University of Warsaw

Faculty of Modern Languages

Institute of English Studies

Anna Orzechowska

Anxiety, Ambiguity and Authenticity: The Vision of Women's Existential Experience in Marilyn Duckworth's Fiction

PhD dissertation

written under the supervision of

prof. ucz. dr hab. Dominika Oramus

Warsaw 2021

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION **1**

CHAPTER ONE: ANXIETY, AMBIGUITY, AND AUTHENTICITY IN THE THOUGHT OF MARTIN HEIDEGGER, JEAN-PAUL SARTRE, AND SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR **16**

1.1 INTRODUCTION 16

1.1.1 PROBLEMS WITH DEFINING EXISTENTIALISM 16

1.1.2 HUMAN BEING AS CONCEIVED OF BY HEIDEGGER, SARTRE, AND BEAUVOIR 21

1.1.2.1 HUMAN BEING AS AN INDIVIDUAL EXISTENT 21

1.1.2.2 HUMAN BEING IN A COMMUNITY 31

1.2 ANXIETY 37

1.3 AMBIGUITY 43

1.4 AUTHENTICITY 47

1.4.1 PERSONAL AUTHENTICITY 47

1.4.2 AUTHENTICITY IN INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS 65

1.5 CONCLUSION 82

CHAPTER TWO: EXISTENTIAL QUANDARIES IN DUCKWORTH'S MEMOIR **85**

2.1 INTRODUCTION 85

2.2 A CAMPER ON THE FAULTLINE 86

2.3 DUCKWORTH'S MIRROR ENCOUNTERS WITH THE TRUTH OF EXISTENCE 88

2.4 DUCKWORTH'S EXPERIENCE OF INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS 90

2.5 CONCLUSION 95

CHAPTER THREE: ANXIETY AND AMBIGUITY IN DUCKWORTH'S FICTION **97**

3.1 INTRODUCTION 97

3.2 "THE UNFAMILIAR INTRUDING UPON THE EVERYDAY" 98

3.3 CONFRONTATIONS WITH THE TRUTH OF EXISTENCE 107

3.4 FEAR OF INSIGNIFICANCE 115

3.5 ANXIETY AND THE BODY 117

3.6 REVELATIONS OF EXISTENTIAL AMBIGUITY 119

3.7 CONCLUSION 126

CHAPTER FOUR: (IN) AUTHENTICITY IN DUCKWORTH'S FICTION **128**

4.1 INTRODUCTION 128

4.2 SISYPHEAN CIRCLE OF AUTHENTICITY 129

4.3 (IM)POSSIBILITY OF ESCAPE FROM INAUTHENTICITY 137

4.4 FALLACY OF FIXED IDENTITY AND ROLE PLAYING 153

4.5 INAUTHENTIC SELF-FASHIONING 166

4.6 IDEALS OF AUTHENTICITY 170

4.7 CONCLUSION 175
CHAPTER FIVE: INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS IN DUCKWORTH'S FICTION. 176
5.1 INTRODUCTION 176
5.2 DYNAMICS OF INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS 177
5.2.1 THREATENING RELATIONSHIPS AND THE IMPULSE FOR ISOLATION 177
5.2.2 ENTANGLEMENT IN THE DYNAMICS OF DOMINATION AND SUBORDINATION ... 181
5.2.3 DECONSTRUCTING MOTHERHOOD 191
5.2.4 ENTANGLEMENT IN A NETWORK OF RELATIONSHIPS 194
5.3 IDEAL OF RECIPROCAL RECOGNITION 198
5.4 DESIRE FOR KNOWLEDGE AND MEANINGFUL COMMUNICATION 203
5.5 CONCLUSION 208
CONCLUSION 210
WORKS CITED 216

INTRODUCTION

"Marilyn Duckworth stands alone in New Zealand fiction, occupying a lofty and lonely spot few others have had the tenacity to reach," states Heather Murray ("Woman"), applauding the quite exceptional success of one of the country's most prominent women writers in reconciling a fruitful professional career with a rich family life. Born in 1935 in Auckland, Duckworth debuted in 1959 and since then has published fifteen novels, a novella, one volume of short stories, two collections of poems, and a memoir. Along the way, she has tasted the joys and sorrows of love, has had four husbands, being twice divorced and once widowed, and has raised four daughters, as well as taking care of three stepchildren. Janet Wilson remarks that "her own life and art have overlapped untidily" ("Art"). It is indeed difficult to resist the impression that her personal experience has been an invaluable asset, enabling her to consistently pursue the mission that she set herself at the very outset of her literary journey: "I was concerned to write deliberately like a woman, rather than copy the style of male novelists, and to write *for* other women—to tell the truth" ("Duckworth, Marilyn"). Over a span of almost fifty years, she has remained "a chronicler of women's lives" (Murray, "Duckworth, Marilyn" 271), giving an account of distinctly female troubles and struggles with clarity, wit, and, most significantly of all, an acute understanding of their nuances.

Duckworth's oeuvre has brought her a number of awards and distinctions, including the New Zealand Literary Fund Award for Achievement for *A Barbarous Tongue* (1963), the New Zealand Book Award in Fiction for *Disorderly Conduct* (1985), the Order of the British Empire for services to literature (1987), and the New Zealand Prime Minister's Award for Literary Achievement in Fiction (2016). Nevertheless, even with this acclaim, her "long career as pre-eminent portrayer of the daily life of women has not been accorded appropriate recognition" (Murray, "Woman"), also within academia. Her selected novels have been discussed mostly in passing, among the works of other authors, in surveys of New Zealand literature, notably Patrick Evans's *The Penguin History of New Zealand Literature* and Terry Sturm's *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature*, and in several scholarly papers, including "From Mansfield to Svensson: The Female Hero in Recent Short Fiction by Women Writers" by John Watson and "Inscapes and Escapes Novels by New Zealand Women, 1986-1987" by Gail Pittaway. The only more extensive, yet still sketchy, study of Duckworth's literary output so far was offered in 2000 by Dale Benson in one of the chapters of her doctoral dissertation entitled *A World Like This: Existentialism in New Zealand Literature*.

This neglect may be attributed in part to Duckworth's unrelenting unwillingness to respond to popular expectations and be pinned down to any fixed positions. On the one hand, she has often embarrassed conservative New Zealand society with portrayals of full-blooded women with a strong sexual drive, contesting the stereotypical representations of "madonnas or whores and nothing in between" (Murray, "Woman"), as well as with her resistance to pass verdicts on the moral choices of her characters:

> She has suffered from the continuing puritanism of her compatriots. They expect a fixed and universal moral code where clearly she does not find one. . . . But in particular she has suffered from a surfeit of critics who have forgotten that critics are the servants of literature, their task to comment on how writers write, not to judge them on how well their work fits into the straitjacket of any preconceived literary theory. (Murray, "Woman")

On the other hand, despite a steady preoccupation with women's matters, the writer has distanced herself from the feminist movement: "Feminism isn't a fixed dogma. It's constantly changing and so tomorrow it may mean something rather different. I don't like labels—labels impose limits and I don't want to be limited by the label of feminism" (qtd. in Le Marquand 152). Her scepticism about feminism as a rigid category has translated into a proclivity for depicting women in a manner that does not necessarily align with prevailing feminist ideas. Duckworth's works are populated not only by heroines oppressed by their male partners but also by those who seek domination over men, resorting to psychological and physical violence.

Her approach has been frowned upon and misrecognised as inimical to the women's cause, at times leading to her marginalisation, as evinced most strikingly by the decision to exclude her *Seeing Red* from the Top 20 of the Women's Book Festival in 1993 because "[i]t's been suggested . . . that women's violence isn't an appropriate topic for Suffrage Year"[1] (qtd. in Stratford). By no means, however, is Duckworth anti-feminist even in the slightest degree. What she does in her fiction is to do justice to the intricacies of particular circumstances in which women are enmeshed, without glossing over issues that do not fit into long-standing preconceptions. Duckworth herself once admitted: "I'm certainly interested in the feminist dialogue that's going on—I'm listening in and learning all the time—but when it comes to fiction, I'm more interested in individuals" (qtd. in Le Marquand 58). Most importantly, in this focus on the individual, she has endeavoured to steer clear of the essentialising idealisation of women as paragons of virtue in clear-cut opposition to men: "When I say I'm interested in human weakness, I want it to be seen that it's equal across the genders" (qtd. in Stratford). "I'm

[1] In 1993 New Zealand celebrated the centenary of granting the franchise to women.

aware that men, too, are victims," she states (qtd. in G. O'Brien 69), emphasising men's bewilderment in the face of women's growing self-assertiveness and ambition.

Apart from avoiding "message novels" with one-sided ideological agendas (qtd. in G. O'Brien 69), Duckworth has demonstrated her singularity and ingenuity also by playing with the entrenched literary traditions of her place and time. Having this in mind, although her New Zealandness will not bear direct relevance to the viewpoint adopted in the present dissertation, it is worthwhile sketching the local context in which her fiction has been embedded so as to give a better sense of how it meanders between conventionality and originality.

Duckworth debuted towards the end of what was later classified by Lawrence Jones as the Provincial Period in literature,[2] a span of thirty years from 1935 to 1964 that saw the flourishing of the New Zealand novel "with its own themes and conventions" (Jones, "Novel (New Zealand)" 1137), albeit not entirely free of British and American influences. The mode that lent itself most readily to capturing the evolving sense of national identity and awareness, marked by disenchantment about the ability of New Zealand society "to live up to its own myths of progress" (Jones, "Novel (New Zealand)" 1138), and thus emerged as the primary form of expression at the time, was critical realism (Jones, "Novel" 142). John Mulgan and Frank Sargeson established their reputation as two of its leading exponents, setting the tone, style and thematic focus for other writers to follow. The former made a noteworthy and lasting contribution to national literature by introducing the Man Alone figure in his Hemingway-inspired novel of the same title (1939), mounting a resounding critique of "New Zealand between the wars as a constricted puritan and capitalist society" (Jones, "New Zealand Novel" 931). An English *émigré* veteran of the First World War, Johnson, the eponymous hero, is a disenchanted drifter confronting the grim reality of post-war life in the country. After having found himself inadvertently embroiled in the Great Depression riots, he begins to work at a local dairy farm. The accidental shooting of his employer, whose wife he previously seduced, forces him to take flight into the bush and mountains. As the novel closes, the man, now a survivor of the trials of wilderness, resolves to leave New Zealand to fight in the Spanish Civil War. Throughout all these tribulations, "Johnson remains the same, stubbornly autonomous, not so much unsocial as asocial, unwilling to give allegiance to causes" (Schafer 63). His rugged individualism and heroic masculinity, portrayed against the backdrop of the local colour, using

[2] In *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English*, Jones divides the history of the New Zealand novel into four periods based on "the major social and economic changes in New Zealand society; the novelists' relationship to and attitude towards those changes; and the novelistic modes and conventions that they evolved for depicting their society and expressing their attitudes towards it": Pioneer or Early Colonial (1861-1889), Late Colonial (1890-1934), Provincial (1935-1964) and Post-provincial (from 1965) ("Novel" 107).

terse style and language, soon came to be iconic and definitional of "New Zealand's unconscious self-image" (Schafer 61), as reflected in a new type of hero that featured in much of the country's fiction since then (McCormick 130).

The figure of Man Alone was also a staple of Frank Sargeson's short stories. Impressed by the essential simplicity mixed with a sharp ear for the idiomatic vernacular distinctive of works by Mark Twain, Sherwood Anderson and Ernest Hemingway, Sargeson became a master at portraying working-class men, usually social outcasts, unable to cope with the challenges of their lives, with piercing authenticity achieved through the deft use of colloquial speech and laconic tone, strongly rooted in the local context. This "apparently simple and colloquial surface," as Dennis McEldowney asserts, "skilfully conveyed his deeper insight" (1396) into the problems of social alienation and otherness. The writer also played a foremost role in defining the character of modern New Zealand literature in terms of a distinctly masculine ethos. Kai Jensen observes that in the 1930s and 1940s "[m]ale writers wished to persuade their society that they weren't contemptibly effeminate" (93) and flaunted the virile quality of their work as a counterpoint to the earlier genteel writing by women (78). Sargeson manifested this "masculine emphasis" (Stachurski, *Reading* xliii) in both the brusque style and the thematic orientation of his stories, including the representation of male mateship as superior to unstable and unsatisfactory male-female affairs, often with an implicit or explicit homosexual innuendo, the most prominent example being *That Summer* (1943-44). Most importantly, the writer juxtaposed his own masculine realism against the feminine impressionism of Katherine Mansfield (Williams, *Leaving* 21), vocally disparaging her introspective, metaphor-laden narratives (Jensen 78-79) as foreign to the true spirit and aspirations of their country. While the latter, in his view, concerned itself only with ephemeral experience of private significance, the former was broad enough in its scope to capture the voice of the nation (Prentice 13) and so deserved due recognition as "a properly New Zealand kind of fiction" (Williams, *Leaving* 21).

It is significant to note that decades later this sharp opposition was placed under critical revision. In the chapter on the novel in Terry Sturm's *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature* (1991), Jones emphasises that Sargeson was certainly biased in elevating realism over impressionism as a quintessentially New Zealand mode, the only one that was suitable for accurately framing and investigating the country's problems ("Novel" 165). Heightened attention to the intricacies of the human psyche, so his argument goes, "does not preclude a critical treatment of society, but rather it changes the focus of criticism from the external effects of society on the individual to the internal experience of those effects" (Jones, "Novel (New Zealand)" 166). Furthermore, the rigidly gendered quality of the dichotomy can be hardly

held tenable. After all, Sargeson himself, despite placing a premium on realism, did make use of distinctly impressionist devices, as starkly evidenced by the Joycean style of his *I Saw in My Dream* (1949) (Jones, "New Zealand Novel" 931). Similarly, Mark Williams maintains that not all of Sargeson's fiction is as straightforwardly realistic as is usually assumed. While non-realist forms were simply not bound to suit the tastes of readers in New Zealand at the time, the writer engaged in "a deliberate strategy of audience-teasing" by expanding the limits of his realism to incorporate elements of the Gothic (Williams, *Leaving* 29).

Be that as it may, considering the pervasive embrace of a male-centred perspective and male-constructed set of values in fiction, the Provincial Period was not a propitious time for women writers to make their voice heard, let alone to find their way into the mainstream of New Zealand literature.[3] In his doctoral dissertation entitled *Social and Literary Constraints on Women Writers in New Zealand 1945-1970*, Michael John O'Leary goes as far as to emphatically aver that the years under consideration "became a cultural 'wasteland'" in terms of women's literary production (48). With cold objectivity and aloofness set as the criteria of merit, narratives that conveyed uniquely female sensibility and perception were poorly positioned to gain widespread acknowledgment (O'Leary 49). As stated with a note of bitterness by Lydia Wevers, "[l]iterary nationalism had a long history of patronising or ignoring women writers" ("Novel" 249). One remarkable case in point is Robin Hyde (Wevers, "Novel" 249), whose "nonconformity in matters of genre and style—considered odd or perverse in her own time" (Sandbrook xiv) consigned her to near oblivion for some four decades after her death. Many of her works, both poetry and novels, now appreciated for their lyrical imagery and evocative power, were published and brought to the limelight only in the 1980s.

The late 1950s marked a significant upsurge of women's presence in New Zealand's literary world, even if not necessarily welcomed by male critics and audiences (Alcock 248). 1957-1958, the "*annus mirabilis*" in literature, as Jones has it ("Novel (New Zealand)" 1137), saw the novelistic debuts of two of the country's most distinguished female writers: Janet Frame with *Owls Do Cry* (1957) and Sylvia Ashton-Warner with *Spinster* (1958). Each of them transgressed the widely recognised standards of literary expression in their own unique

[3] As noted by Peter Gibbons, women's perspectives were marginalised also in the field of non-fiction writing (80). Nevertheless, "there appears to have been a distinctive women's non-fiction tradition since extensive Pākehā settlement began in the nineteenth century" (80). Some of the most noteworthy works published in the Provincial Period include *Journalese* by Robin Hyde (1934), *The Women of New Zealand* by Helen M. Simpson (1940), *Tales of Pioneer Women* by A.E. Woodhouse (1940), as well as pieces of lifewriting such as *My First Eighty Years* by Helen Wilson (1950), *The Whirinaki Valley* (1956) by Nancy Ellison, and *A River Rules My Life* by Mona Anderson (1963). For a broader discussion, see Gibbons 80-83 ("Non-Fiction").

directions, gaining international fame but often failing to receive the praise and attention they deserved at home.

Frame's work was always poignantly intertwined with her harrowing personal experience of social alienation and stigmatisation. Wrongly diagnosed as schizophrenic following a nervous breakdown, she was institutionalised in mental hospitals, subjected to electroconvulsive therapy and finally scheduled for brain surgery. It was then that Frame's writing came to her rescue in a very literal sense: once the medical authorities discovered that her collection of short stories, *The Lagoon* (1951), had been published and won the prestigious Hubert Church Memorial Award, they reversed their decision. *Owls Do Cry,* which came into print two years after her release, is a heavily autobiographical portrait of the Withers siblings—Francie, whose childhood is cut short when she is forced to leave school to work in woollen mills; Toby plagued by epileptic fits; Chicks, who drowns at an early age; and emotionally fragile Daphne, confined to a mental asylum after her sister's death, a focus of much of the narrative—set in provincial New Zealand over a span of 20 years. In registering the subtleties of their inner worlds, traumas and maladjustment to the narrow-minded and judgmental society that shapes their lives, the writer seamlessly blends poetry with prose and erases barriers between imagination and reality, showcasing a "buoyancy of creativity and brightness," as put vividly by Margaret Drabble, through "the glory and intensity of the language" and "the heightened imagery." In many of her later novels, including *Faces in the Water* (1961), Frame probes into the bewildered hearts and minds of social misfits and outcasts, with "an uncanny ability to arouse the diverse sensibilities of shifting moods and to entangle in language the wordless truths of her inner eye" (New 334), destabilising the imposed norms of sanity and insanity.

While Ashton-Warner's fiction remains much more firmly wedded to the conventions of realism, it similarly provides vivid portrayals of the tension between individual subjectivity and deleterious social impact (Jones, "Novel" 157). Just as is the case with Frame and her *Owls Do Cry,* the plot of *Spinster* conspicuously draws its material from the author's own life: her experience as a teacher and endeavours to reinvigorate the ossified educational system with a view to accommodating the special needs of her pupils. It follows the story of Anna Vorontosov, an unmarried immigrant from Kazakhstan, who works in a local Māori school and strives to apply her original literacy instruction method despite the opposition of the male authorities. Although not thoroughly subversive in its message, considering that the ending sees Anna bound to follow the traditional path of wifehood, disillusioned as to the possibilities of achieving professional success with her unconventional approach, the novel certainly posed

a challenge to the prevailing literary standards of cold restraint and objectivity, giving extensive glimpses into the heroine's psyche, torn by conflicting desires and emotions, with an "extravagance of style" condescendingly disparaged by male critics (Mercer 449).

