes a binary opposition. It also establishes sexual discrimination as a justified, and an accepted part of the institutional culture of society – sexual discrimination as standard operating procedure. This provides a subliminal ideological justification, and sets the stage for the



learning and internalization of appropriate paradigms for socialization into culturally-constructed sex roles.

For once Elaine is institutionally separated from her brother – structurally deprived of her brother and of male friendship – and becomes aware of this BOYS and GIRLS opposition, that one differentiates on the basis of sex, by default she falls in with girls. “So I am left to the girls, real girls...in the flesh” (52), she says. Up to this point, having been raised in the bush with her brother as play-mate, Elaine has not played with girls, and Elaine’s experience now that she has girl school-chums in Toronto shows that play itself is culturally gendered, and a learned, ritualized social activity. As she has not yet been socialized or enculturated into the gendered norms of the learned behavior that is play, Elaine says, “But I’m not used to girls, or familiar with their customs. I feel awkward around them, I don’t know what to say” (52). Elaine’s observations show that playing with girls, appropriate social inter-action within the culture of girls, is learned behavior: “Playing with girls is different and at first I feel strange as I do it, self-conscious, as is I’m only doing an imitation of a girl. But I soon get used to it” (57). Elaine’s noting that she feels as though she were “only doing an imitation of a girl” shows that there is no intrinsic feminine nature that expresses itself instinctually, or naturally, in a girl playing with girls. Appropriate gendered play, therefore, is not a natural, instinctual, thing – it’s a culturally-constructed ritualized arena of intersubjectivity.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> My baby boy, Adam, enjoys very much playing with trucks and tractors – socially accepted typical male play. Nonetheless, the other day I walked in to find him wearing one of his big sister’s pink frilly dresses, dancing. Adam is too young to know that he will be ridiculed later in life if he flounces about in a frilly pink dress. Play is not intrinsically gendered, and Adam just does what seems like fun – for the time being. He has not yet been socialized into gendered play roles. This will happen when he begins to play with other boys. Boys socialize each other into gendered play roles, just as girls do; a phenomenon portrayed in *Cat’s Eye*, when Elaine describes boys showing off and roughhousing together on the playground as “Boys work at acting like boys” (110).

In fact, Cat's Eye illustrates – as opposed to *Les Bijoux*, which showed men as agents of socialization in Robert's encouragement of Christine's self-objectification – that it is through play and friendship with other girls and interaction with other women that Elaine is socialized into a construction of sex roles and the feminine; Cat's Eye shows women as the most important enculturating influence upon women. As soon as Elaine begins to go to school and play with her new friends, Carol and Grace, this socializing into sex roles begins. One of the games that the girls play together is to sit on the floor with old Eaton's catalogues,<sup>5</sup> cut out pictures of women and various domestic goods, and paste them together, in domestic scenes, into scrapbooks. The girls name the figures of the women that they paste into the scrapbooks "my lady", and Elaine recounts that they tell each other "'My lady's going to have this refrigerator,' we say, 'My lady's getting this rug.' 'This is my lady's umbrella'" (59). The word "lady" is a title, having connotations of propriety, respect and dignity, and all of the domestic and material objects with which the girls surround their lady is culturally proper feminine accoutrement. The cultural values that Carol and Grace are teaching Elaine are that a woman who enjoys cultural approbation, a "lady," is a domestic creature, occupied with tasks of immanence. Elaine says that she finds the game "...tiring – it's the weight, the accumulation of all these objects, these possessions that would have to be taken care of..." (59). Grace and Carol, whose families have never moved, and whose mothers are suburban house-wives "add more and more, stuff the pages of their scrapbooks with dining room suites, beds, stacks of towels, one set of dishes after another, and think nothing of it" (59). Elaine is being taught, through modeling by her girlfriends, the cultural values of feminine immanence (and of Post-WWII North American consumerism, let us add, though it doesn't bear immediately upon this examination). Despite finding the game "tiring", knowing that taking care of all of this stuff would be an endless task, Elaine begins

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<sup>5</sup> Eaton's is a Canadian department store chain.

to internalize these feminine values, saying, “I begin to want things I’ve never wanted before: braids, a dressing gown, a purse of my own. Something is unfolding, being revealed to me” (59).

The power of the enculturating influence of women upon each other, the pressure to conform, is illustrated in the scrapbook game. Grace and Carol denigrate their own work in the scrapbooks, feigning incompetence before each other. Elaine reports that they tell each other “Oh, yours is so good. Mine’s no good. Mine’s *awful*.” According to Elaine “They say this every time”, with their voices “wheedling and false; I can tell they don’t mean it...But it’s the thing you have to say, so I begin to say it too” (59). The fact that Elaine begins to say it, too, shows how powerful is the social pressure to conform to the standards exhibited by her girlfriends, how strong an enculturating influence women are upon each other in the modeling, learning, and internalization of the feminine. But why do the girls feign incompetence, claim that they’ve done badly when they don’t really think so? Because competence is culturally associated with transcendence, and the feminine Other is associated with immanence, thus not-competent. Mme. de Beauvoir explains “Être féminine, c’est se montrer impotente, futile, passive, docile...Toute affirmation d’elle-même diminue sa féminité” (“To be feminine is to reveal herself impotent, futile, passive, and docile...Any affirmation of herself diminishes her femininity”; *Le Deuxième Sexe* I: 382). As opposed to boys and men, who are encouraged to compete, and to attach value to excellence, “feminine” women do not compete (overtly), and are not taught to attach value to their own excellence in transcendence. This discourages women from even attempting transcendent projects, relegating “feminine” women to immanence. Atwood thus shows the existential crisis of the feminine condition: a woman’s choice between transcendent Self-hood vs. imminent Other-ness, with culture *a priori* defining the woman as the Other. The question of competence is a choice between engagement in intersubjectivity in self-

actualization vs. self-objectification as the Other. It is a choice between transcendence and immanence.

For Elaine, who as her brother's playmate in the bush has learned about plants and animals, and to value things like the ability to run fast, throw a rock far and straight, and sneak about in the dark silently, this is a new, and tempting, realization: "I see that there's a whole world of girls and their doings that has been unknown to me, and that I can be part of it without making any effort at all. I don't have to keep up with anyone, run as fast, aim as well...I don't have to think about whether I've done ...well, as well as a boy. All I have to do is sit on the floor and cut frying pans out of the *Eaton's Catalogue* with embroidery scissors, and say I've done badly. Partly this is a relief" (*Cat's Eye* 59). This is a relief – partly – and a temptation, because in not even attempting transcendence, one does not have to make any effort, one avoids the possibility of failure, and one avoids the anguish of assuming one's own existence. Mme. de Beauvoir explains: "[À] côté de la prétention de tout individu à s'affirmer comme sujet, qui est une prétention éthique, il y a aussi en lui la tentation de fuir sa liberté et de se constituer en chose...c'est un chemin facile : on évite ainsi l'angoisse et la tension de l'existence authentiquement assumée" ("Besides the pretension of every individual to affirm oneself as a subject, which is an ethical end, there is also in him or her the temptation to flee one's freedom and to make oneself into a thing...it is an easy road: one thus avoids the anguish and tension of assuming an authentic existence"; I: 23). This is Elaine's "relief": in assuming the feminine – which is being offered to her, indeed, encouraged, by her culture – Elaine will have to make no effort, take no risks, nor excel. Elaine qualifies her "relief" with the word "partly" because accepting her Self as the Other is a *fuite inauthentique* – a flight into existential inauthenticity – which will cut her off from transcendence as a Self. It is, or would be, a betrayal of her Self into immanence, and in certain times and circumstances, she would become expressly aware of it, and suffer guilt and

frustration. She is thus torn between contradictory desires, faced with the existential choice between self-actualization vs. self-objectification: transcendence vs. immanence.

*Élevées par des femmes, au sein d'un monde féminin<sup>6</sup>*  
(*Le Deuxième Sexe* II: 9)

Cat's Eye shows that it is overwhelmingly women who are the agents of enculturation into the feminine. As modeled in the play of Carol and Grace, other girls define what it is to make oneself into the Other, and encourage Elaine's accepting of herself as the feminine. As opposed to Christine's case in *Les Bijoux*, where men are shown as agents of sexual-role enculturation, in Elaine's case it is primarily other girls and women who socialize each other, and it is not just through playful modeling that Elaine is socialized into the feminine. It is not all play, and it is *not* innocent, for Cat's Eye shows that women betray other women into the feminine. Cat's Eye shows that, in intersubjectivity, *women* objectify women, teach each other the feminine, and encourage or coerce other women to objectify themselves – thus placing their sisters and themselves in the feminine condition: a vicious cycle of complicity in their own subjugation. Mme. de Beauvoir observes “Une des malédictions qui pèse sur la femme...c'est que, dans son enfance, elle est abandonnée aux mains des femmes...[qui] entend[ent] intégrer la fille au monde féminin” (“One of the curses that weighs on a woman...is that, in her childhood, she is abandoned into the hands of women...[who] intend to integrate the girl into the feminine world”; II: 28).