Such a deprecating and dismissive attitude towards expressions of female sensibility as displayed in the criticism of Ashton-Warner began to gradually fall into disrepute starting from the mid-1960s, with the passage into the Post-provincial Period, when the hitherto approved literary formulas and stylistic patterns were "increasingly seen as outworn, no longer appropriate for dealing with an increasingly affluent, suburbanized, and pluralistic society" (Jones, "Novel" 142). Even if realism was not dethroned as the leading narrative mode, it was being transformed throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s "into a richer version of its own possibilities" (Williams, *Leaving* 20), its boundaries stretched to integrate new elements. At the same time, non-realist forms of fiction were also gaining unprecedented prominence. Most significantly, rampant social changes empowered marginalised groups to emerge with their own values and viewpoints as new powerful voices in New Zealand literature. As the feminist movement grew in force around the world, the 1970s brought "a triumphant resurgence" of female fiction (Wevers, "Novel" 249), "laying stress on and giving new value to the experience common to women" (Williams, *Leaving* 16).[4] While some of the debuting writers chose to narrate women's lives within the more conventional frameworks of domestic or social realism, many embarked upon experimental paths to "reveal hidden dimensions in familiar genres" (Wilson, "Contemporary" 604).

The former was the case with Fiona Kidman, whose *Breed of Women*, "the first overtly feminist novel in New Zealand" (Wevers, "Novel" 249) and a huge commercial success, written in plain realist style, charts the quest of Harriet Wallace for independent identity against the attempts of her prejudiced provincial environment to restrict her to narrowly defined gender roles. A similar pattern recurs throughout most of Kidman's fiction: her "rebellious heroines" are subjected to manifold challenges while they "resist the social values that threaten to engulf them" (Wilson, "Kidman" 566). The realism of Barbara Anderson, another figure of note, who entered the New Zealand literary scene at the turn of the 1990s, assumes a much more playful form, "[taking] the reader on a journey behind the scenes in ordinary lives that in the writing are never merely ordinary, in fact they teem with imaginative inconsistencies which Anderson

[4]The 1970s can be deemed a breakthrough decade also in terms of emergent Māori presence in New Zealand literature. The so-called Māori Renaissance was fuelled, *inter alia*, by such distinguished women writers as Patricia Grace and Keri Hulme. This Introduction, however, focuses solely on Pākehā (i.e. non- Māori) writing, considering that Duckworth herself is of non-Māori origin and all her works of fiction present the perspective of non-Māori women.

paints with a characteristic wry humour and attention to detail" (D'Cruz 30). The writer was a master at exploring the ebbs and flows of romantic relationships, as instantiated by her award-winning *The Portrait of the Artist's Wife* (1992). In her novels, this staple theme of women's fiction is elevated into a witty and often unpredictable exploration of "the irony and the ridiculous in everyday life" (Stachurski, "Anderson" 39). Other female novelists have provided also broader pictures of New Zealand society, calling attention to its multicultural character and the tensions that underlie it. Sue McCauley rose to fame in 1982 with *Other Halves*, adapted two years later into a film, a compelling story of an affair between a middle-class Pākehā woman in her thirties and an orphaned Māori teenager, offering a context for commentary on social injustices and biases. Yvonne du Fresne, influenced by her Danish-French Huguenot origin, oriented her narratives on the perspective of immigrant communities in New Zealand. Elizabeth Knox, on her part, has been one of the most notable exemplars of experimental impulses, distinguished by her penchant for the Gothic and supernatural, displayed as early as in her debut *After Z-Hour* (1987). Other significant women writers of the Post-provincial Period include Joy Cowley, Fiona Farrell, Anne Kennedy, and Margaret Sutherland.[5]

The place of Duckworth's fiction within this literary landscape of New Zealand lies on the overlap between subversion and conventionality, her body of writing reflecting some of the broader tendencies outlined in the preceding paragraphs and simultaneously bearing the stamp of her originality. She broke into the male-centred arena of the Provincial Period with *A Gap in the Spectrum* (1959), published a year after the *annus mirabilis*, portending, just as *Owls Do Cry* and *Spinster* did, the looming shift in literary style and thematic perspective. What her debut shares with these two novels is its autobiographical touch[6] and the foregrounding of the female protagonist's private realm: her confusion after waking up in London with a nearly erased memory of her identity and past. Similar to an extent to Frame, although using much more succinct and plain language, more reminiscent of Sargeson, Duckworth depicts a site where the extraordinary erupts to intrude upon the everyday, a subjective experiential reality in confrontation with a world that is falling apart. In *The Penguin History of New Zealand Literature*, Evans remarks that "[i]n her first novel . . . Marilyn Duckworth subverted the existing tradition from within, challenging the idea of what is real within her text through

[5] The flourishing of women's fiction in the 1970s and 1980s was paralleled by a boom of autobiographical writing with such works as most notably Ashton-Warner's *I Passed This Way* (1979), Frame's three volumes of autobiography: *To the Is-land* (1983), *An Angel at My Table* (1984), *and The Envoy from Mirror City* (1985), and Hyde's *A Home in This World* (1984). For a broader discussion, see Gibbons 83-85 ("Non-Fiction) and 871-872 ("Life Writing").

[6] Duckworth has confessed that her portrayal of the heroine's experience was inspired by the sense of dislocation that she herself felt after return to New Zealand following emigration to England (qtd. in Benson 209).

a central figure who has amnesia" (265). Little wonder, then, that this "study in odd states of mind," as the novel was described with an unmistakable note of derision by Joan Stevens, came under trenchant criticism for being cryptic to the point of meaninglessness (110). Similar charges were levelled also against Duckworth's second novel, *The Matchbox House* (1960), an incisive portrayal of suburban neurosis, which plunges a thirty-six-year-old woman, frustrated with the toils of life centred on mothering, into a world of disturbing fantasy, with deleterious effects for her friend's children, temporarily under her foster care: "This kind of subject, humourless, and set in the half-light of peripheral states of mind, is one peculiarly difficult to assess. Is this pretentious stuff-and-nonsense, or a genuine attempt to express a 'private vision'?" (Stevens 110). It was only her third novel, *A Barbarous Tongue* (1963), using a plainly realist mode to narrate the journey of a teenage heroine from slavish reliance on her irresponsible and selfish lover towards self-sufficiency as a single mother, that gained wider recognition, as testified by the New Zealand Literary Fund Award for Achievement. The first stage in Duckworth's career was closed with *Over the Fence is Out* (1969), a domestic drama unfolding among a larger-than-life patriarchal tyrant, his submissive wife and self-centred lover. Exhibiting the writer's penetrating eye for the conflictual complexities of human relationships, the work, as recounted by Wilson, was yet held in low regard due to its alleged "lack of verisimilitude" ("Art").

Silent as a novelist throughout the 1970s,[7] Duckworth began her second lease of literary life in the 1980s, with an unwavering focus on women's subjectivity and an ever more pronounced sense of the uncertainties permeating their lives. She also took bolder departures from "tightly controlled domestic realism," which neatly dovetailed with the developments in female writing at the time (Wevers, "Novel" 250), although *Disorderly Conduct* (1984), her acclaimed second debut, is a prime example of social realism, setting the private troubles of the middle-aged female protagonist against the nationwide unrest unleashed by the Springbok Rugby Tour in 1981. "I prefer to anchor my own work in reality," declared the writer in 1988, "but I'm interested in the experimental writing that's going on at the moment" (qtd. in G. O'Brien 72). In fact, several of her novels published in the 1980s and 1990s, are captivating blends of domestic and social realism with distinct notes of the Gothic, science-fiction, and fantasy. These include *Married Alive* (1985), where an epidemic of insanity caused by contaminated vaccine disturbs interpersonal relationships throughout New Zealand; *Rest for the Wicked* (1986), which traces an increasingly nightmarish stay of its heroine in a Sleep Research Centre; *Pulling Faces*

[7] In 1975 she published a collection of poems, *Other Lovers' Children*.

(1987), drawing a compelling picture of a near-future world dominated by modular houses, adjusted to the fleeting character of human ties, and modern technology exploited by the egocentric female protagonist to secure control over other people; and *Studmuffin* (1997), harking back to *Alice in Wonderland* as two main characters become mysteriously marooned on an island ruled by a deranged despot. But even when Duckworth operates strictly within the perimeters of the realist mode, she does so in "a playful and perverse" way (Pittaway 54), showing how comfortable assumptions about reality are frustrated by the sudden twists and turns of the plot. This is the case with *A Message from Harpo* (1989), a look at three generations of women with their distinctive dilemmas and perspectives on women's roles, where the passage of the Homosexual Law Reform Bill unexpectedly throws the life of one of them into disarray; *Seeing Red* (1993), a gripping exploration of interpersonal conflict and violence, dramatised with the motif of incest and a female character unconventionally placed in the role of the oppressor; *Fooling* (1994), which brings its heroine's craving for both secure love and independence into collision with the deception of mass media images; and *Leather Wings* (1995), confronting the problem of paedophilia. With her last two works, *Swallowing Diamonds* (2003) and *Playing Friends* (2007), she both returns to the problems explored in the prime of her career, such as the art of self-determination, and adds new ones, such as the quandaries of women's aging.

It is undoubtedly the case that the storylines of her novels, although revolving primarily around themes typical of women's popular literature, such as the trickiness of romantic relationships, usually veer into unanticipated and strange territories, generating a frisson of uncanniness. In her article, tellingly entitled "The Art of the Odd," Wilson observes that "the unexpected becomes a character in its own right" in Duckworth's fiction. This disturbingly eerie aura consistently winding through her works has been noticed by other critics. Elizabeth Knox accords particular attention to the manner in which Duckworth portrays her characters: "I think her fiction is about the oddity in ordinary people and the odd lives that overtake people who expect things to be more ordinary" (qtd. in Stratford). Marion McLeod in a similar vein brings to the fore the writer's propensity for interrupting realistic surfaces: "her [Duckworth's] domestic realism has a way of transmuting into something shaky. Menace turns the pages. Not the menace of a clichéd horror story but something more understated and therefore more frightening" (qtd. in "Marilyn Duckworth"). Duckworth herself reveals that this is a conscious and deliberate strategy: "Yes, I like to twist things slightly, set up expectations then shatter them" (qtd. in Stratford). "I do like to subvert reality," she explains in further detail in an interview with Antonella Sarti, "it makes it more interesting; it heightens perception. . . . People

are often odder than they appear to be if you delve underneath" (26). While always remaining thematically interested in the mundane, she has a knack for uncovering and probing into its underlying peculiar dimensions. Starting from her debut, she has consistently worked within well-established literary formulas while at the same time undermining and revising calcified ways of looking at reality, juggling back and forth between stark realism and its modifications.

By rejecting blind allegiance to any of the generic conventions, with their underlying ideologies, Duckworth has maintained fidelity to the desire for individuality that first attracted her to writing: "The reason I started being a writer was I wanted to do something on my own, and not have to fit in with others" (qtd. in Stratford). Although often misunderstood and censured, her idiosyncrasy has provided fresh and perceptive glimpses into women's experience, meriting a much more detailed and attentive study than has been offered so far. The general objective that guides the present dissertation is thus to fill this gap in the research and cast a more informed light on Duckworth's fiction, thereby also making a modest but hopefully meaningful contribution to the wider discussion on women's literature.

In pursuing this goal, the dissertation takes a cue from Jones, Murray and, to the most significant extent, Benson, all of whom identify the existentialist tenour of Duckworth's fiction. The first lists Duckworth among the novelists whose novels exemplify the "assumption that human beings live in an absurd universe with no religious significance, and that meaning is something that one makes for oneself by exercising one's existential freedom and choosing commitment and responsibility," which has formed the subtext of much of New Zealand fiction since the 1950s (Jones, "Novel" 193-194). Murray summarises the thematic gist of her writing in a similar manner: "Marilyn Duckworth has written about the plight of ordinary people, particularly women, in an indifferent universe. An early convert to Existentialism, Duckworth shows people adrift in free-falling mode amidst the trivia of daily life: nothing stays the same, the boundaries continually shift" ("Duckworth" 271). It must be clarified, however, that the conversion to Existentialism to which Murray refers should be understood mostly as a metaphorical turn of phrase. In no respect is Duckworth a New Zealand counterpart of Iris Murdoch, whose "fiction is continuous with her interest in moral philosophy and her preoccupation with ethical choice" (Joannou 109), displaying, to a significant extent, a dialogic relationship with existentialism.[8] The former has expressly denied being inspired by any existentialist philosopher (Benson 207). Still, she has acknowledged that "Existentialism was in the air" (qtd. in Benson 207) when her career was on the rise and that zeitgeist could have

[8] For an in-depth analysis of the influence of existentialism as well as other philosophical schools and traditions on Murdoch's fiction, see, *inter alia,* Leeson, Antonaccio, Forsberg, and Martin.

penetrated into her writing. In her dissertation on the influence of existentialism on New Zealand literature from the 1930s through to the 1970s, in a twenty-page-long chapter devoted to Duckworth, Benson thus "suggest[s] that the echoes of Sartre and Camus in Duckworth's fiction are evidence of the New Zealand author's development of her own existentialist sensibility" (207). Benson's main argument is that the novels have at their centre the characters' struggles in "an indifferent universe in which human beings have no special status" (226). She remarks simultaneously that although most of them are "distinctly *lonely*" (Benson 207) in bearing the onerous burden of existence, Duckworth "emphasizes that beyond awareness, existential freedom and loneliness there is still a need for community" (Benson 208).

While Benson, due to the overall subject matter of her dissertation, explores selected works of fiction for their engagement with "popular existentialist ideas" (218), the present dissertation reverses this perspective. It applies existentialist thought as a lens through which to gain a better comprehension of how Duckworth envisions women's experience.[9] Furthermore, in contrast to Benson, who refrains from adopting the standpoint of any specific existentialist ideas and using "philosophical jargon" (1) more than very sparingly, justifying this approach by the lack of strictly philosophical intentions on the writer's part, this dissertation employs selected concepts from the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Simone de Beauvoir. The fact that the literary works that will be scrutinised here are indeed far from being "philosophical treatises" (Benson 1) or, to use Beauvoir's term, "metaphysical novels," which deliberately blend literature with philosophy so as to "grasp man and human events in relation to the totality of the world" ("Literature" 276), does not necessarily preclude the use of existentialist thought as the theoretical framework for their interpretation. Quite the contrary, existentialism furnishes a set of invaluable conceptual tools that allow one to describe and expound a number of issues that are accorded centrality by Duckworth in her narratives of women's lives.[10]

Above all, existentialism, as a "philosophy of crisis" (Kuhn), is perfectly suited to analyse stories predominantly concerned with how women plunge into turmoil in the face of various

[9] The phrase "women's experience" may obviously appear somewhat controversial due to its essentialist tenour. It should be thus borne in mind that, whenever used in this dissertation in the context of Duckworth's fiction, it refers predominantly to white, heterosexual and middle-class women.

[10] The fruitfulness of existentialist philosophy for the analysis of women's fiction or female characters is evidenced by such studies as Amy Ujvari St. Jean's "'Blind Strivings of the Human Heart': *Existential Feminism in Sister Carrie*," which uses Beauvoir's ideas to argue that Theodore Dreiser's novel depicts "a woman's existential journey in an unending search for self-realization and transcendence in a world populated with subjects that threaten to objectify her and fix her identity in a life filled with problems which tempt her to find easy solutions through self-destructive acts of bad faith" (135-136); "A Heideggerian Reading of Jack's Homelessness in Marilynne Robinson's *Home*" by Fatima Zahra Bessedik, who applies Heidegger's concepts of "being" and "dwelling" to interpret the theme of homelessness; Emma Simone's *Virginia Woolf and Being-in-the-world: A Heideggerian Study*; or Anita Singh's *Existential Dimensions in the Novels of Anita Desai*.

personal and global challenges. Most of Duckworth's heroines usually feel out of place in the external world, grapple with identity issues or become ensnared in destructive interpersonal liaisons. This dissertation has as its aim to explicate why they act in an erratic manner, remain incapable of finding satisfaction and meaning in life and, most significantly, often fail to extricate themselves from unfavourable circumstances. It enquires about the fundamental source and nature of their predicament.

As a matter of fact, the most general answer to the puzzles is encapsulated by the remark of the narrator in *Disorderly Conduct*, Duckworth's "wryly humorous existentialist vision of an imperfect human situation with which we must live," as characterised by Jones ("Doing" 109): "What she suffers from is the human condition, no less" (160). Still, this answer requires extensive elaboration so as to specify how the distressing human condition is conceived of and portrayed by the writer. This is where the existentialist thought of Heidegger, Sartre, and Beauvoir come to tremendous assistance, furnishing insights that bear pertinence to the concerns of Duckworth's fiction. While the choice of the author of *The Second Sex* is the most readily obvious one in view of her feminist orientation, the presence of Sartre and Heidegger on this list may superficially appear more surprising due to the accusations of patriarchal bias that have been often levelled against the two philosophers. Considering Duckworth's open, nuanced, and unconventional approach to gender matters, it is, however, by no means unwarranted and may provide illuminating perspectives from which to read the writer. Although philosophical criticism tends to focus on the bilateral influences, links and differences between Sartre and Beauvoir, Sartre and Heidegger, or Heidegger and Beauvoir,[11] all the three thinkers have actually remained in dialogue with each other, responding to, drawing on, or taking distance from each other's ideas, so bringing their individual standpoints together appears opportune to establish a better argued and more coherent theoretical approach for this dissertation.

The argument is structured around three concepts that lie, in various formulations, at the core of their philosophies and simultaneously appear to give the most apposite and comprehensive interpretation of the heroines' experience of external reality, their own existence, and their relationships with other people, thereby also explicating their troubles: anxiety, ambiguity, and authenticity. It will be demonstrated that the sense of disorientation in life accompanying the women can be accounted for in terms of anxiety, which arises when they grasp themselves as

[11] See, *inter alia*, Daigle, *Beauvoir and Sartre*: *The Riddle of Influence*; Fullbrook and Fullbrook, *Sex and Philosophy: Rethinking de Beauvoir and Sartre;* Fell; and Gothlin, "Rereading Simone de Beauvoir with Martin Heidegger."

indeterminate and ambiguous human beings—both self-defining subjects and objects limited to a certain extent by an array of internal and external factors. The heroines find themselves at a loss to acknowledge the truth of their existence so as to be able to navigate through the restrictions that it imposes on them and make utmost use of the opportunities that it opens up. Their overriding problem is the inability to live authentically by exercising their existential freedom on an ongoing basis through self-chosen projects, instead of adhering to pre-given social codes of conduct, as well as by respecting the freedom of other people, a task that proves especially forbidding in romantic relationships.

The dissertation consists of five chapters, the first two providing a philosophical and an autobiographical background for the textual analysis of Duckworth's fiction. Chapter One begins with an overview of existentialism as a philosophical phenomenon and then proceeds to examine the general idea of the human being in the thought of Heidegger, Sartre, and Beauvoir so as to facilitate the detailed discussion of the concepts of anxiety, ambiguity, and authenticity as understood by these three philosophers. It should be borne in mind that by no means does it aspire to provide any fresh re-reading of their ideas; rather, it collates and makes use of a number of well-established interpretations to lay the theoretical foundation for what follows. Chapter Two discusses the writer's memoir, *Camping on the Faultline*, with a view to illustrating Duckworth's existential mindset and demonstrating how the dilemmas that form the thematic texture of her fiction have been also part of her private experience.

Chapters Three to Five are concerned strictly with selected works of fiction by Duckworth—twelve novels, a novella, and one short story, all published in the twentieth century—that illustrate her existential focus in the exploration of women's experience in the most prominent manner, pertinent to the subject matter of the entire dissertation. The works are discussed not chronologically, considering that there are no clear and distinct phases in the evolution of the writer's literary vision, but thematically. Chapter Three focuses on the crisis situations in which the writer tends to place her heroines, arguing that they shatter their self-comforting illusions about surrounding reality and their own existential condition. The import of their disquietude is explicated with reference to the Heideggerian concept of anxiety as occasioned by a dawning insight into the true structure of existence as well as Sartre's and Beauvoir's ideas about anxiety of freedom and choice. Next, it is framed in the notion of human ambiguity as expounded by Beauvoir. At the same time, attention is paid to how Duckworth co-mingles realist and non-realist conventions to lay emphasis on the heroines' encounters with the uncanny underside of being.