This process begins with feminine objectification of other women. Carol, who is the first friend that Elaine makes at school, objectifies Elaine for her own benefit. Elaine explains that, at school, Carol recounts stories about Elaine's unorthodox family to other classmates not “with scorn, but as

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<sup>6</sup> Raised by women, in a feminine world.

exotic specialties. I am, after all, her...partner, and she wants me to be marveled at. More accurate: she wants herself to be marveled at, for revealing such wonders. It's as if she's reporting on the antics of some primitive tribe: true but incredible" (54). Elaine, and her family, are portrayed as Other – some exotic and primitive tribe – to serve the glory of Carol. Carol objectifies her other girlfriends, too, as shown when she introduces Elaine to Grace: "Carol has another friend, who is sometimes her best friend and sometimes not...Carol points her out to me...as an object to be admired" (57). So, Grace, as well, is expressly an object that serves to reflect admiration onto Carol. For Carol, both of her friends are objects as means to serve the end of reflecting admiration and marvel onto Carol, herself. This is not mutual recognition in reciprocal intersubjectivity; this is objectification of other women. Some might reasonably suggest that Carol's self-centred attitude toward her friends seems a common enough and reasonably harmless childish selfishness, but Cat's Eye shows that as the girls become more involved in each other's lives, and as they grow older, the objectification takes on a darker tone, and loses any sort of childish innocence.

For while, as Elaine ironically describes, "We look like girls playing" (155) – seemingly innocent enough – playing with girls, which, as shown above, is a learned and gendered arena of intersubjectivity, Cat's Eye shows to be the objectification of other women, not a reciprocal recognition of the Self in the Other. Elaine, playing with the other girls – within the culture of little girls – finds herself in the feminine situation specifically – as culturally demanded to objectify herself. Now, social pressure must be brought to bear to encourage, or coerce a woman, who knows herself to be a subject, to accept her Self as an object, and Cat's Eye illustrates that women bring this social pressure to bear on each other through objectifying each other.

Settling into life in Toronto, Elaine's circle of play-mates becomes Carol and Grace, and another girl, Cordelia. As Elaine is the girl with the least status, she becomes the primary victim of the

other girl's objectification. They form a tight-knit clique of four, and they spend a lot of time together. Elaine considers these girls her friends: "Cordelia is my friend. She likes me...they all do. They are my friends, my girl friends, my best friends" (131). Elaine's "friends", however, cruelly watch, judge, and criticize everything that Elaine does, or does not do, in a never-ending struggle for social power within their clique. Elaine is on the bottom of the pecking order, because she wants friends more than the other girls do: "I have never had any [friends] before and I'm terrified of losing them. I want to please" (132). While the power struggles of the girls would make a fascinating study, the immediate concern here is the objectification of women by other women.

The other girls deliberately snub Elaine to make her feel inadequate, or somehow lacking, for example: "I'm standing outside the closed door of Cordelia's room...Cordelia, Grace and Carol are inside. They're having a meeting. The meeting is about me. I'm just not measuring up...I will have to do better" (128). Having made Elaine feel inadequate, making her doubt herself with their snub, the girls force Elaine to choose whether she will choose for herself, or for them: "'You can come in now,' says the voice of Cordelia from inside the room. I look at the closed door, at the doorknob, at my own hand moving up, as if it's no longer a part of me" (128-9). Elaine, seemingly detached, remote from her own body, watches her hand moving in acquiescence to the other girl's demand, as though it moved without her choice, symbolically as though it were no longer her Self. In opening the door, Elaine is symbolically crossing a threshold into Other-ness, accepting the status that the other girls are assigning her, and surrendering her Self to the other girls in order to be accepted. Later in the tale, we will see Elaine, an older girl, and a girl who has learned a hard lesson, able to turn and walk away from Other-ness, as Christine, too, rejects the role of Other – both girls, in the end, choosing transcendence.

Mme. de Beauvoir notes that one of the ways that women socialize girls into objectifying themselves is through making harassing and self-esteem destroying criticisms of their physical appearance, movements, and actions until the girls become self-conscious and begin to restrain *themselves* in order to accord to externally-imposed standards of comportement: “On lui impose des règles de maintien : tiens-toi droite, ne marche pas comme un canard ; pour être gracieuse, elle devra réprimer ses mouvements spontanés” (“They impose rules of behavior upon her: Stand up straight – Don’t walk like a duck; to be gracious, she will have to suppress her spontaneous movements”; *Le Deuxième Sexe* II: 29). This is exactly what Elaine’s play-mates do to her; the girls relentlessly watch and criticize everything Elaine does: “They comment on the kind of lunch I have, how I hold my sandwich, how I chew. On the way home from school I have to walk in front of them, or behind. In front is worse because they talk about how I’m walking, how I look from behind...Cordelia stands close beside me and whispers into my ear: ‘Stand up straight! People are looking!...Don’t hunch over,’ says Cordelia. “Don’t move your arms like that” (131). Being constantly watched and criticized affects how Elaine perceives herself as perceived by others, until she comes to feel that her physical Self is socially unacceptable.

Elaine tells of a particularly cruel incident illustrating how the girls make her feel that she is socially unacceptable, when, one day, showing malicious fore-thought “Cordelia brings a mirror to school...She takes it out of her pocket and holds the mirror up in front of me and says, ‘Look at yourself! Just look!’ Her voice is disgusted, fed up, as if my face, all by itself, has been up to something, has gone too far. I look into the mirror but I don’t see anything out of the ordinary” (175). Cordelia is yet again explicitly declaring to Elaine that her Self, just plain old Elaine, nothing out of the ordinary, is socially unacceptable – to be socially acceptable, Elaine must make herself into other than her Self.



In almost all that she does, everywhere she goes, her friends watch her. At school she is constantly watched: “Carol is in my classroom and it’s her job to report...what I do and say all day” (131). “Everything [my teacher] says, everything I do, is heard and seen by Carol and will be reported later” (140). Elaine goes to church with Grace – by invitation – and while they are praying, Elaine notes “She’s watching me” (137). While they are singing a hymn, she tells “Light glints from Grace’s...eyes as she watches me sideways” (200). Symbolizing just how constantly observed Elaine feels, the hymn they sing goes “God sees the little sparrows fall/ It meets His tender view/ If God so loves the little bird/ I know he loves me too” (200). There is no escaping the gaze of the Other, for God is watching poor Elaine, too. Elaine says, “I feel that I’m always being watched” (134).

The girl’s constant surveillance and harassing criticism of Elaine’s every move works as Mme. de Beauvoir says it would, teaching Elaine to perceive of herself as witnessed through the eyes of other perceiving subjects, teaching her to see herself as a perceived object being constantly witnessed, which encourages, indeed, pressures her to suppress her spontaneity and her Self, making Elaine question herself until it reaches the point where she recounts “I worry about what I’ve said today, the expression of my face, how I walk, what I wear, because all of these things need improvement ...” (130). Elaine has evidently, in claiming that she needs improvement, internalized the constant surveillance and criticism of the other girls, and her play-mate’s campaign has made Elaine doubt her very Self, for she continues, “...I am not normal, I am not like other girls. Cordelia tells me so, but she will help me. Grace and Carol will help me too. It will take hard work and a long time.” (130). Cordelia telling Elaine that she is not normal tells Elaine that her Self is not socially acceptable. Cordelia, Grace, and Carol will help Elaine become like “other” girls; they will enforce cultural standards of femininity until Elaine is “Other.” This will require that Elaine act her entire life as though she were on display and being judged according to an externally-imposed standard of

culturally-defined femininity. She is being pressured to choose to make herself as others would have her, rather than as she would have herself; to make herself into someone else, socially acceptable as perceived by other perceiving subjects, rather than to be herself. This reflects Mme. de Beauvoir's observation, as already mentioned, that women, to socialize girls "...impose des règles de maintien...elle devra réprimer ses mouvements spontanés" ("They impose rules of behavior on her...she will have to suppress her spontane[ity]"; II: 29). Mme. de Beauvoir has given us the paradigm to understand what is happening to Elaine. This is a social demand to self-objectification, and represents what Mme. de Beauvoir identifies as the existential crisis of the feminine condition. The other girls articulate a cultural demand that Elaine objectify herself, which represents a choice for immanence rather than transcendence. Thus, Cat's Eye illustrates that women objectify women in intersubjectivity, and that women enculturate and socialize each other into the feminine condition. Elaine, at this point, early in the narrative, comes to believe that she is socially unacceptable, and should choose not to be herself, but should make herself Other, a choice to serve the transcendent ends of others with her very being – the very definition of immanence – in this case to serve the will to power of her play-mates.