Chapter Four uses the concept of authenticity to analyse how and why the heroines usually fail to negotiate the tensions inherent in their existential condition. It shows that most of them relinquish the enterprise of continual self-creation both under external pressures and out of a desire to avoid the anxiety of existential responsibility by clinging to the safe shelter of social roles or entertaining the mirage of having a fixed identity. It is also noted that Duckworth tends to place weight on the process of balancing between conflicting impulses, where even good faith intentions to be a possessor of one's own life may be pursued in an existentially inauthentic fashion.

Chapter Five examines the question of authenticity in the context of the heroines' engagements with other people, predominantly of a romantic nature but not solely. It is observed that the writer represents them as a site of conflict and threat, in which the dynamics of domination and subordination are played out. While female characters are usually those who lose or wilfully abdicate their autonomy and subjectivity, they are by no means idealised as innately free of the appetite for power over men. Separate attention is drawn also to the mother-child relationship, depicted by Duckworth as conflictual in the same measure as all other human ties rather than inherently built on generosity. It is emphasised that the writer does not yet posit mutual hostility as unsurmountable. What is celebrated in some of her novels as the key to establishing a rewarding relationship is the ability to accept one's own existential vulnerability and embrace the freedom of the other, an attitude consonant with the Beauvoirian ideal of reciprocal recognition.

The Conclusion reconstructs the entire argument of the dissertation to prove that the existential experience of women in Duckworth's fiction may be convincingly explicated in terms of anxiety, which confronts the heroines with their own indefiniteness as human beings and unmitigated responsibility for freedom of self-constitution; ambiguity, which throws them into tension between self-defining subjectivity and objectivity vulnerable to external injunctions; and authenticity, which requires the lucid acceptance of existence as a personal project, resistance to social constructions as well as respect for the freedom of other people.

CHAPTER ONE: ANXIETY, AMBIGUITY, AND AUTHENTICITY IN THE THOUGHT OF MARTIN HEIDEGGER, JEAN-PAUL SARTRE, AND SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR

1.1 INTRODUCTION

1.1.1 PROBLEMS WITH DEFINING EXISTENTIALISM

The overarching purpose of this chapter is to elucidate the concepts of anxiety, ambiguity, and authenticity in the thought of Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Simone de Beauvoir with a view to laying the theoretical groundwork for the analysis of the selected literary works by Marilyn Duckworth in Chapters Three to Five rather than to offer an in-depth picture of existentialism. Nonetheless, before doing so, it is desirable and expedient to give, by way of an extended introduction, an account of the meaning and philosophical implications of what is denoted by the term "existentialism" with a view to facilitating the discussion proper.

Despite its apparently self-explanatory name, straightforwardly signalling a central concern with existence, existentialism actually defies an easy and clear-cut definition. Difficulties arise already when one considers the origin, contemporaneous reception and later applications of the notion. In the popular imagination, existentialism prompts immediate associations with the movement that flourished in the 1940s in France in response to the atrocities of the Second World War. Indeed, the authorship of the name is commonly accredited to the French philosopher Gabriel Marcel (Cooper, *Existentialism* 1; Daigle, "Problem" 5; Joseph et al. 1), who used it for the first time in 1943 to describe "the currently emerging ideas of Jean-Paul Sartre and his close friend Simone de Beauvoir" (Cooper, *Existentialism* 1). Nevertheless, conflating existentialism with "the expression of post-war 'dishevelment', despair or malaise" belittles its philosophical significance and trivialises it as a mere "vogue" that "could be only temporarily and locally valid" (Cooper, *Existentialism* 13). Suffice it to say that Marcel's coinage was soon extended to include not only the French thinkers from the intellectual circle of Sartre and Beauvoir, including Albert Camus, Emmanuel Levinas, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, but also German philosophers with a firmly established philosophical reputation at the time, including Karl Jaspers and Martin Heidegger.

Another problem is that "almost everyone who was labeled an existentialist went to great lengths to deny that he or she was an existentialist" (Marino xiii; see also Cooper, *Existentialism* 1-2; Joseph et al. 3; Michelman 16-19). Sartre and Beauvoir accepted and appropriated the title in their own way, as best evidenced by the former's famous lecture *Existentialism Is*

a Humanism (1945) and the latter's essay "Existentialism and Popular Wisdom" (1945), but only after initial resistance: "Sartre had refused Gabriel Marcel to apply this adjective to him. . . . I shared his irritation. I had written my novel before I had even encountered the term Existentialism; . . . But our protests were in vain. In the end, we took the epithet that everyone used for us and used it for our own purposes" (Beauvoir, *Force* 45-46). Heidegger, on his part, categorically disclaimed any affiliation with existentialism, criticising Sartre for his metaphysical inclinations ("Letter" 232). Stephen Michelman explains, however, that his reaction should not be adduced as a legitimate argument against classifying him among existentialist philosophers. For one thing, his understanding of existentialism propounded in "Letter on Humanism" (1947) "was based on [its] narrow identification with Sartre's philosophy of the time" (Michelman 176). For another, in the late 1940s, Heidegger had already substantially re-oriented his thought as compared to the fundamental ontology of *Being and Time* (Michelman 176). All in all, "[i]t is generally agreed that if Heidegger and Sartre are not existentialists, then no one is" (Cooper, *Existentialism* 6).

Over time, the term came to be interpreted in an even more extensive manner. In his *Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy* (1958), the American philosopher William Barrett defends it against the accusations of being "a passing fad or a mere philosophic mood of the postwar period" (18) and makes a case for its significance as "a major movement of human thought that lies directly in the main stream of modern history" (18). He traces its roots from as early as antiquity to the nineteenth century, taking note of such figures as Plato, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, Blaise Pascal, and Henri Bergson. The credit for giving birth to twentieth-century existentialism itself goes to Heidegger and Jaspers, who "[gave] it its decisive stamp, brought its problems to new and more precise expression, and in general formed the model around which the thinking of all the other Existentialists revolves" (Barrett 11). The former philosopher together with Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Jean-Paul Sartre receive the most detailed treatment in the central section of his study, a clear suggestion of their pre-eminent contribution to existentialism. This group is accorded special attention also by contemporary scholars, including Charles Guignon, who claims that "no matter how one interprets the notion of existentialism, one will have to come to terms with these four pivotal figures" (Introduction 3), and Robert C. Solomon, who gives them pride of place as "the big four" existentialists (ix). Still, there is no unanimity: David Cooper is one of those critics who

have certain objections to Kierkegaard and Nietzsche being subsumed under the label,[12] noting that it would be more accurate to characterise them as "precursors of existentialism" (*Existentialism* 10). Michelman follows this line of reasoning, asserting that existentialism is "a decidedly 20th-century phenomenon, though with roots in the 19th century" (xvii) and specifying that it can be divided into two phases: the first one with its hotbed in the Germany of the 1920s and 1930s, and the second one originating in France in the 1930s and 1940s (2). The list of the philosophers anthologised and discussed in the context of existentialism includes also, most notably, Martin Buber, Nikolai Berdyaev, Albert Camus, Gabriel Marcel, Paul Tillich, and Miguel de Unamuno. Simone de Beauvoir has been sadly often ignored, not only because of patriarchal prejudices but also due to her own reluctance to acknowledge intellectual independence from Sartre and professed aversion to "systematic philosophy and its pretensions" (Mussett and Wilkerson 5), remaining, to use Michèle Le Doeuff's turn of phrase, a "well-hidden philosopher" (139).

Another question that requires to be addressed now is on what grounds the thinkers mentioned in the preceding paragraphs could be lumped together under one blanket term. Identifying a set of common denominators of a definitional nature poses a substantial challenge since, as observed by Kevin Aho, contrary to what is suggested by the suffix "ism," existentialism does not constitute "a coherent and unified philosophical school" (*Existentialism*), a position shared by a number of scholars. Walter Kauffmann, one of the early critics of existentialism, goes as far as to contend that the very gist of existentialism lies precisely in its "[t]he refusal to belong to any school of thought, the repudiation of the adequacy of any body of beliefs whatever, and especially of systems" (12). Felicity Joseph et al. similarly stress that it is "difficult to argue that existentialism represents a single, unified philosophical movement" (3). John Macquarrie holds that "there is no common body of doctrine to which all existentialists subscribe, comparable, let us say to those central tenets that held together idealists or Thomists in the respective schools" (2) and finds it more felicitous to replace the word "philosophy" with the expression "style of philosophizing" (2) so as to recognise the differences between individual philosophers. Noreen Khawaja admits in the same vein that existentialism "lacks the deeper unity of a movement with shared objectives," instead exhibiting the characteristics of a "tradition" (4). Cooper, by contrast, while taking account of its internal diversity, maintains that there does exist "a coherent, definable philosophy of existentialism,"

[12] The most serious charge levelled against Nietzsche's credentials as an existentialist is that he does not believe that the human being is endowed with free will (Cooper, *Existentialism* 9; Michelman 245; McBride xii).

which must not be reduced to "a mere 'tendency'" (*Existentialism* 6). It should be made clear, however, that by no means do the previously mentioned commentators succumb to the pitfall against which he warns. Macquarrie also calls for not identifying existentialism with "a fad . . . applied to all sorts of people and activities that are only remotely, if at all, connected with existentialist philosophy" (1). By the same token, Joseph et al. do not hesitate to add that "it would be too hasty to conclude . . . that existentialism is, in fact, a term with no real referent and no real philosophical unity" (3).

Whereas Khawaja claims that it is "a pattern of intergenerational influence" (4) that binds existentialists together, most scholars identify certain "overlapping themes" (Aho, *Existentialism*) or underlying ideas and perspectives that demarcate the boundaries of existentialism. Michelman highlights a shift away from an abstract towards a more subjective approach to human existence "as it is lived, enjoyed, and suffered in the first person rather than described or explained from an ostensibly neutral third-person perspective" (1). In a similar vein, Aho brings to prominence "concern for the human situation *as it is lived* . . . felt and made meaningful by the concrete choices and actions of the existing individual" (*Existentialism*). Guignon, who also pays heed to the characteristic concentration on "the concrete nature of existence" (Introduction 1), pinpoints two "core assumptions of existentialist philosophy," as derived from Nietzsche and Kierkegaard: the absence of any pre-ordained values and the responsibility of each human being for self-constitution respectively (Introduction 2). For Barrett, "the whole problematic of Existentialism" (36) takes its roots in the spirit of modernity, permeated by "[a]lienation and estrangement; a sense of the basic fragility and contingency of human life" (36), a view in which he is followed by Cooper. The latter avers that "the whole existentialist enterprise" is fuelled by the problem of "*alienation* in its various forms—alienation from the world, from one's fellows, from oneself" (Cooper, *Existentialism* 8). With this in mind, elsewhere he develops a "manifesto" detailing the fundamental points of similarity among twentieth-century existentialists:

> The human predicament that inspires the very enterprise of philosophy; the distinctive character of human existence that distinguishes it from all other types of existence; the intimacy of the relationship between human beings and their world; the radical character of individual human freedom; the tone that a life led in appreciation of this freedom must possess; and the structure of interpersonal relations consonant with this radical, existential freedom. (Cooper, "Existentialism" 29)

The emphasis on human freedom, featuring so prominently in the passage quoted above, is considered to have an emblematic character also by Macquarrie. Accorded prime importance by existentialist thinkers, "[s]uch themes as freedom, decision, and responsibility" (4) constitute, according to the scholar, the pivots upon which their conception of the human being as "an existent rather than . . . as a thinking subject" (Macquarrie 3) rests. To these considerations, he adds "such topics as finitude, guilt, alienation, despair, death" (Macquarrie 4), echoing Calvin O. Schrag's description of existentialism as "an emphatic philosophy of human finitude in which the concepts of finite freedom, temporality, historicity, non-being, estrangement, anxiety, death, guilt, and resolve are central" (xi).

Joseph et al., in their turn, compile a list of eight crucial features, combining recurring leitmotifs, shared beliefs, and methodology, that distinguish the "family" of existentialists:

1. a focus on concrete lived experience as opposed to academic abstraction;
2. freedom;
3. death, finitude, mortality;
4. an interest in first-personal experiences and 'moods' . . .;
5. an emphasis upon authenticity and responsibility as well as the tacit denigration of their opposites . . .;
6. a suggestion that human individuality tends to be obscured and denied by the common social mores of the crowd, and, in the work of some, a pessimism about human relations per se;
7. a rejection of any external determination of morality or value . . .;
8. methodologically . . . many existentialists are invested in phenomenology and the use of transcendental reasoning. (3-4)

By no means complete, as the authors themselves concede (4), the catalogue certainly furnishes an informative picture of what renders existentialism a discrete philosophical phenomenon.

It is yet the concise definition formulated by Marjorie Grene that will be of chief interest from now onwards: "Existentialism is the philosophy which declares as its first principle that existence is prior to essence" (*Dreadful Freedom* 2). It will be elaborated with reference to Heidegger, Sartre, and Beauvoir and, most importantly, employed as the point of departure for expounding how they conceive of the existential situation of the human being, an analysis that will be later instrumental in introducing the concepts of anxiety, ambiguity, and authenticity.

1.1.2 HUMAN BEING AS CONCEIVED OF BY HEIDEGGER, SARTRE, AND BEAUVOIR

1.1.2.1 HUMAN BEING AS AN INDIVIDUAL EXISTENT

The dictum "existence precedes essence" was articulated by Sartre in the previously mentioned lecture *Existentialism Is a Humanism* (20), published in 1946 in the form of an essay under the same title, in which he set out the key elements of existentialist thought in an attempt to clear it of unwarranted accusations, thereby also establishing its credentials among a wider public. According to the philosopher, the slogan conveyed the belief that united Christian existentialists, including Jaspers and Marcel, and atheistic ones, including himself and Heidegger (Sartre, *Existentialism* 17). Commonly believed to be Sartre's flagship idea, it was, as he admits in *Being and Nothingness* (438), inspired and preceded by Heidegger's insight into the existential character of *Dasein* (Catalano 12), a central notion in his ontology used to designate the human being:[13] "*The essence of Dasein lies in its existence*" (*Being* 67). This claim was readily embraced also by Beauvoir, who in *The Second Sex* echoes her life-long partner, stating that "essence does not precede existence" (319).[14] What is implied, in the broadest terms, by these parallel formulas is that "there is no *essential* human nature, given in advance" (Warnock, *Philosophy* 53; see also Dreyfus 23; Webber 8). Granted, there is the human condition understood as the "basic features of existence" (Michelman 41), termed by Heidegger "existentialia," such as, for example, finitude, but in itself it "does not make man distinctively human" (Catalano 10). Most significantly, the human being is never a sum of "essential properties" (Cooper, *Existentialism* 70) constituting the fixed core of their selfhood.

In this respect, both Heidegger and Sartre stage a clear opposition between human beings and things. The former bases his fundamental ontology laid out in *Being and Time*—the enterprise of attending in depth to the so far neglected question of "the meaning of *Being*" (Heidegger 1)—on the criticism levelled against the pervasive misapprehension of human existence in terms of "the ontological structures appropriate to the Being of substances and physical objects" (Mulhall 38). A substance or a physical object possesses a number of

[13] There is certain contention among scholars as to whether the term "*Dasein*" denotes a mode of existence or an individual existent. John Haugeland, for instance, claims that *Dasein* is "neither people nor their being but rather a way of life shared by the members of some community" (160). This dissertation, however, follows the commonsensical interpretation proposed by Hubert L. Dreyfus: "The best way to understand what Heidegger means by Dasein is to think of our term 'human being,' which can refer to a way of being that is characteristic of all people or to a specific person—a human being" (14).

[14] Beauvoir was also well acquainted with Heidegger's version, as testified by its mention in "Pyrrhus and Cineas": "In a way, a man is always all that he has to be, since, as Heidegger shows, it is his existence that defines his essence" (123).

distinctive qualities that "make it the entity it is" (Gorner 25), but it does not "exist" in the strict philosophical sense of this word, reserved by Heidegger exclusively for *Dasein* (*Being* 67). It is merely present-at-hand, without relating to itself in any way: "they 'are' such that their Being can be neither a matter of indifference to them, nor the opposite'" (Heidegger, *Being* 68). *Dasein*, by contrast, eludes the category of "what-being" in the sense of not having "a specific essence or nature that it always necessarily manifests" (Mulhall 15): "with the term 'Dasein', we are expressing not its 'what' (as if it were a table, house or tree) but its Being" (Heidegger, *Being* 67). The prime characteristic that differentiates it from things is precisely its self-understanding: "Dasein . . . is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an *issue* for it" (Heidegger, *Being* 32). In other words, it displays concern for the manner in which its existence is disclosed (Gorner 23).

Further, while inanimate objects lack individuality, being frozen in an unchanging, formulaic essence, *Dasein* "has *in each case mineness*" in such a way that it can be referred to by a personal pronoun (Heidegger, *Being* 68). More than that, it is *Dasein* itself that chooses how to practically realise its mineness (Heidegger, *Being* 68) by interpreting its Being in a specific manner (Heidegger, *Being* 32). Human existence is thus far from being static. It presents itself as a dynamic reality that calls for one's active response, a fact that comes into particularly sharp relief when Heidegger describes *Dasein* as "Being-possible" (*Being* 183). As argued by Dreyfus:

> It makes no sense to ask whether we are essentially rational animals, creatures of God, organisms with built-in needs, sexual beings, or complex computers. Human beings can interpret themselves in any of these ways and many more, and they can, in varying degrees, become any of these things, but to be human is not be *essentially* any of them. Human being is essentially simply self-interpreting. (23)

Instead of being thrust into rigid actualities, *Dasein* has the power to re-mould itself on a continual basis by seizing existential opportunities.

As for Sartre, he starts his line of reasoning in *Existentialism Is a Humanism* by finding fault with the century-long tradition of treating the human being as the product of God's creative act, similar to the process of an artisan manufacturing an item according to a pre-established pattern, required for it to serve its intended purpose (20-21). He insists that the individual is always "a project that has a subjective existence, rather unlike that of a patch of moss, a spreading fungus, or a cauliflower" (Sartre, *Existentialism* 23), placing weight on their "[standing] out from nothing" (Macquarrie 42) onto a path of giving meaning to themselves. The human being

"materializes in the world, encounters himself, and only afterward defines himself" (Sartre, *Existentialism* 22).

In *Being and Nothingness,* the French philosopher captures the polarity between these two modes of existence in the concepts of being-in-itself and being-for-itself. As succinctly clarified by Beauvoir, who subscribed to his vision in this respect, they establish a contrast between "inert things that remain indefinitely equal to what they are" and "men who are consciousnesses and freedoms" respectively ("Jean-Paul Sartre" 229). The former simply "is what it is" (Sartre, *Being* 66). Self-identical, being-in-itself has no capacity to engage in self-reflection and self-transformation beyond a set of immutable traits, whereas being-for-itself is "what it is not and not . . . what it is" (Sartre, *Being* 67). Paradoxical and cryptic as this proclamation may sound, it is afforded a very lucid and cogent reading by Joseph S. Catalano. The first part identifies the existent with their existential possibilities, thereby attributing them with freedom and consciousness; the other one separates them from the brute circumstances of existence, such as their physicality, past, and environment (Catalano 84). Self-aware but always at a remove from itself, being-for-itself can never attain a permanent identity, always lingering in a state of flux. In summary, the human being is, to use Beauvoir's words, "a constantly renewed upspringing that is opposed to the fixed reality of things" ("Existentialism" 212).