Whereas Elaine's very first girl friend ever, Carol, might have appeared a normal, self-centred child showing off to her class-mates in telling everybody about Elaine's unorthodox family right after Elaine moved to Toronto, hardly deserving to be accused of the treachery of complicity in betraying women into their own subjugation, Elaine as an adult narrator, looking back on this period in her life, reminds the reader "Little girls are cute and small only to adults. To one another they are not cute. They are life sized" (129). Elaine's "friends" used a cruel, determined and coordinated campaign of mental abuse to coerce and betray her – and, by extension, all women – into the subjugation of the feminine, of culturally demanded self-objectification, in the interests of their own will to power.

Elaine's play-mates demanded of Elaine that she make herself Other in order to be accorded status – friendship. Later in life, Elaine, remembering back, muses to herself, “Cordelia... You made me believe I was nothing” (219) – “nothing” being “non-being.” This describes how Cordelia, Grace, and Carol, from a position of prestige and power, for they were held in great esteem by Elaine, devalued Elaine to the point that she discounted her very Self. They had made Elaine come to believe that she was nothing so that she would feel that she would have nothing to lose by choosing non-being, and that she might possibly gain that friendship cynically held out before her as bait – that friendship that she so wanted. The girls offered to Elaine a cultural demand that she objectify herself, a choice between being and non-being. Cat's Eye thus nuances the feminine situation as illustrated by Christine in *Les Bijoux*, and as defined by Mme. de Beauvoir – “That which defines...the feminine situation, it is that...she discovers herself and chooses herself in a world where the men impose upon her to accept herself as the Other” *Le Deuxième Sexe* I: 34) – for Elaine discovers and chooses her Self in a world where it is the *women* who impose upon her to accept herself as the Other. Whereas Mme. de Beauvoir acknowledges the way in which women act to enforce the patriarchy, Ms. Atwood develops this concept more fully.

Ultimately, in the work of Atwood, as with Christine in *Les Bijoux*, it is possible for a woman to choose her Self, to act as a subject. For after an ugly incident where the girls get carried away in their abuse of Elaine, and take it too far, Elaine turns her back on Cordelia, Grace, and Carol, and walks away. Cordelia, pretending to have been offended by Elaine, takes her toque and throws it from a bridge onto the soft, spring-time ice of a creek. Spring-time ice is treacherous; it is common knowledge in Canada that one should never go onto the ice in the spring, and Elaine must know that. As well, Elaine has been forbidden by her parents to descend into the littered ravine, full of old tires and rusty junk, rumoured to be the repair of drunken and threatening men. Cordelia demands that

Elaine retrieve her toque. Though Elaine's play-mates have demeaned her in a thousand petty ways, they have never yet placed her in a situation of actual physical danger. Elaine is struck by this new extremity of her friends' demands: "I look at her. She wants me to go down into the ravine where the bad men are, where we're never supposed to go." For the first time, perhaps shocked by the arrogance and disregard for her safety shown by such a dangerous demand, she questions whether she should obey: "It occurs to me that I may not" (206). Elaine hesitates, and, sensing this, Cordelia once again plays upon Elaine's longing for friendship and acceptance: "'Go on then,' she says, more gently, as if she's encouraging me, not ordering. 'Then you'll be forgiven'" (206). So it is for the sake of "forgiveness," a reconciliation with her "friends," that Elaine is convinced to descend into the ravine and venture out onto the ice. She falls through, and her friends run.

Though Elaine manages to scramble out, and her mother searches for and finds her, Elaine's friends had betrayed her to her death. Nonetheless, she still lies to her mother to loyally protect her friends: "Telling the truth about Cordelia is still unthinkable for me" (211). It is when they falsely accuse *her* of betraying *them* in telling on them that she ultimately denies them. In this scene, Ms. Atwood formally stages the moment of Elaine's moment of existential choice, the choice between Self vs. Other. Elaine chooses for her Self, here describing the moment when she turns and walks away:

"Cordelia says[,] 'Then how come your mother phoned our mothers?'"

'Yeah, how come?' says Carol.

'I don't know and I don't care,' I say. I'm amazed at myself...I am still a coward, still fearful; none of that has changed. But I turn and walk away from her. It's like stepping off a cliff, believing the air will hold you up. And it does. I see that I don't have to do what she says, and worse and better, I've never had to do what she says. I can do what I like" (213).

We are shown Elaine's moment of the identification of her Self as differentiated from her identification of herself with her friends. When she says "I turn and walk away" she separates herself from them. In that very instant her Self is affirmed, for, as we've already seen, Mme. de Beauvoir states: "le sujet ne se pose qu'en s'opposant" (the subject posits him or her self only by opposing his or her self"; I:18). Elaine rejects the role of "nothing" which Cordelia, as we have seen above, made her feel her Self to be. This rejection is an affirmation of her Self, an existential choice for being, a choice for self-actualization.

The other girls need Elaine, though, to continue their game, for Elaine served them in immanence as means to their ends of self-glorification. They try to reintegrate her into the clique, trying everything from begging to threats, but in vain. Elaine says of their machinations, "I can hear this for what it is. It's an imitation...It's an impersonation, of someone much older" (214). The objectification of women by women is an "imitation" and an "impersonation" of someone older because women have been betraying each other into Other-ness since time immemorial; the girls are imitating their mothers, and their mothers and sisters before them. Elaine continues "I keep walking...Nothing binds me to them. I am free....They need me for this, and I no longer need them" (214). Elaine can say "I am free" after choosing her Self, choosing to affirm her Self in transcendence. The other girls, because they are involved in projects of inauthenticity, playing dishonest games for the sake of self-serving power and specious social stature – non-being – symbolically grow "paler and paler every day, less and less substantial. I hardly hear them any more because I hardly listen" (214). The girls become less real and less tangible, like a harmless ghost, because they *are* less real than Elaine has chosen to make her Self. Elaine rejects the other girls as witnesses, judges, and socializing agents. In doing so, as Mme. de Beauvoir suggests, she affirms her Self in opposing her Self, in asserting her own identity. As Christine in *Les Bijoux* rejects a male-

enforced self-objectification, Elaine rejects a female-enforced self-objectification, and both Elaine and Christine, as their stories continue, learn to choose transcendence in self-actualization.

*A tableau vivant.*

Whereas Cat's Eye nuances the feminine situation, on the one hand, by illustrating that women are the primary agents of enculturation into the feminine, for Elaine discovers and chooses her Self in a world where it is the *women* who impose upon her to accept herself as the Other – as opposed to the case of Christine in *Les Bijoux*, and as defined by Mme. de Beauvoir, where *men* impose upon a woman her to accept herself as the Other – Ms. Atwood further nuances the feminine situation by showing that, while men can objectify women, women can also objectify men. Cat's Eye shows a young adult Elaine objectified by her lover – yet objectifying her objectifying lover, right back. Two can play at that game.

Elaine, like Florentine, finds herself encouraged to make herself into the Other in order to win and keep a man. Her lover, an artist, suggests hairstyles and clothes for her. He is “rearranging” her, she comments (331). Elaine recounts that, one day, “I catch a glimpse of myself without expecting it, in the smoked-mirror wall...and I see for an instant what [he] sees: a slim woman with cloudy hair, pensive eyes in a thin white face. I recognize the style: late nineteenth century. Pre-Raphaelite. I should be holding a poppy” (332). He brushes her cheek and murmurs “Mysterious.” Elaine tells, “I do not feel mysterious, but vacant” (333). He has encouraged her to create herself as he wishes her, a piece of art upon which he projects his fantasies of a mysterious woman, an object. Elaine feels “vacant” because she is not a Pre-Raphaelite fantasy; she has been created as an object, a man's Freudian projection.

He tells her of his dreams – Freud's definitive field of expression from the sub-conscious – dreams which are projections of women; dreams of women enshrouded, faces turned away. Elaine

recognizes that “None of them are me” (325). That he is not seeing what he is looking at, that he’s seeing an image in his mind rather than seeing the “real” outside world – and thus the “real” Elaine – is symbolically suggested with “When he tells me these dreams, he doesn’t look at me exactly; it’s as if he’s looking at a point several inches inside my head...I’m a little jealous of these women in his dreams: none of them are me” (325). When he looks at Elaine, he doesn’t see her – the light waves bouncing off of her that strike his retinae – he sees a projection that his mind suggests to him. He looks in the direction of her face, but he doesn’t see it; she is a canvas onto which he projects the Other. The individuality of Elaine herself doesn’t matter; he just needs *a* woman, onto whom he will project the Other. The real Elaine is not there, what the lover sees is the physical shell painted onto Elaine, an object-Elaine, not who Elaine is inside; Elaine as a Pre-Raphaelite fantasy is “vacant” because she’s empty in there, like an uninhabited house, like a blank stare.