It has been shown so far that Heidegger, Sartre, and Beauvoir proclaim the uniquely human power to be cognizant of one's own existence and endow it with individual significance, which is yet always fluid and irreducible to any inherent kernel of selfhood. The philosophers grant centrality to self-creation or, more precisely, self-creating, considering that they have in mind not a one-time accomplishment but an ever-renewed process unfolding through specific choices and, most crucially, actions. Macquarrie reiterates that the theme of action occupies a predominant position in the entire existentialist conception of the human being since "only in action does existence attain correctness and fullness" (136). True to this remark, *Dasein,* as has been noted, actualises its potentiality-for-Being only by seizing its possibilities. Its existence thus constitutes "a task, something to be accomplished, done" (Gorner 24), hence also a responsibility (Gorner 25). Furthermore, *Dasein* exists in the world not "as a disengaged subject" (Blattner 92) or "a spectator" (Mulhall 39) but as an agent practically involved in it.

Macquarrie's remark finds an even more potent illustration in Sartre's refutations of the charge that existentialism is a deeply disheartening philosophy, which fosters passivity by brandishing slogans about the ultimate meaninglessness of human life. Not only has it no intention of bringing anyone to despair, he avows, but, quite the contrary, it extols an active approach to existence: "The doctrine I am presenting to you is precisely the opposite of

quietism, since it declares that reality exists only in action" (Sartre, *Existentialism* 36-37). There is no other way to give meaning to one's life than by acting in a self-determined manner: "man is nothing other than what he makes of himself" (Sartre, *Existentialism* 22). In the absence of any pre-assigned human nature, it is projects undertaken that represent the only factor constitutive of one's identity: "What me mean to say is that a man is nothing but a series of enterprises, and that he is the sum, organization, and aggregate of the relations that constitute such enterprises" (Sartre, *Existentialism* 38). "All that is distinctive in man results from man's actions and does not precede those actions," explains Catalano, paying attention to the fact that Sartre basically equates the essence of the human being with their pursuits and deeds at a given time (10). The capacity for self-formation, however, is as much a privilege as a burden and, as a result, also a source of anguish (Sartre, *Existentialism* 23-27), an understanding that will figure centrally in the section on anxiety and authenticity.

In "Existentialism and Popular Wisdom," Beauvoir supports Sartre in this vindication of their philosophy and similarly demonstrates that its uplifting tenour arises from the core belief in human self-shaping agency: "Man is the unique and sovereign master of his destiny if only he wants to be. This is what existentialism affirms, and certainly this is an optimism" (213). As a matter of fact, she set forth her perspective on the existential meaning of action a year earlier in "Pyrrhus and Cineas" (1944). Although the essay's main objective is to lay foundation for ethical theory, Beauvoir does not start her argument by dwelling on "the ethical question, How ought I act?" but by responding to "the existential question, Why act?," as observed by Debra Bergoffen (Introduction 82). The work opens with Plutarch's account of a conversation between Pyrrhus, the king of Epirus, and Cineas, his chief adviser, to make a case for "the rationality of action itself" against all the odds (Bergoffen, Introduction 81). The ancient ruler reveals his plans of seizing control of the entire world, land by land, eventually admitting that he will rest once there is nothing left to conquer, to which Cineas retorts, "Why not rest right away?" (90). The latter essentially undermines the sense of undertaking any project, considering that it unavoidably leads back to the starting point and thus can never secure a sense of fulfilment once and for all. Even if he is right insofar as "there are neither absolute ends of, nor guaranteed justifications for, our projects" (Bergoffen, Introduction 82), Beauvoir explicitly takes the side of the king ("Pyrrhus" 113) when it comes to "the ontological truth of his position: to be human is to act" (Bergoffen, Introduction 82). Action is not a mere option but the very condition of self-determination; the human being "must act" (Beauvoir, "Pyrrhus" 139), otherwise receding into an abyss of self-annihilation (Beauvoir, "Pyrrhus" 113). Existence unfolds itself only through ever new ventures and goals: "He [the human being] haunts, he

fishes, he fashions instruments, he writes books: these are not diversions or flights but a movement toward being; man makes so as to be [faire pour être]" (Beauvoir, "Pyrrhus" 115). Importantly, Beauvoir underlines that all human efforts entail the hazard of failure but at the same time affirms equally emphatically that "[w]e must assume our actions in uncertainty and risk, and that is precisely the essence of freedom" ("Pyrrhus" 139). To be human is to act, fail and persevere in action despite failure, a prospect that, as remarked by Stella Sandford, should be by no means regarded as bleak in the philosopher's intention: "the necessity for us to act in the full acknowledgement of the paradoxes of action and the potential meaninglessness of existence is not done grudgingly or in resignation but, on the contrary, in joy" (20).

The philosophical content of "Pyrrhus and Cineas" embodies yet another signature of existentialist thought, namely its pronounced emphasis on the futural dimension of existence. The existentialists see the human being from the viewpoint of "what he is on the way to becoming in the pursuit of projects issuing from a reflective concern for his life" (Cooper, *Existentialism* 3), prioritising the future over the present, whereby theirs is "the philosophy of transcendence" (Beauvoir, "Existentialism" 212). The notion of transcendence runs throughout the aforementioned essay, repeated later in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* and *The Second Sex,* wherever Beauvoir strives to give justice to the truth of human reality: "man is transcendence" ("Pyrrhus" 212); "[t]o exist genuinely is not to deny this spontaneous movement of my transcendence" (*Ethics* 13-14), "a being who is transcendence" (*Second Sex* 68). By this she means "a perpetual surpassing" (Beauvoir, "Pyrrhus" 102) of the given towards the new, unknown and not yet realised, or, in other words, "expansion toward an indefinitely open future" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 37). Not "a vessel that docilely allows itself to be filled up" (Beauvoir, "Pyrrhus" 98), the human being continues to move forward beyond their current circumstances, never fully converging with their aims. The future demarcates all human activity not as a fixed point in time but as a renewed deferral: "He has the infinity of his transcendence that can constantly push back the horizon toward which it rushes" (Beauvoir, "Pyrrhus" 116).

In formulating these ideas, Beauvoir certainly draws on Sartre (Arp, *Bonds* 23), whose stress on the future surfaces most evidently in the previously commented dictum that being-for-itself is "being what it is not" (Sartre, *Being* 88). According to Hazel E. Barnes, this maxim expresses a conviction that "his present being [that of the human being] has meaning only in the light of the future towards which he projects himself" (Translator's Introduction xix). Sartre situates human existence in the sphere of potentiality consistently throughout his *opus magnum.* Elsewhere he rephrases his insight in the form of another paradox: "I am the self which I will be, in the mode of not being it" (Sartre, *Being* 32). Although possibilities define existents, they

are simultaneously always beyond them, never rigidifying into stable realities. The future is an evanescent horizon of existence, continuing to slip beyond one's full grasp: "what I project as my future being is always nihilated and reduced to the rank of simple possibility because the future which I am remains out of my reach" (Sartre, *Being* 36).

In this framework, transcendence consists precisely in the negating power of consciousness. Negation is considered by Sartre to operate as "a single transcendental condition of conceptuality . . . and of perception" (Gardner 65). For instance, when we enter a café and notice that certain Pierre with whom we have an appointment is not there, the man's absence "haunts" the whole place, becoming almost tangible to us (Sartre, *Being* 9-10). In the same way, "[c]onsciousness confronts its past and its future as facing a self which it is in the mode of not-being" (Sartre, *Being* 34). It is capable of abandoning and revising projects undertaken hitherto and apprehending itself from the point of view of opportunities that lie ahead or new goals and plans that have to be brought to life. As neatly summarised by Iris Murdoch:

> Consciousness is negation, nothingness; it makes itself by negating the given, the brute thingy world , on one side—and it makes itself also by aspiring, on the other side, toward an ideal completeness. So consciousness is both *rupture* (the break with the given) and *project* (aspiration to totality): both these characteristics Sartre equates with freedom and the latter he connects with value. Freedom, considered as negation and project, is the main character of human consciousness. (34).

Neither Beauvoir nor Sartre, however, pioneered in interpreting the human being as future-oriented and self-transcending. Heidegger articulated this idea before them by incorporating "the movement of self-surpassing" (Macann 94) into *Dasein's* fundamental structure of being-ahead-of-itself (Heidegger, *Being* 192*)*. It has been indicated earlier that *Dasein* is uniquely capable of understanding its own existence. Now it should be specified that, in this self-understanding, it posits itself as potentiality-for Being,[15] whereby "in each case Dasein is already *ahead* of itself" (Heidegger, *Being* 236). It stands out from itself and its reality, "pressing ahead into who [it] is to-be" (Blattner 165). Crucially, *Dasein's* aperture into possibilities is its ontological attribute, irrespective of how *Dasein* feels or behaves at a given moment. Heidegger provides an example of hopelessness, when life is experienced as a stagnant misery without any promise of new chances. Even such a condition actually "does not tear

[15] William Blattner expresses reservations against this translation of the original "*Seinkönnen*" proposed by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, warning that it may be erroneously understood as the development of latent qualities rather than capability, as intended by Heidegger (86).

Dasein away from its possibilities, but is only one of its own modes of *Being* towards these possibilities" (Heidegger, *Being* 279). As projection, *Dasein* "has not yet become 'actual'" (Heidegger, *Being* 279), and "it is *not yet*" (Heidegger, *Being* 186). Its existence consists in self-making and thus becoming unalterably until death.

By framing their discussion of existence in such terms as "not yet," "ahead-of-itself," or "outside of himself," the philosophers agree that it is fundamentally marked by a lack that cannot be ever replenished, no matter how many meaningful undertakings one assumes. The human being must be viewed as "unfinished and incomplete" under all circumstances (Macquarrie 50). For Heidegger, *Dasein* "is itself essentially *null*," but he advises against identifying this nullity with "a privation, where something is lacking in comparison with an ideal which has been set up but does not get attained in Dasein" (*Being* 331). What he intends to communicate is rather that since *Dasein* is defined by what has not yet taken shape, it is by force nothing. Its nullity stems from the very mode of projection upon yet unrealised opportunities (*Being* 331). Further, "a lack of totality" specific to human existence lies in the fact that "there is always something that Dasein has *not yet become*. . . . there is always something left for Dasein to do" (Sembera 148-149). Finally, projection upon a gamut of options necessarily involves selection and rejection of some of them, so *Dasein* is affected also by its negative choices (Heidegger *Being* 331).

For Sartre, the negating power of consciousness evidences that consciousness itself is "total emptiness" (Barnes, Translator's Introduction lvi). Accordingly, all human self-constructing activity ultimately fails to achieve any fixed objective: "as soon as we posit ourselves as a certain being . . . then by that very positing we surpass this being—and that not toward another being but toward emptiness, toward nothing" (Sartre, *Being* 62). As dispiriting as this idea may superficially appear, otherwise being-for-itself would lapse into being-in-itself, which coincides entirely with its pre-determined essence, having plenitude but no freedom. Most significantly, on this understanding, nothingness not only is the pre-requisite of freedom but also constitutes freedom: "freedom is really synonymous with lack" (Sartre, *Being* 565). This is why the notion is absolutely salient to Sartre's analysis of human existence and the philosopher categorically rejects all suggestions that consciousness could be filled with any content: "If we start by conceiving of man as a plenum, it is absurd to try to find in him afterwards moments or psychic regions in which he would be free" (Sartre, *Being* 441). Nothingness signifies freedom, hence also "a lack of *completed possibilities*"; as a result, one "must always remain unsatisfied as long as [one] is conscious" (Warnock, *Philosophy* 45). The same standpoint is adopted by Beauvoir, who acknowledges human incompleteness in all her major writings, voicing such opinions as

"[h]is being [that of the human being] is lack of being, but this lack has a way of being which is precisely existence" (*Ethics* 13) or "in his pure subjectivity, the human being is *nothing*" (*Second Sex* 319).

The picture that emerges from this section so far is that of the human being as a free, radically self-making, and self-transcending entity. This picture requires to be supplemented by the aspect of facticity, understood as all constraints that impose limitations on human existence (Macquarrie 147), including one's physicality, sexuality, socio-historical situation, and cultural circumstances. It is necessary to remember that "I never start from scratch, nor do I ever have before me a *tabula rasa*. I am always already in a situation, bringing to it capacities that are already fixed within fairly narrow limits" (Macquarrie 149). By no means are these factors regarded by the existentialists as inexorable determinants; they are malleable in the course of self-fashioning. Still, they form a framework in which one is embedded and as such cannot be ignored; as underlined by Macquarrie, "when one speaks of possibility, one must have in mind factical possibility" (149). Considering the foregoing, existence has at its very heart tension between possibility and facticity (Macquarrie 149), with which one is required to wrestle.

Heidegger makes allowance for the factical side of *Dasein* when he introduces the notion of thrownness. The term is used in *Being and Time* to convey Dasein's condition of "*being delivered over*" (Heidegger 174) to existence without any conscious choice on its part: "As being, Dasein is something that has been thrown into its 'there,' but *not* of its own accord" (Heidegger 329). *Dasein* is cast into a particular location, historical time, and context, "alongside a definite range of definite entities within-the-world" (Heidegger, *Being* 264). Its freedom to shape itself is always practiced within the boundaries of a given reality, "the range of its possibilities [being] related to the situation it has been thrown into" (Onof 48). While arguing that *Dasein* exists in the mode of Being-possible, Heidegger thus at the same time adds emphatically that what he has in mind is "*thrown possibility* through and through" (*Being* 183) or "*thrown projection*" (*Being* 265) rather than possibility and projection pure and simple. Thereby, the philosopher foregrounds the conjunction of continual self-surpassing with restrictions imposed by facticity, where the former has the latter as its background: "It is not a free-floating self-projection; but its character is determined by thrownness as a Fact of the entity which it is" (*Being* 321). The world as a nexus of socio-historical meanings inevitably renders "certain possible ways of being a self . . . opened up for Dasein and others . . . closed off" (Dreyfus 300). Importantly, facticity must be radically differentiated from "the factuality of something present-at-hand" (Heidegger *Being* 321). *Dasein*, as intimated earlier, does retain

the leeway to choose specific possibilities from among those delivered to it and utilise them in an inventive manner.

Further, apart from being determined by its environment, *Dasein* is delimited also in a strictly temporal sense by "the inexorable certainty of death" (Sembera 157), which makes it a "*finite transcendence*" (Vogel 22). Death cannot be either chosen or evaded but must be accepted. Most fundamentally, by using such expressions as "Being-towards-the-end" or "Being-towards-death," Heidegger envisages mortality as an integral and ever-present part of Dasein's existence, looming over all its endeavours as "the possibility of [its] absolute impossibility" (Heidegger, *Being* 294), a nihilating force that may strike the final blow at any moment. As the philosopher quips, "'[a]s soon as man comes to life, he is at once old enough to die'" (Heidegger, *Being* 289).

In "Pyrrhus and Cineas," Beauvoir takes a cue from the author of *Being and Time* in juxtaposing transcendence against facticity (Sandford 27) to declare that existence partakes of both: "A man is freedom and facticity at the same time. He is free, but not with that abstract freedom posited by the Stoics; he is free in situation" (124). Similar to Heidegger, she also emphasises that the human being "does not coincide with his situation" (Beauvoir, "Pyrrhus" 122) but is destined to go beyond its limits through self-chosen projects. Nevertheless, facticity is this aspect of existence that exhibits special vulnerability to external influences, most notably violence inflicted by other people. Mindful of this, she finds it justified to maintain the Cartesian distinction between freedom and power; whereas the former cannot be ever obliterated, forming part of the human ontological constitution, the latter "is finite, and one can increase it or restrict it from the outside" (Beauvoir, "Pyrrhus" 124).

The essay provides only an overture to Beauvoir's nuanced perspective on the human condition developed over time and laid out most comprehensively in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* and later, in the form of a feminist critique of patriarchal society, in *The Second Sex*. Since the key claims of these two texts will be examined at length in the subsequent sections, for now it is salutary only to adumbrate the general directions taken by Beauvoir in them. The former work posits that "[t]he self can neither be reduced to its facticity nor be identified with a radical break from it" (Keltner 202), combining, instead, the given with the undefined in a tension-ridden unity. Her *opus magnum*, in turn, lends special prominence to the uneasy interrelationship between transcendence and immanence, which may be construed as respectively "activities that enable self-expression" and "[l]abors . . . required for the sheer perpetuation of existence" (Veltman 115): "In truth, all human existence is transcendence and immanence at the same time; . . . These two moments are implied in every living movement"

(Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 506). Most importantly, the opposition plays a prime role in what is lauded by various scholars not only as "a crucial mark of Beauvoir's thought" (Bergoffen, *Philosophy* 54) but also as "one of her most important contributions to existentialist philosophy" (Sandford 57), namely the idea of situated freedom, which takes account of the positioning of the human being within a socio-cultural system and its effects. While firmly clinging to the belief in the fundamental ontological freedom of self-determination, Beauvoir concedes that its practical exercise may be sometimes severely compromised by oppressive external conditions, which deprive one of the necessary means to autonomously construct meanings and values.

The idea described above mitigates the Sartrean insistence on the absolute character of freedom in *Being and Nothingness*.[16] Sartre does recognise that the human being is a mixture of transcendence and facticity (Catalano 82; Cooper, "Existentialism" 34) but conceptualises the relationship between these two aspects in a different manner. On his account, facticity is the foundation of freedom; it is yet freedom that endows facticity with significance: "Without facticity freedom would not exist—as a power of nihilation and of choice—and without freedom facticity would not be discovered and would have no meaning" (Sartre, *Being* 495-496). Although no one can choose to be born under specific circumstances, these circumstances do not represent an objective constraint on human agency but a situation open to subjective interpretation: "I confer on it its meaning and its resistance" (Sartre, *Being* 83). The individual is always an architect of their own life: "in being born I take a place, but I am responsible for the place which I take" (Sartre, *Being* 495). One continually nihilates brute facts of existence through future-oriented and self-surpassing actions, the result being that "[t]he given in no way enters into the constitution of freedom" (Sartre, *Being* 487). It is true that facticity "does not cease to haunt the for-itself" (Sartre, *Being* 309), reminding it of "its unjustifiable presence in the world" (Sartre, *Being* 84*)*; nevertheless; it is precisely by raising alertness to the groundlessness of existence that it "causes me to apprehend myself simultaneously as totally responsible for my being" (Sartre, *Being* 309). "I have to own up to it," explains Steven Crowell, "but it does not excuse (because it does not cause) what I subsequently do" (214). Most strikingly, when Sartre opines that "I am responsible for everything, in fact, except for my very responsibility, for I am not the foundation of my being" (*Being* 555), he literally does

[16] There are scholars who disagree with the mainstream interpretation of Sartre's absolute freedom that will be presented in what follows, among them Sebastian Gardner, who argues that it draws an erroneous picture of a "megalomaniacal elevation of the self" (157), not intended by the philosopher himself. For the whole discussion, see Gardner 157-161.

not allow for any extenuating circumstances where human freedom would be impaired, let alone abolished. He believes that "even torture does not dispossess us of our freedom" (Sartre, *Being* 524) since there is always space for deciding how to respond to a given position. Maltreatment and persecution "can have meaning only on and through the foundation of my free choice," an example being anti-Semitic restrictions, which could be simply ignored, vehemently opposed or meekly withstood (Sartre, *Being* 524).