Elaine, recognizing the truth of Mme. de Beauvoir’s observation that a woman “...gagnera du prix aux yeux des mâles...en se modelant sur leurs rêves” (“...will gain esteem in the eyes of men...in modeling herself after his dreams”; II: 88), plays along with his Pre-Raphaelite fantasy. Though Elaine recognizes the ambiguity in his feelings for her, she cooperates in her own objectification because she wants to keep him: “I am in love with his need” (322), she explains. Note that she is not in love with *him*, but with his need for her; neither is he in love with *her*, he wants her as the mysterious Other. It is an ambiguous empowerment for Elaine, but in the sense that Elaine does not accept the traditional binary relationship of man as Self and woman as Other, but subversively acts as a Self in objectifying the man as Other, their relationship is not the victimization of the woman by the man, but rather a mutual victimization. For his need for her serves her ego; she is using him, too. “I may have served his ends, but he served mine as well” (398-9), Elaine admits. Thus we see again Ms Atwood testing and extending the model of the feminine situation proposed by

Mmes. Roy and de Beauvoir, where women are encouraged to self-objectification by men. Cat's Eye shows that women can also objectify men.

So, ultimately both Mme. de Beauvoir and Ms Atwood, faced with the feminine situation, point resolutely to a courageous and risky choice for self-actualization rather than acquiescence in self-objectification. Yet Elaine's situation is unique, and somewhat differentiated from the situation as articulated by Mme. de Beauvoir. Firstly, women, rather than men, are shown as the primary agents of socialization into the feminine and secondly, women objectify men, as well.

As well, in common with Mme. Roy, Ms. Atwood shows a common literary articulation of the feminine situation, in which an existential crisis occurs that allows each protagonist to be seen in the process of self-becoming. Yet Ms. Atwood examines the feminine situation in a specific cultural context – Post-War Anglophone Canada. This suggests that Ms. Atwood is articulating a feminism native to Anglophone Canada, just as Mme. Roy expresses a native French-Canadian feminism. Ms. Atwood is, in fact, asking much the same question as Mme. Roy: What is the place of women in Canada?

*Pour la jeune fille... il y a divorce entre sa condition proprement humaine et sa vocation féminine  
(Le Deuxième Sexe I :383)?*

“Comment dans la situation féminine peut s’accomplir un être humain?” (“How can a feminine subject actualize herself as a human being?”; (I: 35) asks Mme. de Beauvoir, and perhaps one might say that the whole *propos* of *Le Deuxième Sexe* boils down to an attempt to elucidate this one question. The fact is that a woman is inextricably bound to culture – men are too, but women are specifically bound to culture as the Other. A woman is a self-aware transcendent subject, an individual physical and mortal creature, and also a cultural artifact at a particular time and place. In fact, every woman is an incarnate and particular locus of dynamic reflexive intertextual influence upon and with a unique Self. A woman is a text. Each of us is a text. The world is a text. We create



our own lives and Selves reflexively within the text that is the world. If we are bound to immanence, cut off from transcendence, we cannot existentially *be*. We cannot create ourselves in the intersubjectivity that is our human condition; and this is exactly the feminine condition. Because women are the perceived loci of the culturally constructed “Other,” women are cut off from transcendent roles, bound to immanence through oppression – women cannot *be*. Mme. de Beauvoir’s central and critical question appears to be, then, given that a woman is, on the one hand, a self-aware subject called to transcendence, and on the other hand, a cultural construction bound to roles of immanence, how does one (or perhaps, how do *we*, since culture is a collective endeavour) reconcile those two seemingly contradictory existences?

Mme. Roy and Ms. Atwood explore this dilemma fictionally with Florentine, Christine, and Elaine, formally presenting Self-as-setting where these dynamic lines of intertextual power intersect with gender and identity formation in particular perceiving and reflective Selves. Whereas the fiction portrays differences nuancing the feminine situation in each girl’s particular case, as I’ve shown, the feminine situation is nonetheless portrayed as a constant in the Canadian woman’s experience. *Comment dans la situation féminine, Florentine, Christine, et Elaine peuvent-elles s’accomplir comme des êtres humains?* How, in the feminine situation, are Florentine, Christine, and Elaine to actualize themselves as authentic human beings? Whether a writer poses the question propositionally, as does Mme. de Beauvoir, or fictionally, as do Mme. Roy and Ms. Atwood, the answer remains the same: it cannot be done. The feminine situation does not allow self-actualization.