1.1.2.2 HUMAN BEING IN A COMMUNITY

The present section has so far concerned itself with the existential structure of the human being as an individual, without giving much regard to their relation to the surrounding environment, apart from the mentions of Heidegger's thrownness and Beauvoir's situated freedom. This lacuna requires to be filled now since "[e]xistence is fundamentally communal in character," as remarked by Macquarrie (75). The problem is that, as a matter of fact, existentialism has faced, a barrage of criticism for its alleged "solipsistic proclivities" (Cooper, *Existentialism* 166) and "individualism . . . to the neglect of the social and communal character of existence" (Schrag 200). While it can be hardly denied that the existentialists attach preeminent attention to the individual subject—as proclaimed by Sartre himself in *Existentialism Is a Humanism*[17]—this does not presuppose that they remain oblivious to the worldly and intersubjective side of human existence. Schrag refutes any suggestions to the contrary, drawing a sharp line between "[t]he accentuation of the reality of the individual" and solipsistic individualism (201). Cooper concurs with this standpoint, holding that human imbrication in a shared reality features prominently in existentialist thought: "The self, for the Existentialist, far from being a hermetically sealed 'pure ego', is an embodied engagement in a world where, necessarily, it is alongside others" (*Existentialism* 166). The aim of the present sub-section will be thus to probe into how this is reflected in the thought of Heidegger, Sartre, and Beauvoir.

It has been already established that *Dasein* from the very beginning finds itself located within a definite socio-historical space. Further, it does not disinterestedly observe this setting from afar, enclosed within the bounds of its own subjectivity, but interacts with it on an ongoing basis. Critical of the Cartesian tradition in philosophy, Heidegger sought to erase the dualism of subject and object, which drives a distance between the human being, conceived of as an isolated atomistic entity, and the external world, by substituting it with "the unity of structure of being-in-the world": "Self and world belong together in the single entity, the Dasein" (*Basic*

[17] "What they [existentialists philosophers, including Jaspers, Marcel, Heidegger, and Sartre himself] have in common is simply their belief that … subjectivity must be our point of departure" (Sartre, *Existentialism* 20).

297). Significantly, being-in-the-world is not a mere incidental or occasional expression of *Dasein's* varying levels of engagement with its surroundings but a "constitutive state" (Heidegger, *Being* 78). As noted by Lauren Freeman, his originality consists in that he "does away with a model of subjectivity which understands human beings as cut off or wholly separated from the world" ("Reconsidering" 375). The human being cannot take an individual shape in separation from the world: "Dasein itself has a 'Being-in-space' of its own; but this in turn is possible only *on the basis of Being-in-the-world in general*" (Heidegger, *Being* 82). As concluded briefly by Dreyfus, the world "is what makes individual human beings possible" (98).

The "in" of being-in-the-world by no means implies a strictly spatial location. The relationship that binds *Dasein* to the world is not parallel to that between water and a glass into which it is poured, i.e. physical containment (Heidegger, *Being* 79). What this "in" nods to in Heidegger's scheme is rather a connection predicated on familiarity and absorption that stems from Dasein's "[dwelling] alongside" its environment (*Being* 80). In his interpretation, Drefyus exploits the connotations of the word "inhabiting." "When we inhabit something," he comments, "it is no longer an object for us but becomes part of us and pervades our relation to other objects in the world" (45). It is thus more justified to draw analogies with the "in" of "being in love" or "being in business," which signifies "*involvement"* (Dreyfus 41). This "emotional and practical" (Golomb 67) attachment is condensed in what Heidegger calls "concern" (*Being* 83), listing a number of its possible manifestations: "having to do with something, producing something, attending to something and looking after it, making use of something, giving something up and letting it go, undertaking, accomplishing, evincing, interrogating, considering, discussing, determining" (*Being* 83). Interestingly, and somehow counterintuitively, concern reveals itself, albeit in a "deficient" manner, also in those attitudes that exhibit a lack of interest and detachment, such as "[l]eaving undone, neglecting, renouncing, taking a rest" (Heidegger, *Being* 83). *Dasein* is thus "*fascinated by* the world" (Heidegger, *Being* 88) in the sense of relating to worldly entities "concernfully and with familiarity" (Heidegger, *Being* 138). Heidegger goes here against the grain of the Western philosophical tradition and places a premium on engaged dealings as more primordial than mere perception (Gorner 39-40; Dreyfus 60). He juxtaposes theoretical contemplation against practical use of equipment, understood as everything that may be employed for a variety of applications (Heidegger, *Being* 97), showing itself in the mode of readiness to hand, as "manipulable in the broadest sense and at our disposal" (Heidegger, *Being* 98).

Most crucially, such ready-to-hand pieces of equipment encountered by Dasein in the world bring to light the simultaneous presence of other *Daseins*, who may put them to their own uses (Heidegger, *Being* 154). Whereas Heidegger never refutes his earlier claim that the human being has "some sort of exclusive and unique relationship to [their] existence" (Wrathall and Murphey 10) by virtue of mineness, at no point does he grant them a purely "private sphere of experience and meaning, which is self-sufficient and intelligible in itself" (Dreyfus 90). Quite the reverse, the space in which *Dasein* abides is "always the one that [it] share[s] with Others" (Heidegger, *Being* 155). More than that, it is this public intersubjective arena, in which individuals confront each other on a daily basis while concernfully handling equipment in the pursuit of their individual ends, that takes precedence over "one's 'own' closest (domestic) environment" (Heidegger, *Being* 65; see also Olafson 20, Drefyus 90).

Consequently, in Being-in-the-world, *Dasein* has also Being-with Others as its essential mode of existing (Heidegger, *Being* 155). As insistently highlighted by Heidegger, the "reciprocal presence" (Olafson 10) of *Dasein* and others built into this concept assumes an ontological character, which means that it constitutes the underlying framework of human life, irrespective of whether one intensely and enthusiastically seeks interpersonal interactions or avoids them (Heidegger, *Being* 160). For Dreyfus, Being-with manifests itself in the very potentiality for reaching out to other people, to the extent that it "would still be a structure of my Daseining even if all other Daseins had been wiped out" (149). Analogically to what is the case with concern and equipment, aloneness is only "a deficient mode of Being-with" (Heidegger, *Being* 157), which paradoxically proves the inseparability of *Dasein* and others, considering that "[t]he Other can *be missing* only *in* and *for* a Being-with" (Heidegger, *Being* 157). Further, insofar as Being-with fundamentally structures existence, *Dasein's* inherent understanding of itself always goes hand in hand with "the understanding of Others" (Heidegger, *Being* 161). By the same token, preoccupation with the shape of one's own life cannot be abstracted from the broader interhuman context; as concisely put by Blattner, "[i]n caring about who *I* am, I care about who *others* are" (39). Fellow *Daseins* "are not encountered as person-Things present at hand: we meet them 'at work', that is, primarily in their Being-in-the-world" (Heidegger, *Being* 156). Heidegger calls this manner of approaching other people "solicitude," with the proviso that he has does not intend to necessarily evoke the positive associations with attentiveness, support and benevolence as are attached to the word in its common usage (Gorner 62). Once again, solicitude is *Dasein's* ontological trait, and may cover a broad range of attitudes at the ontic level, not least enmity, insensitivity and indifference,

where the last one, in point of fact, is the most typical of "everyday, average Being-with-one another" (Heidegger, *Being* 158).

The communal aspect of existence in the sense sketched above does not diminish one's individuality but sets the stage for it to crystallise. In other words, "intersubjectivity is not the denial of subjectivity but its further specification" (Mulhall 66). Nevertheless, Heidegger also discerns another side to *Dasein's* grounding in the social field and integrates it into his concept of the they-self (*das Man*).[18] It comes into central focus in his exposition of anxiety and (in)authenticity and will be subject to careful scrutiny in the relevant sections of this chapter, but it is apposite to give some introductory remarks on its meaning beforehand. Like understanding, mineness, being-in, being-with, concern, and solicitude, the they-self is listed among existentiales as "*a primordial phenomenon*" that "*belongs to Dasein's positive constitution*" (Heidegger, *Being* 167). While *Dasein* enjoys the singularity of a unique self-interpreting entity, "*[p]roximally*, it is not 'I', in the sense of my own Self, that 'am', but rather the Others, whose way is that of the 'they'" (Heidegger, *Being* 167). Despite the misleading use of a personal pronoun in translation into English, the they-self does not designate any "*definite* Others"—neither "some people" nor "the sum of them all" (Heidegger, *Being* 164). In applying the term, Heidegger does not have in mind an intersubjective collectivity, a social subject, or "an oppressive super-entity that tries to dictate or anticipate one's every move," as explained by Frederick A. Olafson (39), but an anonymous and not readily transparent reality. "[A] free-floating, impersonal construct" (Mulhall 68), it refers to a plurality of communal norms, practices, rules of conduct, interpretations, and values governing human presence in a particular socio-historical with-world, sometimes without even being consciously recognised.

Various scholars point here to the two-fold implications of *Dasein's* immersion in the they-self (Dreyfus 143; Guignon, "Authenticity" 225-227). On the one hand, "the 'they' itself Articulates (sic) the referential context of significance" (Heidegger, *Being* 167). Uprooted from this realm of implicit conventions, one would not be able to grasp oneself and one's environment as meaningful. The they-self pre-constructs frames for apprehension of existence and common understanding between human beings. Guignon maintains that "[o]ur everyday actions make sense only because they instantiate or exemplify the taken-for-granted patterns and norms of the shared life-world" ("Authenticity" 225-226). Nevertheless, the scholar admits

[18] This dissertation consistently uses Heideggerian terms as translated by Macquarrie and Robinson, but, according to Drefyus, the phrase the they-self does injustice to Heidegger's intent. It mistakenly implies that *Dasein* is "not part of *Das Man*" (xi) and should be substituted with "the one" (151-152). Blattner, for instance, renders the term as "the Anyone" (69).

that at the same time the they-self induces conformity with "the lowest common denominator of what is acceptable and well adjusted" (Guignon, "Authenticity" 226). Its obfuscating, de-individualising and levelling impact is precisely what rivets Heidegger's attention throughout much of *Being and Time*. According to Heidegger, the everyday relation of *Dasein* to the they-self is not one of mere participation but "*subjection*" (Heidegger, *Being* 164), involving dispossession of private interpretations, ideals and ends: "It [Dasein] itself *is* not; its Being has been taken away by the Others" (Heidegger, *Being* 164). *Dasein* becomes ignorant of and unresponsive to its own faculty of self-creation. It abdicates its power of choice, blindly adhering to public canons and routines (Heidegger, *Being* 239).

As for Sartre, the accusations of excessive concentration on the individual may appear not entirely groundless, as acknowledged by Schrag (134). The author of *Being and Nothingness* rejects the concept of Being-with or *Mitsein* for its flawed and selective conceptualisation of intersubjectivity. In his *opus magnum,* he accuses Heidegger of mistakenly postulating that the self and the Other are bound together in "a sort of ontological solidarity for the exploitation of this world" (Sartre, *Being* 245). The German philosopher comes under criticism for excluding the possibility of antagonism to privilege one type of relation (Sartre, *Being* 247). For Sartre, the self and the other cannot co-exist in reciprocal unity as a "crew" (*Being* 246); they pose an irremediable threat to one other's freedom, which leads him to famously state that "[t]he essence of the relations between consciousnesses is not the Mitsein; it is conflict" (Sartre, *Being* 429), a problem that will be elaborated upon in the subsequent sections.

Nevertheless, Sartre never falls into the pitfall of solipsism, affirming, as he does, that one is perforce cognizant of the existence of others through their corporeal presence and grasps oneself as perceived by others (*Being* 218; see also Warnock, *Existentialist Ethics* 27), a premise from which he infers that there is "another mode of existence as fundamental as being-for-itself" and it is "being-for-others" (*Being* 218). Further, in *Existentialism Is a Humanism,* the philosopher explicitly disproves the allegations of championing a vision of the human being as disconnected from the world at large. He reiterates that self-awareness is inextricably coupled with the awareness of others. Further, others not only contribute to but also determine the very possibility of self-knowledge, as well as validating one's own idea of self: "Therefore, the man who becomes aware of himself directly in the *cogito* also perceives all others, and he does so as the condition of his own existence. He realizes that he cannot be anything . . . unless others acknowledge him as such" (Sartre, *Existentialism* 41). Second, all our individual choices exert a profound influence on other people, creating a universal meaning: "in choosing himself, he is choosing for all men" (Sartre, *Existentialism* 24). It is impossible to

dissociate the pursuit of one's private ventures from the interpersonal world, so one bears double responsibility for themselves and for fellow human beings: "I cannot set my own freedom as a goal without also setting the freedom of others as a goal" (Sartre, *Existentialism* 49). In a passage that somehow recalls Heidegger, Sartre concludes that "[w]e are thus immediately thrust into a world that we may call 'intersubjectivity'" (*Existentialism* 42).

It may be argued that Beauvoir's approach to the relationship between the self and the other strikes a balance between the standpoints of Heidegger and Sartre (Kruks, *Situation* 222). In "Pyrrhus and Cineas," she clearly escapes from solipsism (Tidd, "Self-Other" 230) by showing that, in transcending themselves through a series of forward-looking projects, the human being is oriented also on other people: "my subjectivity is not inertia, folding in upon itself, separation, but on the contrary, movement toward the other" (Beauvoir 93). At the same time, the long history of conflicts in the world prevents her from believing that there could be "any preestablished harmony between men" (Beauvoir, "Pyrrhus" 108). While strategic alliances are possible, goals of individual human beings often clash with each other, so universal solidarity is precluded. Most basically, then, "[f]reedoms are neither unified nor opposed but separated" (Beauvoir, "Pyrrhus" 108).

Over the years, Beauvoir's thought evolved towards greater affinity with Heidegger, as evidenced by *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (Gothlin, "Simone de Beauvoir's" 46), where, in opposition to Sartre, she deems "interdependence of self and other" to be "an ontological, and not a merely psychological, given of existence" (Simons, "Beginnings" 25). "The me-others relationship," she claims, "is as indissoluble as the subject-object relationship" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 72). Although nowhere does Beauvoir expressly espouse the Heideggerian Being-with, such formulations as the following ones essentially encapsulate the nub of his idea and leave no doubt that she integrates connection with others into the very structure of human existence (Gothlin, "Simone de Beauvoir's" 46): "Thus, every man has to do with other men. The world in which he engages himself is a human world in which each object is penetrated with human meanings" (*Ethics* 74); "the individual is defined only by his relationship to the world and to other individuals" (*Ethics* 156). Accordingly, the freedom of any individual is interlinked with the freedom of others in a reciprocal relation. For one thing, "his freedom can be achieved only through the freedom of others" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 156); for another, "[t]o will oneself free is also to will others free" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 73).

In *The Second Sex*, the term *Mitsein* explicitly finds its way into Beauvoir's conceptual repertoire and, despite being invoked few times, becomes one of the pillars of her thought in major departure from Sartre (Lundgren-Gothlin, *Sex* 220). As opposed to her partner, she claims

that the primordial experience of both sexes is that of togetherness, not division or discord: "men do not define themselves first as individuals; men and women have never challenged each other in individual fights; the couple is an original *Mitsein*" (de Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 69-70). There has been a rift between men and women, but it arose only with the emergence of patriarchal society, to serve the interests of the former (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 29). At a later point in the work, Beauvoir elaborates and refines her account to capture the complexity of this situation more accurately, stating that "the human reality . . . is at once *Mitsein* and separation" (*Second Sex* 81). The assertion complicates the Sartrean interpretation of *Mitsein,* which presumes that the concept must necessarily entail harmony and camaraderie. For Beauvoir, Being-with "does not mean that humanity is one and that everyone has the same goals and aspirations, living in some kind of friendly symbiosis" (Gothlin, "Reading" 58), contrary to what Sartre holds. Gothlin elucidates that, in Beauvoir's understanding, "humans are *Mitsein,* but this *Mitsein* can be lived either in separation and conflict or in friendship and solidarity" ("Reading" 58), and this nuanced idea effectively combines both Heidegger's insight that "human existence is always societal" and Sartre's emphasis on the basic antagonism between human beings (Lundgren-Gothlin, *Sex* 221).

1.2 ANXIETY

The preceding pages have traced how Heidegger, Sartre, and Beauvoir theorise the existential situation of the human being both as an individual and as a part of the world of things and people. It is opportune now to use this background for delving into the three concepts that guide this dissertation, commencing with anxiety.[19] As "a fundamental ontological affect," it figures among the paramount themes of all existentialist thought (Macquarrie 127), yet occupies a uniquely prominent position in Heidegger's philosophy (Cooper, *Existentialism* 130). An "ontological affect" is the key phrase here, for anxiety, as understood by Heidegger, must not be reduced to a sheer psychological feeling; its meaning goes far beyond the common usage of the word, designating a specific type of existential orientation. In the terminology of *Being and*

[19] The original German *Angst* is another term from *Being and Time* whose translation into English generates disagreement between scholars. Macquarrie acknowledges that his own choice, i.e. anxiety, is far from perfect; it evokes rather commonplace associations that do not cohere with the existential tone of Heidegger's usage (127). Nevertheless, he holds that it is more accurate than "dread," which gestures towards something closer to fear, and "anguish," which "suggests acute pain" (Macquarie 27). Cooper, however, refrains from using the word "anxiety" precisely due to its overtone of ordinariness (*Existentialism* 127). He retains the German original, considering that "it lacks the misleading connotations of the various English words" (Cooper, *Existentialism* 127).

Time, it represents "a basic state-of-mind of Dasein"[20] (Heidegger 179), and first it is necessary to disentangle what is hidden behind this formulation.

A state-of-mind is another structural facet of human existence, instantiated by moods or, put differently, attunement (Heidegger, *Being* 172-173). In introducing this concept, Heidegger sets out to reverse the traditional view that the world is originally apprehended through theoretical reflection, while emotional disposition towards an object of reflection arises only at a later point (Dreyfus 170). The philosopher presumes that in order to be receptive to the world and its contents at all, the human being must find itself brought into tune with it "before cognition and volition" (Heidegger, *Being* 175). This primordial "openness to the world" takes it root precisely in "the attunement of a state-of-mind," thanks to which intrawordly entities can have significance to *Dasein* (Heidegger, *Being* 176). If an item appears to be, for instance, threatening or appealing, it is because *Dasein's* Being-in-the-world has been "determined existentially beforehand in such a manner that what it encounters within-the-world can '*matter*' to it in this way" (Heidegger, *Being* 176). A mood is not a subjective response of an individual to their situation. As clarified by Matthew Ratcliffe, it does not merely "'colour' some already experienced world" but is integral to "the intelligibility of all our experiences, thoughts and activities" (48). Aho (*Heidegger's Neglect* 26) and Blattner (77) compare it graphically to a pre-existing and all-encompassing atmosphere in which one is steeped and through which one perceives the surrounding environment. Heidegger himself characterises its impact in terms of an assault (*Being* 176), emphasising the passivity of *Dasein* (Blattner 82), which is "delivered over" to a mood instead of plunging into it willingly (Heidegger, *Being* 173).

On this picture, moods and states-of-mind should be thus viewed not as expressive but rather as revelatory. First and foremost, they "disclose[] Dasein in its thrownness and its submission to that world" (Heidegger, *Being* 178). *Dasein* pre-reflectively intuits that it has been cast, without any reason, into a definite spatial and temporal matrix of significations, which forms a backdrop against which it must shape itself through projection. Paradoxically, however, this intuition strikes *Dasein "in the manner of an evasive turning-away"* (Heidegger, *Being* 175) from the exasperating truth that it carries. Further, moods are modes of *Dasein's* Being-in-the-world and accordingly expose Being-in-the-world (Heidegger, *Being* 176) with all the

[20] The rendition of the German *Befindlichkeit* as a state-of-mind is widely disputed for creating confusion as to the philosophical gist of the term. In their translation of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, Macquarrie and Robinson admit that it "fails to bring out the important connotation of finding oneself" (172n2). More seriously, Dreyfus rejects the phrase because it implies a subjective mental state, which, as will be elucidated in the present section, could not be further from Heidegger's intent (168). While he opts for "affectedness" (Dreyfus 168), numerous scholars, notably Guignon and Blattner, use "mood."

"connections and connection-wholes" constitutive of it as well as all "the existential possibilities for comportment towards intramundane entities" (Sembera 84). This is the reason why they neither have the character of psychic states nor fit into the division between objective and subjective or that between internal and external (Ratcliffe 11).

Heidegger elaborates the theory recapitulated above through the example of fear, which later serves him as a counterpoint to anxiety. The analysis unfolds in three parts, each devoted to one of the following structural elements: "(1) that in the face of which we fear, (2) fearing, and (3) that about which we fear" (Heidegger, *Being* 179). The first one is the "fearsome" or, more precisely, a factor that poses a threat to one's well-being (Heidegger, *Being* 179). Most crucially, it is always readily identifiable and menaces *Dasein* with an imminent, yet possibly avoidable, risk (Heidegger, *Being* 179-180). As for fearing, it refers to the fearsome being "freed and allowed to matter to us" (Heidegger, *Being* 180). In line with what has been argued earlier, fear does not arise from the reflective apprehension of an intrawordly entity as a possible source of threat but rather discloses this entity to *Dasein* in its hostile light (Heidegger, *Being* 180). Finally, the third element corresponds to *Dasein* itself, which, in its unique capability of being preoccupied with its own existence, is also the only one that can experience fear, both for its physical safety and for its existential possibilities (Heidegger, *Being* 180).

Anxiety and fear are akin to each other, both eliciting unease, but they differ fundamentally in one respect: whereas fear is directed at a particular event or object, anxiety cannot be ascribed to any identifiable source (Heidegger, *Being* 231). Although its presence is felt by *Dasein* with almost physical force—it "stifles one's breath," in Heidegger's phrase—it "'does not know' what that in the face of which it is anxious" (Heidegger, *Being* 231). Further, not only does anxiety conspicuously lack a determinable stimulus, but it also involves the experience of "the totality of involvements of the ready-to-hand or present-at-hand discovered within-the-world" losing its usual intelligibility (Heidegger, *Being* 231). At this point, it is imperative to note briefly, without going into details, which will be supplied in the discussion of (in)authenticity, that the everyday manner of *Dasein's* being is that of falling (Heidegger, *Being* 219). *Dasein* is wont to lose itself in the they-self, reproducing sedimented social practices and adopting ready-made interpretations rather than actively exploring its own capacity for creating meaning. Its total engrossment in publicness gives rise to "tranquilized self-assurance" (Heidegger, *Being* 233), where the world is taken for granted as a thoroughly familiar space. In anxiety, this "[e]veryday familiarity collapses" in the predominant feeling of uncanniness or not-being-at-home (Heidegger, *Being* 233). *Dasein* finds itself facing the world in bafflement as "an instrument that has failed to do its job," to use Dreyfus's metaphor (179). Violently torn away

from the underpinning structures of the they-self, other entities now "sink[] away" (Heidegger, *Being* 232), showing themselves as utterly meaningless, unserviceable and contingent.

This sense of "peculiar indefiniteness" (Heidegger, *Being* 233) and disruption to habitual settlement in the world is not a state of existential disarray but, quite the contrary, a privileged moment of "a total disclosure of the human condition" (Macquarrie 130). Once tranquilising and stabilising, hence also alienating, public interpretations have been stripped away, *Dasein* gains an illuminating glimpse into itself. What is uncovered, however, is not "who we really are," since the idea of permanent identity is entirely foreign to existentialism, but "*how* we are" (Blattner 160); it is the truth about the structure of human existence that comes to the surface. The hardly definable object of anxiety is nothing more than "Being-in-the-word as such," which functions simultaneously as "[t]hat *about which* anxiety is anxious" (Heidegger, *Being* 233). *Dasein* confronts the groundlessness of the world, which, despite being its framework of signification, "has itself no significance because it has not foundation in the nature of things" (Gorner 118) and the arbitrary character of the received truths in which it has so far placed unquestioned faith. Consequently, it encounters itself in "its *Being-free for* the freedom of choosing itself and taking hold of itself" (Heidegger, *Being* 232). In Blattner's words, "the transparency of self-constitution breaks down, and I become aware of myself as a self-constituter" (139). In the absence of any constant human nature, incessant pressing forward in the pursuit of self-chosen projects forms the only substance of my existence.

At the same time, anxiety awakens *Dasein* with a unique urgency and immediacy to the fact that, in this ceaseless onward motion, it is inevitably heading towards its death—the ultimate horizon of all existential possibilities (Heidegger, *Being* 294). Absorption in everydayness effectively eclipses this distressing reality, tempting one into various self-deceptive strategies. Death tends to be treated as an event awaiting one somewhere at the end of a long trajectory of life rather than as a lingering prospect. It is usually a misfortune that befalls other people, only "[giving] us the assurance still more plainly that 'oneself' is still 'living'" (Heidegger, *Being* 254). The disclosive power of *Angst*, by contrast, strikes one in the revelation of death as "that possibility which is one's ownmost, non-relational, not to be outstripped, certain, and yet indefinite" (Heidegger, *Being* 354). *Dasein* discerns that death is creeping into every moment of its life with the threat of definitely severing all its ties to the world. It cannot be either ceded onto someone else or escaped; its omnipresence must be recognised in all one's plans and ventures.

In summary, dissociated from public involvements, anxious *Dasein* comes to experience its own nothingness and freedom as bounded by facticity and finitude. While all states-of-mind by

definition have a revelatory effect, anxiety performs quite an outstanding function: the troubling revelation that it brings "individualizes Dasein for its ownmost Being-in-the-world, which as something that understands, projects itself essentially upon possibilities" (Heidegger, *Being* 232). With the insight that no socially enforced conventions and roles can ever fully ground its existence, *Dasein* becomes capable of taking ownership of itself. Exercising this capability, however, produces a disquiet of its own, related to the necessity of undertaking an endless self-creative effort without any solid foothold or guarantee of success. In consequence, anxiety, as noted by Dreyfus, concomitantly with opening the way towards self-determination, provokes a temptation to flee back into the shelter of comforting illusions (313). Whether its transformative potential will be unlocked depends solely on *Dasein*, who may choose either a resolute response leading to authenticity or inauthentic engulfment in the they-self, a choice that will be the subject of the subsequent sections.

Sartre, influenced by Heidegger in this scope (Barnes, Translator's Introduction xxiv), sees anxiety[21] as originating principally from the last-mentioned factor: the awareness of radical freedom of choice and its implications. In *Being and Nothingness*, he retains the distinction between anxiety and fear. Whereas the stimulus that elicits the latter is extrinsic to the experiencing subject, the one that provokes the former lies within themselves: "anguish is anguish before myself" (Sartre, *Being* 29). In more precise terms, fear concerns itself with "the situation as acting on the man" (Sartre, *Being* 29), as exemplified by the feelings that accompany a person walking along a narrow path over an abyss, mindful of the external threats to which they are vulnerable as "an object in the world, subject to gravitation" (Sartre, *Being* 30). Anxiety, by contrast, is focused on "the man as acting on the situation" (Sartre, *Being* 29). It is a disconcerting flash of realisation that one has unrestrained liberty to steer oneself in any direction, as famously epitomised by the vertigo "not of falling over the precipice, but of throwing myself over" (Sartre, *Being* 29). This is "'anguish in the face of the future'" (*Being* 32), one of the two types differentiated by Sartre. The other one is "anguish in the face of the past" (Sartre, *Being* 32), exemplified by the situation of a reformed gambler who approaches a gambling table and understands that the resolution that he made some time ago to never indulge in his addiction again is not binding any more. The past does not fix the human being into an immutable form. As a future-oriented and never-finished project, one must re-create oneself through new acts at every moment. Consequently, in order to shield himself against the risk of falling into a financial ruin, the gambler is forced to "remake it [his past commitment]

[21] The original French "*angoisse*" in Sartre's works is translated as "anguish," but, for the sake of clarity, anxiety will be used except for quotations.

ex nihilo and freely" (Sartre, *Being* 33). In both cases, a stark light is cast on the onus of non-negotiable responsibility that the individual bears for the shape of their existence. Its fabric is composed entirely of sovereign choices whose content cannot be derived either from any essential human nature or from any pre-established systems of values. As proclaimed in *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, "man is condemned to be free: . . . once cast into the world, he is responsible for everything he does" (Sartre 29). This is precisely the tormenting existential truth that anxiety impresses upon the human being, often pushing them into a trap of bad faith, a problem that will be brought up later.

Following the lead of Sartre, Beauvoir also connects anxiety with the burden of freedom requiring constant re-affirmation through self-chosen actions. In "Pyrrhus and Cineas," she takes distance from Heidegger's emphasis on living in the ever-present shadow of death to give pre-eminence to the impossibility of achieving fixity as the primary source of existential unease: "The nothingness that anguish reveals to me is not the nothingness of my death. It is the negativity at the heart of my life that allows me to constantly transcend all transcendence" (Beauvoir 114). What anxiety does is to bring the awareness that there will be no rest in acting as long as one lives. No project can secure a steadfast sense of plenitude; at the very moment of completion, it opens the door to another one, thereby occasioning what is called in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* "the anguish of . . . permanent choice" (Beauvoir 26).

In the aforementioned work, anxiety is illustrated by the bewilderment attendant to the passage from childhood to adolescence. Since their actions have no weight, a child can live in blissful insouciance, operating within the parameters pre-defined by adults: "He can do with impunity whatever he likes. He knows that nothing can ever happen through him" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 37). The measure of agency that one gains when moving into teenage years is experienced as a mixed blessing: both a gift of independence and a strain of investing one's life with significance; "it is not without great confusion that the adolescent finds himself cast into a world which is no longer ready-made, which has to be made; he is abandoned, unjustified, the prey of a freedom that is no longer chained up by anything" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 39). The adolescent feels with excruciating force that their choices may change reality, weighing heavily on "a world which is not the work of a strange power, but of himself, where his defeats are inscribed, and his victories as well" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 16). This gives rise to anxiety and then also to nostalgia for the times of oblivion to freedom and "its exigencies" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 60). One of these exigencies is the necessity of facing one's own existential ambiguity, which leads to the subject of the next section.

1.3 AMBIGUITY

Bergoffen has no doubt that the concept of ambiguity[22] plays a pivotal role in Beauvoir's philosophy. As its "driving force," it betokens the philosopher's originality and divergence from the Western philosophical tradition through subversion of the Cartesian dualism (Bergoffen, *Philosophy* 4) and "an either/or logic" (Keltner 203), which implants "some sort of radical *split*" (Bauer, *Simone de Beauvoir* 161) into the picture of the human being, notably that between "body and soul" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 8), where one side of the division is typically disparaged and the other one is idealised. Furthermore, according to various scholars (Bergoffen, "Between" 188; Langer 87), it also provides an understanding of the human condition that markedly modifies Sartre's position, exceeding its limitations. It has been already demonstrated in this chapter that Beauvoir attenuates the radicality of her partner when it comes to the scope of human freedom. Adamant that it is an unassailable ontological structure of existence, she simultaneously attempts to do justice to the multifarious constraints arising from facticity by throwing into relief the subject's practical situatedness in a communal world. The idea of ambiguity enunciates most clearly her distinctive attentiveness to the two co-existing poles of the human situation. It is thus expedient to devote the following paragraphs to this central notion, which, in Beauvoir's opinion, have been deliberately concealed from view by consecutive generations of philosophers (*Ethics* 7).

Beauvoir avails herself of the concept of ambiguity to bring to light the optimistic and deeply humanistic tenour of existentialism by shifting the point of gravity in the discussion of human existence from its absurdity to its "irreducible indeterminacy" (Langer 90): "To declare that existence is absurd is to deny that it can ever be given a meaning; to say that it is ambiguous is to assert that its meaning is never fixed, that it must be constantly won" (*Ethics* 129). This reorientation dovetails neatly with her logic of becoming that supersedes the supremacy of stable being. As argued by William Wilkerson, "[s]omething that becomes or changes is always in an indeterminate state with respect to those aspects that change" ("Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty" 225). One is born without any essential nature and never congeals into identity with a stabilised form. A project that must be re-assumed, the human being continually expands into

[22] The concept of ambiguity, associated most closely with Beauvoir, appears earlier in *Being and Time* as one of three typical manifestations of falling, together with idle talk and curiosity. The Heideggerian ambiguity signifies distorted discernment between "what is disclosed in a genuine understanding, and what is not" (*Being* 217), a state of existential obfuscation where "[t]he trivial and superficial is never clearly separated from the important and significant" (Schrag 186). Absorbed in and dominated by publicness, *Dasein* has a warped idea of the world, other *Daseins* and its own potentiality-for-Being, thereby "constantly *going wrong* [*versieht sich*] in its projects" (Heidegger, *Being* 218). This usage of the term, however, will not be of relevance to this dissertation.

an unsettled future, always reaching beyond what they are at the given moment. As a result, "new ways to define oneself and one's situation" always lie open (Weiss 172). Existence thus does have its meaning—a meaning that an individual is re-inventing on an ongoing basis through a multiplicity of open-ended goals, pursuits and engagements—but it does not coincide with any permanent reality. A part of parcel of the human situation, ambiguity corresponds to this state of irresolvable existential mutability and fluidity, escaping the desire for constancy.

The other sense in which Beauvoir applies the notion is that of "our state of existing in various modes that cannot be reconciled" (Deutscher 7). Ambiguity displaces the paradigm of disjunction, which radically separates opposites and either reduces them to sameness or amalgamates them into a homogenous unity (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 7), with the logic of both/and (Lundgren-Gothlin, "Gender" 6), where two seemingly mutually exclusive elements can occur side by side, constantly impinging on each other but never coinciding. Importantly, neither pole of such an antithetical dyad is given privilege, requiring the other one to be suppressed or denied. As contended by Kruks, in this "paradoxical reality" inscribed in the model of ambiguity, "each of two contradictory aspects of a single existent carries equal weight" (*Situation* 91). The human being exists as "singular rather than unified" and as "ambiguous rather than divided" (Bergoffen, "Between" 189). They are suspended in perpetual tension between opposing polarities, which together form a totality of their existence.

Beauvoir discerns several dimensions of ambiguity constitutive of the human condition. The first and "most fundamental of all" is "that every living movement is a sliding toward death" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 127). Just as Heidegger, Beauvoir treats death not as "the opposite of life, but its constant companion" (Sandford 24). In contrast to the German philosopher, however, she simultaneously looks at the problem from the other side, emphasising that "every movement toward death is life" (*Ethics* 127). The limited time everyone has on earth is filled at every moment with continual self-surpassing towards the not-yet, in the pursuit of ever new goals, as a result of which the present and the future are knit together in "a single temporal form" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 116). It is these projects, not death, that give the ultimate direction and purpose to one's life. Human existence is thus finiteness, but, paradoxically, "a finiteness which is open on the infinite" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 159).

Further, ambiguity resides in the fact that "a human is at the same time a consciousness and a material presence in the world" (Arp, *Bonds* 121), balancing between interiority and exteriority, without being able to cling firmly to either side. Despite the prevailing sense of enclosure in an inviolable cocoon of private experience, one actually remains in the clutches of factors beyond human control: "He asserts himself as a pure internality against which no

external power can take hold, and he also experiences himself as a thing crushed by the dark weight of other things" (Beauvoir, *Ethics 7).* By the same token, the pride of individuality and agency continually intermingles with the mortifying shame of being in no way superior to other creatures in the world, operating, just as they do, within frames that put a brake on one's aspirations: "Each one has the incomparable taste in his mouth of his own life, and yet each feels himself more insignificant than an insect within the immense collectivity whose limits are one with the earth's" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 9). For Beauvoir, human existence thus constitutes "a synthesis of freedom and constraint" rather than pure freedom, an insight which, according to Kruks (*Situation* 102), bears witness to her philosophical departure from Sartre, for whom facticity is posterior to consciousness and acquires significance only from it. In contradistinction to the author of *Being and Nothingness,* she places the immanence of a material body, situated under specific physical, social, cultural and historical conditions, on the same plane as the self-transcendence of consciousness (Kruks, *Situation* 102). The human being is never exclusively a self-conscious subject endowed with the power of self-determination, enjoined to interpret the world and put their individual stamp on it, or solely an object delimited by extraneous circumstances, but necessarily "at once subject and object" (Card 15). These two positions interlace, neither being reducible to the other, holding one in a state of uncurable strain.

Apart from the uneasy relation between freedom and facticity within which human life is contextualised, the subject-object ambiguity reveals its presence also in interpersonal relationships. The experience of transcendence inspires the confidence of being "a sovereign and unique subject amidst a universe of objects" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 7), who continues to surge beyond the given through meaning-making activities. In the eyes of other people, each of whom regards themselves as equally unique, one appears, however, to be nothing more than an object "in the collectivity on which he depends" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 7). Every human being has their own space of individuality constituted by personal enterprises, plans, desires, ideas, and perceptions, but this is not the perspective through which one is usually appraised by other individuals. As noted by Sandford, "for others," who have no access to my consciousness, "I am often no more than the exterior form that our brute existence assumes" (27). The outward sphere of facticity renders me only one of many ordinary elements of the world in which those others live, a means to their personal ends or, quite the contrary, a hindrance (Sandford 27).

This leads directly to another vital aspect of ambiguity, one that has been already implicitly indicated while examining the communal dimension of human existence and that lies in "the bond of each man with all others" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 70). Just as one is simultaneously subject

and object, one also exists both as a free individual pursuing self-chosen ventures and as an integral part of an intersubjective human community (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 72). Ambiguity precludes imprisonment within the bounds of one's own self. Every individual stretches out to fellow individuals, their "boundaries [being] permeable" (Bergoffen, "Between" 189). This inextricable connection between one and many is two-directional. On the one hand, no one can be self-sufficient in the exercise of freedom, as all their choices and actions are grounded in a shared field of experience rather than floating in a void. Others bring their own contributions to one's projects, enriching, facilitating or impeding them. Furthermore, as has been stated earlier, the freedom of any individual must cherish the freedom of others in order to fully flourish. On the other hand, "in his surpassing toward others, each one exists absolutely for himself; each is interested in the liberation of all, but as a separate existence engaged in his own projects" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 112).

To summarise what has been covered in the foregoing paragraphs, using Beauvoir's own words, the gist of ambiguity lies in "the truth of life and death, of my solitude and my bond with the world, of my freedom and my servitude, of the insignificance and the sovereign importance of each man and all men" (*Ethics* 9). It should be added now that these antinomies both take their root and come to expression in "our corporeality" (Murphy "Ambiguity" 221). Bergoffen contends that Beauvoir's philosophy of ambiguity reclaims the significance of the body (*Philosophy* 4), leveraging it out of disparagement and oblivion to which it used to be consigned in the Western philosophical tradition as the imperfect opposite of the mind to the central position of a mediator of human experience. An incarnated consciousness, the human being lives their existential ambiguity primarily through the body, which is itself a site of tension between interiority and exteriority, simultaneously belonging and not belonging to oneself. When identified with its "physiological possibilities" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 41), it represents an object susceptible to social and cultural manipulation, often fostering a sense of self-alienation (Bergoffen, *Philosophy* 4). Its biological and material dimension, which cannot be fully held in check, may frustrate or limit one's plans, as well as exposing one to the power and violence of the other. Still, "the body itself is not a brute fact" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 41); a lived subject, it represents a vehicle of agency implicated in all one's projects (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 68). In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir famously asserts that the body is "a situation" (68), hence, as interpreted by Judith Butler, "a peculiar nexus of culture and choice" (38).