The dilemma cannot be avoided, though; crisis between self-actualization and self-objectification is an inevitable stage in the development of a young woman. As Mme. de Beauvoir notes, “L’adolescente ne peut devenir ‘grande personne’ sans accepter sa féminité” (The adolescent girl cannot become a ‘grown-up’ without accepting her femininity”; I: 369). I have shown that the

fiction of Mmes. Roy and Atwood qualifies Mme de Beauvoir's observation: while Florentine, Christine, and Elaine all show that in order to mature from a girl to a woman, femininity must be dealt with in one way or the other, it is not the case that a woman must necessarily accept femininity. The fiction reveals that the Canadian woman enjoys more and different options as the generations pass.

Whereas "acceptance" of the feminine is clearly the case for Florentine, who, at nineteen years old in Québec in 1940, has one option: to get married for material support and social approbation, Christine – and Mme. Roy, and Mme. de Beauvoir, themselves – are able to choose, during the War days and just Post-War, to sacrifice marriage and/or a family for independence and a career – a hard choice, but an option that was not available to Florentine! Elaine, a generation later, is able to marry, divorce, expect material support from her baby's father, and be a single mother without being socially outcast – and to have a career, too. This nuancing of the model of the feminine situation as initially defined by Mmes. de Beauvoir and Roy reflects changes in Canada's laws and social mores. It was necessary for Florentine to "accept" her femininity, but Christine and then Elaine reveal that it is no longer necessary that the Canadian woman "accept" her femininity. Elaine and Christine both refuse to objectify themselves. Christine, washing off her make-up because she wants "equality on the earth," and Elaine, in walking away from her girlfriends saying "I am free," reject the feminine. Faced with the cultural demand that they objectify themselves, they refuse. Their refusal is a choice to become themselves.

Christine, a *Zephyre* wafting in with the night winds through the open door of the Elie hotel, like a personification of the fields of grain, the land, of Nature herself who has assumed form and appeared on the threshold of the haunt of men, a manifestation of the spiritual, she represents a challenge to the world of men, a questioning of what is perceived as “reality.” Her question to the men is a challenge: “Qu’est-ce que c’est que le Canada? Et d’abord, y a-t-il un Canada?”

In examining the feminine situation, I have shown something of the history of the Canadian woman’s experience. In showing that the Canadian fiction nuances the feminine situation as articulated by Mme. de Beauvoir, I have shown that Mmes. Roy and Atwood evince a native, Canadian feminism – influenced by French feminism, but not dictated by French feminism. I have shown the Canadian woman’s experience as an historical, intertextual manifestation, or creation, of Canada – and of each individual woman. Following the stories of Florentine, Christine, and Elaine has shown a progression in Canada’s laws and mores, and structural changes to Canadian society allowing a gradual empowerment of women. I’ve examined the changing, yet constant, situation of Canadian women, too, and I’ve found the “arrival” of the Canadian woman. This is what I’ve contributed: the arrival of the Canadian woman in the intertextual creation that is the reality that is Canada.

For Christine, intruding into the Elie Hotel, represents the arrival – and the challenge – of a new, energetic, and independent young Canadian woman into one of the social hearts of her society, the patriarchal bastillon of the hotel, in Elie, Manitoba – and there, Gabrielle Roy articulates a federalist vision of Canada as a cultural mosaic that will provide me future study, for not only do the ethnically and religiously diverse men ultimately welcome her, but she finds family and her own place in history as a French-Canadian women, too. She is at home. The new Canadian woman has a place in the country that her fathers built.

In answer to Christine's question "Et d'abord, y a-t-il un Canada?" I can answer yes, there is such a thing as Canada. Mme. Roy agrees, for in "Ély! Ély! Ély!" Christine concludes, somewhat surprised, "Que je me verrais à la fin avec de quoi écrire sur le Canada et ses gens pendant toute ma vie, et que même ma vie n'y suffirait" ("That I would see myself, in the end, with enough about Canada and its peoples to write about all my life, and that even my whole life wouldn't be enough"; 116).

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