Most crucially, Beauvoir indicates the absolute necessity of acknowledging ambiguity in its multifaceted character as essential to the human condition: "man must not attempt to dispel the ambiguity of his being but, on the contrary, accept the task of realizing it" (*Ethics* 13). It is

necessary to "learn to dwell in one's ambiguity" (Daigle, "Unweaving" 263) in all one's projects, navigating through the tensions that permeate existence. At the same time, the philosopher is heedful of the fact that one will be always tempted to relieve anxiety attendant to this vacillation between contradictory positions. Human beings find themselves caught in a conflict between the "desire to disclose being" in its indeterminateness and the even more formidable "desire to be," which seeks to reduce existence to one-dimensional fixity (Weiss 179). "[T]he element of failure involved in the condition of man" should not yet lead do despair (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 10). Whereas for Sartre the unfulfillable yearning for a God-like combination of the in-itself and the for-itself renders the human being "a useless passion" (*Being* 615), for Beauvoir this tension may be embraced "as a positive existence" (*Ethics* 13), opening space for existential authenticity, which from now onwards will be in the spotlight of our attention.

1.4 AUTHENTICITY

1.4.1 PERSONAL AUTHENTICITY

It is probably not exaggerated to state that "authenticity" is one of the buzzwords of contemporary popular discourse, especially prominent in a variety of self-help and inspirational materials, overused to the point of appearing somewhat clichéd. Guignon goes as far as to write about a contemporary culture or industry of authenticity, which has a mission of "reforming and transforming people in order to make them authentic" (*On Being* 3). The call to be authentic made in this context incites one to recover a lost connection with "the real self we have within" (Guignon, *On Being* 4). This is what Cooper dubs the "Polonian" ideal, referring to the character from *Hamlet* and the advice he offers his son Laertes: "To thine own self be true" (*Existentialism* 96). According to this line of thinking, the innermost "I"—one's genuine identity—usually lies buried under the layers of false masks that one wears on a daily basis (Guignon, *On Being* 3; Cooper, *Existentialism* 96). The true selfhood becomes obscured by the constant pretending in which one engages in an attempt to adapt better to the demands of social life, ultimately losing the capacity to differentiate between reality and fiction. What one is encouraged to do, then, is to embark upon a journey of "self-discovery" (Cooper, *Existentialism* 96) with a view to uncovering the misplaced self, "primarily through introspection, self-reflection or meditation" (Guignon, *On Being* 4) so as to let it come into full blossom.

This popular conception, however, goes against the spirit of existentialism, corresponding instead to the attitude of sincerity (Golomb 2), which is underpinned by the fallacious belief in an essential human nature. "Authenticity," avers emphatically Gary Cox, "is the holy grail of existentialism, the great existentialist aspiration or ideal," but it cannot be attained through the

search of a concealed inner self that precedes one's actions. It requires a lucid understanding not of who one has always been at the core, for one cannot be anything other than nothingness, but of "*the ontological structures of existence*" (Sembera 144) without the veil of comforting deceptions and acting upon this insight. As will be shown in a moment, these two elements—proper existential self-awareness and its ongoing re-affirmation through specific choices and deeds—figure large in the thought of Heidegger, Sartre, and Beauvoir.

It has been demonstrated earlier that the role of Heideggerian anxiety is to make an uncanny rupture into *Dasein's* complacent involvement in everydayness, imperceptibly structured by the dictates of the they-self, and confront it with its existential condition as thrown projection towards death. In this capacity, anxiety is a "harbinger of authenticity" (Magrini 78): it "brings Dasein face to face with its *Being-free for* . . . the authenticity of its Being" (Heidegger, *Being* 232). More often than not, however, the desire to quell the discomfiting experience of the entire world falling into disarray and divulging its contingent underlay gains the upper hand of *Dasein*, who prefers to retreat back into the security of the they-self. Anxiety thus opens the way to authenticity, but the human being must boldly acknowledge the perturbing revelation that it brings instead of "covering up or disowning" it (Dreyfus 304). The challenge is thus how to "incorporate[] the insight gained in anxiety" into "an active life" (Dreyfus 316) in a situated context. To become authentic is to accept "the truth of Dasein" not in an abstract way but as the foundation for what "Dasein factually decides to do" (Sembera 182).

In the plainest terms, authenticity involves striving to be "something of [one's] own" (Heidegger, *Being* 68). In mineness, *Dasein* is a unique individual with "its ownmost potentiality-for-Being" (Heidegger, *Being* 183), yet in everydayness it often fails to develop its singularity, unquestioningly appropriating roles and possibilities thrust upon it. It waives its ability to "discover[] the world in its own way" (Heidegger, *Being* 167) in blind reliance upon interpretations and conventions pre-fabricated for it in a shared environment without its active participation. When authentic, *Dasein* makes efforts to extricate itself from this tacit subjection to publicness with a view to "['choosing'] itself and [winning] itself'" (Heidegger, *Being* 68). It takes ownership of its life by determining what shape to give it through autonomously seized existential possibilities, thereby putting an end to an unreflective drift along ready-made pathways. In this sense, authentic existence entails primarily shouldering the burden of responsibility for ongoing self-formation instead of abdicating it to the they-self.

While bearing this responsibility, it is obviously indispensable to reckon with the constraints of facticity, most notably with one's inexorable finitude and mortality. It is known from the earlier discussion that *Dasein* is essentially Being-ahead-of-itself: incomplete in incessantly

stretching out towards an indefinite future. In doing so, it is yet "always already under way toward making something of its life as a totality" (Guignon, "Becoming" 127). In Heidegger's vision, the sense of wholeness is one of the crucial elements that contribute to building a genuine self-awareness, and it may be derived only from the acknowledgment of the final note upon which one's life will become a closed entirety: death itself. It is Being-towards-death that "proves to be the ontologically constitutive state of *Dasein's* potentiality-for-Being-a-whole" (Heidegger, *Being* 277) and authenticity becomes possible solely when *Dasein* grows capable of situating itself and its own choices within the horizon of mortality. When grasped from the perspective of its ultimate end, existence gains an integrity and unity that it would otherwise lack as a sequence of scattered "not-yets." Mindful of its finitude, *Dasein* realises "where [its] life is going" and "how things are adding up as a whole" (Guignon, "Becoming" 130). Death thus serves as "an integrating factor" (Macquarrie 155) in its existence.

The obvious problem is that the living cannot experience death otherwise than by seeing other people die, but such a vicarious encounter does not lead to authenticity. Authentic *Dasein* must treat death not as a brute fact happening to someone else but as its "ownmost possibility which is non-relational and not to be outstripped—which is certain and, as such, indefinite" (Heidegger, *Being* 307) in the mode of anticipation as distinct from mere expectation. In Heideggerian parlance, to expect death is to know that one's life is destined to come to a close at a certain point and to await the actualisation of this destiny (*Being* 306), an approach that disguises the reality of finitude. To anticipate it, by contrast, is to "accept not that death is some vaguely foreshadowed future event but that death is death-in-life" (Sembera 160). Anticipatory *Dasein* has the courage to relate to its own mortality while attending to its worldly concerns, fully aware of fact that the possibility of non-existence affects it at every moment in a direct and undeniable manner. This way, "[a]nticipation turns out to be the possibility of understanding one's *ownmost* and uttermost potentiality-for-Being—that is to say, the possibility of *authentic existence*" (Heidegger, *Being* 307).

As brilliantly remarked by Mulhall, "[b]eing-towards-death is essentially a matter of Being-towards-life" (129). Heidegger believes that accepting the truth of dying empowers one to claim the authorship of one's existence. When apprehended as an ownmost possibility that cannot be shared with others, death pulls *Dasein* out of absorption in the they-self and "*brings it face to face with the possibility of being itself*" (Heidegger, *Being* 311). It illuminates the constructed character of routinised patterns of conduct and beliefs inherited from a public community, summoning one to forge one's own ways of living: "one is liberated in such a way that for the first time one can authentically understand and choose among the factical possibilities lying

ahead of that possibility which is not to be outstripped" (Heidegger, *Being* 308). Guignon notes that "[c]onfronting death can lead you to see the weightiness of your own existence" ("Becoming" 130). *Dasein* is driven to acknowledge that life presents an urgent challenge to which it must respond by making independent choices. It gains the awareness necessary to take a stand on its own existence so as to saturate it with a uniquely individual content.

An anticipatory orientation towards the ownmost possibility of death in its permanent presence in life implies an authentic opening to the future. In order to grasp itself authentically as Being-a-whole, however, *Dasein* must also develop a proper relation to its past. While the analysis of temporality in *Being and Time* is mostly outside the purview of this dissertation, it is necessary to indicate that Heidegger conceives of time not as an ordered "succession" (*Being* 401) of moments unfolding to form discrete compartments of past, present, and future. Quite the contrary, the three dimensions are closely intertwined, forming a temporal continuum: "Temporality temporalizes itself as a future which makes present in a process of having been" (Heidegger, *Being* 401). In authentically embracing its existential possibilities, *Dasein* cannot disjoint itself from the past, considering that the horizon of futural projection is always pre-delineated by its social and cultural entrenchment in a definite historical setting. *Dasein's* "current factical possibilities of authentic existing" reveal themselves only in the light of the shared "*heritage*" of sedimented values, beliefs, and practices into which it has been thrown (Heidegger, *Being* 435). What authenticity requires is that *Dasein* should take hold of this heritage "as something under its control but nonetheless constitutive of who it is" (Mulhall 166). The type of approach to the past that Heidegger advocates in *Being and Time* is termed "repetition." Despite the somewhat misleading name, it does not involve enslavement to received patterns: "The repeating of that which is possible does not bring again [Wiederbringen] something that is 'past', nor does it bind the 'Present' back to that which has already been 'outstripped'" (Heidegger, *Being* 437). *Dasein's* task is not to tether itself to its personal and communal history but to use it in a creative manner as a treasure trove of meanings to be re-worked through personal projects in the forward movement of existence (Heidegger, *Being* 437). Such an apprehension of temporality is the foundation of its self-constancy—unity as juxtaposed against inauthentic dispersal—which should not be confused with the fixity of self-identity (Mulhall 190).

Unlike Heidegger, Sartre does not devote much space in his *opus magnum* to the concept of authenticity; most of his attention goes to bad faith, i.e. a form of self-deception, which will be explored more thoroughly at a later point. Authenticity is defined in a footnote as its opposite—"a self-recovery of being which was previously corrupted"—with the reservation

that the problem falls outside the remit of his study, touching, as it does, upon issues of moral rather than ontological nature (Sartre, *Being* 70). The notion is framed in positive terms only in *Anti-Semite and Jew* (1944), an essay debating the origin of persecution of the Jews and ways of withstanding it: "Authenticity, it is almost needless to say, consists in having a true and lucid consciousness of the situation, in assuming the responsibilities and risks that it involves, in accepting it in pride or humiliation, sometimes in horror and hate" (65). It is yet *Notebooks for an Ethics*, published posthumously in 1983, a sketch of what was supposed to be the work on ethics promised at the conclusion of *Being and Nothingness* but never delivered, that gives a fuller idea of how Sartre understands authenticity.

In contradistinction to Heidegger, Sartre does not make a case for the need the grow clear-sighted about the continued presence of death in life. While the finitude of existence must be acknowledged, death itself does not form part of being-for-itself (Sartre, *Being* 540), so it cannot serve as a signpost allowing one to develop a proper orientation towards existence. Since it erases my power of agency once and forever, "I cannot thrust myself toward it as one of my possibilities" (Sartre, *Being* 545). Furthermore, once dead, a person becomes entirely exposed to the objectifying power of other people's judgments: "the one who tries to grasp the meaning of his future death must discover himself as the future prey of others" (Sartre, *Being* 543). Consequently, the perspective of death detaches one from the reality of self-making instead of giving it an extraordinary visibility. What authenticity faces with lucidity in Sartre's conception is rather the unstable mixture of facticity and transcendence that animates human existence, rendering it irrevocably indefinite. One must accept the brute givenness of situation and simultaneously recognise that it stands open to interpretation. No behaviour, however persistent, can be identified with one's essential nature, impervious to change: "Authenticity therefore leads to renouncing every project of being courageous (cowardly), noble (vile), etc." (Sartre, *Notebooks* 475). An authentic individual turns away from "any quest for being, because [they are] always *nothing*" (Sartre, *Notebooks* 475).

Affirming the groundlessness and incompleteness of existence is a natural path towards assuming the stupendous burden of freedom (Grene, "Authenticity" 266). In *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, Sartre declares that his philosophy seeks to "make every man conscious of what he is, and to make him solely responsible for his own existence" (23). To live in conformity with the truth of existence means to apprehend oneself as "left alone and without excuse" (Sartre, *Existentialism* 29). Having no recourse to any pre-established rules, the human being must posit themselves as the sole and ultimate originator of all values and meanings and, as noted by Ronald Santoni, must do so with clarity and commitment, taking an effort to withstand

the never-dying tendency to self-delusion (123). Crucially, it is by no means sufficient to come to a reflective awareness of one's existential condition. To have an authenticating effect, this awareness needs to be transcribed into self-creative action: "The one meaningful project is that of acting on a concrete situation and modifying it in some way" (Sartre, *Notebooks* 475). Sartrean authenticity is thus "the willed adoption of an attitude in which consciousness accepts its gratuitous freedom and claims authorship and responsibility for all of its actions, whatever its 'situation' might be" (Santoni 103).

While developing her vision of authenticity, Beauvoir is equally critical of Heidegger when it comes to the imperativeness of recognising mortality as a shadow lingering over life. Considering that death remains beyond human control, it is fallacious to hold that the way one addresses its continual imminence determines the quality of one's engagement with existence itself (Beauvoir, "Pyrrhus" 114). Similar to Sartre, she instead places the thrust of attention on how one responds to one's intrinsic freedom. The challenge of living an authentic life is to "will oneself free*"* (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 25) or, in other words, to make an active use of one's self-creative potential. An authentic person does not "[seek] the guarantee for his existence outside of himself" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 14) but follows their own projects with genuine dedication so as to bestow significance upon their existence. It would be yet in vain to expect that this will bring a sense of completeness. Authenticity rather welcomes the very flux of self-surpassing, knowing that is has no firm destination: "I exist as an authentic subject, in a constantly renewed upspringing that is opposed to the fixed reality of things" (Beauvoir, "Existentialism" 212).

The authentic willing of freedom is thus led by the lived recognition of human ambiguity in the sense explored in the preceding section (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 13). In a passage reverberating with Sartrean terminology, Beauvoir, states that "[w]hen a man projects into an ideal heaven that impossible synthesis of the for-itself and the in-itself that is called God, it is because he wishes the regard of this existing Being to change his existence into being" (*Ethics* 14). The human being longs to exist with definiteness, permanence and immutability specific to objects while simultaneously retaining consciousness. Although this "will to be" cannot be fully eradicated, the philosopher makes an appeal to put it "in parentheses" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 14), acknowledging its inherent futility (Lundgren-Gothlin, *Sex* 188). Authenticity may flourish solely on the ground of the "desire to disclose being" (Langer 94), which is receptive to indefiniteness. It ventures out to an unknown and unpredictable future and, instead of striving to foster the illusion of fixity, lets the meaning of existence be created on an ongoing basis through an upsurge of transcendence. "To will freedom and to will to disclose being," opines Beauvoir, "are one and the same choice" (*Ethics* 78).

As can be seen, for all the differing points of emphasis in their understanding of authenticity, Heidegger, Sartre, and Beauvoir agree that it represents an ideal to be actively pursued. None of them, however, believes that it may be a permanent state. Since the human being is irremediably incomplete, one cannot be authentic in the sense of having authenticity as an enduring attribute. "The person who declares 'I am authentic' thinks she *is* something, a fixed entity, an authentic-*thing*," explains Cox. Skye Cleary remarks also that the very expression "'achieving authenticity'" is deceptive insofar as it "implies an endpoint rather than a continuous process" (9). In fact, whenever authenticity is set as an objective, it is necessary to bear in mind that its achievement will be always tenuous, immediately calling for re-achievement through new efforts to confront the truth of human existence. The success in reaching it always only temporary, measured by one's current conduct and choices: "A person is only as authentic as her present act" (Cox).

For Beauvoir, it is clear that "the fundamental ambiguity of the human condition will always open up to men the possibility of opposing choices" (*Ethics* 42). As briefly mentioned earlier, the desire for stable being persists, even if only latently, drawing one away from the insecurity consequent upon self-creation without reliance on any ready-made scripts. The human being is a locus of conflict between two opposing impulses, faced with the daunting task of holding one of them in abeyance: "[T]he disclosure implies a perpetual tension to keep being at a certain distance, . . . and to assert oneself as a freedom" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 23). Dynamic and elusive, freedom requires to be re-claimed time and again through unrelenting struggle: it "will never be given; it will always have to be won" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 119). The projects to which one commits oneself do not lead to any closures but only to ever new beginnings (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 27). Most importantly, Beauvoir emphasises that all these attempts to win oneself despite the pull towards abdication of freedom bear an inevitable risk of failure, which, however, does not condemn them to absurdity, as remarked previously (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 157). In Beauvoir's vision, "it is precisely in failing, acknowledging the failure, and in affirming the competing desires that produce the failure" that one can exist authentically (Weiss 183).

In his *War Diaries*, Sartre also describes authenticity in terms of a project and effort to be undertaken on a repeated basis and adapted responsively to varying contexts: "it isn't enough to have acquired it [authenticity] once, in respect of a particular, concrete circumstance, in order for it to extend itself spontaneously to all the situations into which we are plunged" (220). Even if I am presently acting true to my existential constitution, "[n]othing from the authenticity of the present 'moment' protects me from falling into inauthenticity in the next" (Santoni 93). While authenticity should guide one through life as an everlasting ambition, it must not become

an end in itself: "If you seek authenticity for authenticity's sake," warns Sartre in *Notebooks for an Ethics*, "you are no longer authentic" (4). He is acutely wary of the fact that, quite paradoxically, authenticity may be perverted into a vehicle of flight from freedom (Santoni 95) when one labours under the delusion that it will generate a sense of God-like plenitude (Golomb 107). A truly "[a]uthentic consciousness," reminds Sartre, "grasps itself in its deepest structure as creative" (*Notebooks* 514-515), embracing the ebbs and flows of its continual creation, destined to remain forever unfinished.

Heidegger's idea of authenticity similarly does not allow for any rest or conclusive triumph in endeavours to remain in touch with the truth of human existence and act resolutely upon it. *Dasein* must constantly exert itself so as not to become captivated by the shared world in which it is intrinsically embedded to the point of misplacing its individuality (Dreyfus 236). "Being-in-the-world," cautions Heidegger, "is in itself *tempting*" (*Being* 221). Authenticity is "a fluctuating state of mind, arrived at through an ongoing struggle against the pull of the public world" (Golomb 78), involving a renewed commitment rather than a one-time accomplishment: "*[a]uthentic resoluteness . . . resolves to keep repeating itself"* (Heidegger, *Being* 355). Nevertheless, however determined this effort, it is not possible to overcome distracted absorption in publicness once and for all: "[e]xistence can even gain the mastery over the 'everyday'; but it can never extinguish it" (Heidegger, *Being* 422).

At this point, the focus of our discussion should be shifted to inauthenticity itself, not as an implied antithesis of authenticity but as a phenomenon in its own right, which is both inevitable and "structurally necessary" (Sembera 185). Heidegger states emphatically that authenticity is not "a condition that has been detached from the 'they'" but only its "*existentiell modification*" (*Being* 168). It has been explained on various occasions in this chapter that, as a thrown Being-in-the-world-with-others, *Dasein* perforce operates within the bounds of a specific historical, social and cultural constellation resting upon conventionalised codes of behaviour, habits, paradigms of perception, and norms. The they-self provides a common framework of primary intelligibility, permitting one to make sense of the world, oneself, and other people. Consequently, it cannot be eliminated even if it simultaneously poses a threat to personal authenticity; it may be only "transformed by freedom into an existential project which can be authentically taken over" (Schrag 199). "*[A]uthentic* existence is not something which floats above falling everydayness," cautions Heidegger, continuing that "it is only a modified way in which such everydayness is seized upon" (*Being* 224). The goal is not to succumb to its dictates and grow detached from the true circumstances of one's existence. Nevertheless, it is

inauthenticity that more often than not prevails in everydayness: "The Self, however, is proximally and for the most part inauthentic, the they-self" (Heidegger, *Being* 225).[23]

Inauthentic *Dasein* has become so intensely engrossed in the public world while attending to its daily affairs that it has "fallen away [abgefallen] from itself as an authentic potentiality for Being its Self" (Heidegger, *Being* 220). Its mechanical engagement with the taken-for-granted scripts and routines that structure the social and communal realm has obfuscated the true picture of the potential and responsibility that its existence entails (Heidegger, *Being* 264). *Dasein* drifts mindlessly through life in ignorance of who it is, what its ownmost possibilities of being are and how they may be brought to life: "it *fails to hear* [*überhört*] its own Self in listening to the they-self" (Heidegger, *Being* 315). Most crucially, its self-estrangement arises not only from its ontologically inescapable immersion in a shared environment but also from its wilful choice to close eyes to its own existential condition (Dreyfus 315). In *Being and Time,* Heidegger repeatedly uses expressions that throw into relief *Dasein's* active drive towards self-abandonment: "Dasein comports itself towards it [its Being] in the mode of . . . fleeing *in the face of it* and forgetfulness *thereof*" (69); "we flee in the face of the uncanniness which lies in Dasein" (234); "it [Dasein] flees in the face of itself into the 'they'" (368). Inauthentic fallenness serves as a powerful mechanism of self-protection (Sembera 110) against a head-on confrontation with the groundlessness and contingency of existence. Everyday publicness seduces one with the façade of familiarity built on fossilised conventions and the comforting illusion that "everything is 'in the best of order'" (Heidegger, *Being* 222). Loath to grasp itself in its primordial emptiness, *Dasein* plunges into "a defective self-understanding" (Nagel 301) that camouflages the truth of existence, letting it stay in tranquillity.

First of all, what *Dasein* refuses to accept in the inauthentic mode of being is its status as a creator of itself and meaning of the space in which it dwells. It fails to take possession of its life through interpretative activity, instead dutifully replaying socially approved identities in compliance with pre-defined rules: "it is dominated by the way things are publicly interpreted" (Heidegger, *Being* 264). In inauthenticity, the they-self transforms its character from that of

[23] The question arises which of the two states—inauthenticity or authenticity—is the original one according to Heidegger, but the answer is not an unequivocal one. The quotations from *Being and Time* provided in this chapter point to the former option. Cooper states that, in contrast to Sartre, the German philosopher "speaks of authenticity as something to be won in struggling out from a natural condition of inauthenticity" (*Existentialism* 122). Heidegger, however, is not entirely consistent on this point. Golomb notes that "[a] recurrent theme in Heidegger's writings is 'homecoming', . . . indicating that he sees authenticity as primordial and, at least in time, prior to inauthentic modes of *Dasein*" (67). The scholar resolves this quandary by deciding that authenticity is "the only fundamental, a priori and ontological mode of *Dasein's* Being-in-the-world," whereas inauthenticity takes hold of *Dasein* "at the ontic level" (Golomb 86).

a necessary scaffolding upon which one may develop one's own values into an overwhelming presence that imposes its dictates on all spheres of one's existence: "We take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as *they* [*man*] take pleasure; we read, see, and judge about literature and art as *they* see and judge; likewise we shrink back from the 'great mass' as *they* shrink back; we find 'shocking' what *they* find shocking" (Heidegger, *Being* 164). As clarified by Olafson, "we do what we do because it is the done thing" (38), not because it contributes to our private projects, thereby strengthening our agency. *Dasein* chooses to cede the responsibility for self-determination onto the anonymous crowd, which thrusts it into a ready-made mould; it "makes no choices, gets carried along by the nobody, and thus ensnares itself in inauthenticity" (Heidegger, *Being* 268). The sense that existence presents a pressing issue to which every individual must respond in their own unique way gradually vanishes as "Dasein . . . is *disburdened* by the 'they'" (Heidegger, *Being* 165).

Further, in this state of fallen fascination with the world, which conceals the urgency of commitment to personal choice, *Dasein* disperses itself in idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity (Heidegger *Being* 220). While the last modality has been characterised already previously as the inability to distinguish between a genuine and a distorted understanding of one's existence, now consideration will be given to the other two. Although inauthenticity lulls *Dasein* into tranquilised complacency, by no means does it immobilise it; quite the contrary, it "drives [it] into uninhibited 'hustle,'" which Heidegger calls curiosity (*Being* 222). The problem is yet that this frenetic activity lacks coherence and purposive focus. Curious *Dasein* is on the constant lookout for "the excitement of continual novelty and changing encounters" (Heidegger, *Being* 216), restlessly loitering around to sustain the thrill of the unknown but "*never-dwelling-anywhere*" (Heidegger, *Being* 398). This busy engagement with glittering banalities for the sake of sheer agitation uproots it from its environment and distracts it from a proper understanding of its being: "it concerns itself with seeing, not in order to understand what is seen . . . but *just* in order to see" (Heidegger, *Being* 216). *Dasein's* capability of discernment is similarly eclipsed by idle talk, communicating mere trivialities and inauthentic clichés, which "close[] things off" (Heidegger, *Being* 214) instead of disclosing them as they really are. When *Dasein* falls prey to these two vices, it "loses [its] integrity" (Schrag 48) while mistakenly believing that it "is leading and sustaining a full and genuine 'life'" (Heidegger, *Being* 222).

Further, inauthenticity, just as authenticity, manifests itself in *Dasein's* stance towards its temporal structure. For one thing, inauthentic *Dasein* approaches the future in the mode of awaiting (Heidegger, *Being* 386) in the sense that it projects itself upon a range of possibilities as if they were "something that is actual" (Heidegger, *Being* 397)—"a 'now' which is not yet

real" (Schrag 141). For another, it "has *forgotten* itself in its ownmost *thrown* potentiality-for-Being" (Heidegger, *Being* 388) along with losing sight of the factical foundation constitutive of its identity. Its personal past and communal heritage have slipped into oblivion as factors that no longer exert any real influence on reality. Absorbed in the now, *Dasein* lives its existence as a succession of moments that come and go, inconsiderate about what has been and what looms ahead. Finally, this inauthentic temporalising goes hand in hand with a misguided relation to its own finitude. Despite being plainly conscious of "death's certainty" (Heidegger, *Being* 302), inauthentic *Dasein* desists from recognising its ownmost character. It is constantly "*fleeing in the face of death*" into the tranquilising grip of the they-self, which conceals the unsettling revelation of anxiety by channelling it into a mere fear of demise (Heidegger, *Being* 298*).* Then, the fear itself is "passed off as a weakness," which does not befit any "self-assured Dasein," and suppressed into indifference (Heidegger, *Being* 298), reinforced by idle talk, which conveys death as a casual event affecting other people: "it is said that 'one dies', because everyone else and oneself can talk himself into saying that 'in no case is it I myself', for this 'one' is *the* '*nobody*'" (Heidegger, *Being* 297*).* As a result, *Dasein* detaches itself from the truth of its own mortal structure, treating it in an abstract and de-individualised manner, a flaw that inhibits it from grasping itself as a whole and realising its authentic potentiality-for-Being.

Heavily critical of Heidegger's preoccupation with death, Sartre focuses on the strategies of relinquishing the responsibility of freedom through bad faith, which consists in blinding oneself to the reality of being "at once a facticity and a transcendence" (Sartre, *Being* 56). While these two cardinal dimensions of existence "are and ought to be capable of a valid coordination," (Sartre, *Being* 56), a person in bad faith "attempts to keep them apart" (Catalano 83), identifying with one of them only. On the one hand, one may choose to treat oneself as a thing-like entity (Warnock, *Philosophy* 56) with a rigid essence, pre-determined permanently from outside. Such an individual denies any possibility of change, treating the past as inevitably determinative of the future (Sartre, *Being* 58). Self-deluded about the fixity of their character, they feel excused from directing their own existence in individually chosen ways. The spirit of seriousness takes the upper hand, fostering the illusion that values are objective and absolute rather than personal and context-specific and pushing one to renounce one's own ventures in deference to the "mute demands" of "transcendent givens independent of human subjectivity" (Sartre, *Being* 626). On the other hand, bad faith may express itself in the complete rejection of the factical context in which freedom may be exercised and on which it may confer meanings. In this case, self-deception concerns possessing "a ghostly, dislocated freedom that glides through the world untouched and untouching" (Golomb 108), unaffected by such aspects as physicality or social

and cultural circumstances. Accordingly, I strive to take a radical break from the past in the belief that "I am not what I have been" (Sartre, *Being* 626), so, in other words, that my erstwhile conduct has not had any significance for my existential project and has not exerted any influence on my identity (Webber 48). Irrespective of the type, bad faith is yet a highly "precarious" state (Sartre, *Being* 50) due to the negating and self-surpassing nature of consciousness. It "[wavers] back and forth" (Barnes, Translator's Introduction xii) from the illusion of pure facticity to that of pure and unrestrained transcendence, "playing hide-and-seek" with itself (Crowell 217).

Sartre exemplifies the patterns of bad faith described above through vivid portrayals of people who fail to exercise their freedom with due regard for both structural dimensions of existence. The first, and probably the most famous one, is that of an overly pompous waiter in a café, who gives expression to his "waiterness" with every carefully studied move and gesture:

> His movement is quick and forward, a little too precise, a little too rapid. He comes toward the patrons with a step a little too quick. He bends forward a little too eagerly; his voice, his eyes express an interest a little too solicitous for the order of the customer. Finally there he returns, trying to imitate in his walk the inflexible stiffness of some kind of automaton. . . . All his behavior seems to us a game. He applies himself to chaining his movements as if they were mechanisms; . . . he gives himself the quickness and pitiless rapidity of things. He is playing . . . he is playing at being a waiter in a café. (Sartre, *Being* 59)

In the quoted passage, Sartre shows with graphic attention to detail that what the waiter does is not mere conscientious performance of duties but play-acting, through which he seeks to fully coincide with his role, thereby achieving the solidity of a thing. The waiter entraps himself in facticity through what Sartre labels the project of sincerity—"to be what one is" (*Being* 62)—in order to evade "the constant obligation of becoming" (Catalano 85). He reproduces stereotypical scripts, expecting to be recognised as a waiter in the same way as an inkwell is an inkwell (Sartre, *Being* 59).

The second example is that of a woman on a date who pretends not to notice the sexual undertones of her partner's compliments and caresses (Sartre, Being 55-56).[24] Although she has decided to accept his invitation and thus to engage in flirtation, she defers the moment of

[24] This illustration has been denounced by various feminist critics as sexist, most notably by Michelle Le Doeuff. In *Hipparchia's Choice,* she accuses Sartre of assuming a position of superiority over the woman and pretending that he "knows all that is going on in this woman's head better than she does herself" (72). Toril Moi similarly asserts disapprovingly that "[t]he real problem in this passage is not the woman's interpretation, but Sartre's bland assumption that he knows more than the woman" (150).

responding to his advances by blinding herself to the "possibilities of temporal development which his conduct presents" and concentrating solely on its superficial meaning (Sartre, *Being* 55). Unwilling to grasp herself as a body arousing sexual desire, she falsely attributes the man's demeanour to "admiration, esteem, respect" (Sartre, *Being* 55), feelings that appeal to intellect rather than physicality. When he finally musters the courage to take her hand, she remains coldly indifferent to his gesture, neither reciprocating nor rejecting it. "She does not notice," explains Sartre, "because it happens by chance that she is at this moment all intellect" (*Being* 56). The woman thereby detaches herself from her sexuality and "focuses attention on herself as a pure consciousness" (Catalano 82), transcendence unlimited by facticity.

The denial of one's facticity is illustrated by Sartre also by the story of a homosexual who refrains from facing the implications of his past conduct (*Being* 63-64).[25] The man does admit that he used to be romantically attracted to or involved with other men but fails to integrate this fact into his identity, pretending this his actions were incidents of no broader consequence (Sartre, *Being* 63). Although his refusal to assume the label of a homosexual may manifest resistance to external objectification, he simultaneously deceives himself about being able to disclaim his past (Sartre, *Being* 64). He erroneously supposes that he may be "born anew" at each and every moment, abdicating responsibility for all the factors that constitute his facticity: "he needs this perpetual rebirth, this constant escape in order to live" (Sartre, *Being* 64).

For Beauvoir, in line with the earlier discussion, the temptation of inauthenticity lies in the desire to be. The original will to disclose being, which spontaneously embraces freedom in transcendence, is not doomed to failure but always stands at risk of degenerating into the drive towards self-coincidence and completeness (Bergoffen, *Philosophy* 79-82). In order to allay the anxiety of groundlessness, the human being may seek to congeal the meaning of existence into a fixed essence, impervious to ambiguity, thereby foregoing the onus of dynamic self-determination. This ontological account is accompanied in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* by a catalogue of particular types of people who either flee from their freedom entirely or exercise it in a flawed manner, including the sub-man and the serious man in the former category and the nihilist, adventurer, and passionate man in the latter one.

The sub-man dissipates their capacity for meaningful action for fear of "being in a state of danger before the future" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 44). Reluctant to take a leap into the unknown, they

[25] This example has been also criticised from various positions. Linda A. Bell, for instance, blames Sartre for ignoring the fact that the man's denial of homosexuality is induced by his social milieu: "After all, it exists only because of the prior inauthenticity of the champion of sincerity and other heterosexists and homophobes who have created a 'nature' and destiny for homosexuals" (131).

freeze in their facticity. Their life is lived as barren inertia, devoid of any ventures that would enrich them (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 45). The only project of which they are capable is that of unreflectively adopting "the ready-made values of the serious world" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 44), which protect them against the uncertainty of existence. Innocuous as this characterisation appears, the sub-man may be dangerous "as a blind uncontrolled force which anybody can get control of" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 44). It is sub-men who throughout history have been the most fanatical followers of homicidal ideologies, taking part "[i]n lynchings, in pogroms, in all the great bloody movements" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 44).

Having failed to "keep himself from existing" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 45), the sub-man is prone to become the serious man, who expends all their energy in pursuing a cause, an ideal or a goal regarded as an absolute good to which everything else must be subordinated. The object of this pursuit is of little importance in itself; what counts is rather "the fact of being able to lose [themselves] in it" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 47). The serious man "stubbornly engulfs his transcendence in the object which bars the horizon and bolts the sky" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 51), holding their freedom hostage to seemingly unconditional values, from which they hope to derive a permanent validation for the meaning of existence. Further, apart from denying their own power of choice, they are also likely to deprive other people of liberty. Once their enslavement to external idols spirals into fanaticism, the serious man does not stop short of resorting to oppression in the name of what they take to be the greater good. Their stalwart dedication to the chosen end does not, however, give them a sense of satisfaction since, at the underlying level, they are stimulated by the desire for "the impossible synthesis of the in-itself and the for-itself" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 52).

Faced with the impossibility of investing their existence with the substantiality of the in-itself-for-itself, the serious man often "decides to be nothing" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 52). Their former posture of rigid attachment to inflexible objectives turns into contestation of all meanings. Although the nihilist acknowledges their own nothingness, they do so not through a positive affirmation of freedom to act and create but through withdrawal from active existence. They have their eyes set only on death while ignoring the call to "justify the world and to make himself exist validly" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 57). "The fundamental fault of the nihilist," according to Beauvoir, "is that, challenging all given values, he does not find, beyond their ruin, the importance of that universal, absolute end which freedom itself is" (*Ethics* 57).

The adventurer, in contrast to both the serious man and the nihilist, "likes action for its own sake" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 58) and does not subscribe to any absolute goals. Holding the desire for stability in check, they embrace the ambiguity of existence "in its positive aspect"

(Beauvoir, *Ethics* 58) and press forward, surpassing the given in movement towards existence as an open project. The problem is, however, that the adventurer displays no consideration for the freedom of other people, which, as will be demonstrated in the following section, is essential to true authenticity. More than that, in their selfish appetite for adventure, they do not hesitate to use them instrumentally as their means to an end: "nothing prevents him from sacrificing these insignificant beings to his own will for power" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 61).

Finally, the passionate man resembles the adventurer insofar as they plunge themselves into a whirl of action. As is the case with the serious man, however, their activity lacks the spontaneous opening onto the indefiniteness of existence, being firmly entwined in a quest for a fixed goal. The difference is that "he sets up the object as an absolute end, not, like the serious man, as a thing detached from himself, but as a thing disclosed by his subjectivity" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 64). In plainer words, the adventurer does not submit to any external values but drowns their transcendence in a project of their own choosing. Their tenacity in striving to gain a full grasp of the object of their desire and coincide with it mystifies the truth of human ambiguity and forecloses the reality of change: "he seeks to attain being" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 64-65). Since no enterprise can transform the gap at the heart of their existence into plenitude, "he is never fulfilled" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 65). Most worryingly, while remaining captive to an end that appears to present an overriding value in itself, the passionate man is wont to give expression to tyrannical proclivities, forcing their own will on other people. The passionate man will not recoil from any misdeeds or acts of violence because "[t]he whole universe is perceived only as an ensemble of means or obstacles through which it is a matter of attaining the thing in which one has engaged his being" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 66).

In *The Second Sex,* the analysis of strategies whereby one can jettison the burden of existence, which has no justification other than the unrelenting creation of meaning, centres around the situation of women in patriarchal society. Early in her monumental work, Beauvoir asserts that the most primordial form of flight from freedom is that of alienation: "the anxiety of his freedom leads the subject to search for himself in things, which is a way to flee from himself; . . . here is the first temptation or inauthenticity" (*Second Sex* 81). Subsequently, she characterises three types of women who embody this weakness: the narcissist, the woman in love, and the mystic, all engulfing their freedom in devotion to an object.

The narcissist identifies herself with her own body perceived as pure passivity, taking pleasure in its beauty and desirability, a locus of her entire sense of self-worth. In narcissism, "the self is posited as an absolute end, and the subject escapes itself in it" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 756), seeking the impossible unity of thinghood with consciousness. Despite her self-

deception, the unattainability of this wish is sorely felt: “She cannot grasp herself as a totality, as plenitude” (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 771). By investing her transcendence in herself as a beautiful thing, in fact “she dooms herself to the most severe slavery” (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 771), desperately yearning for the admiration of other people.

The woman in love abandons her freedom in the adoration of her male lover, whom she idolises as a God-like figure: “she will exalt as sovereign the one she loves, she will posit him as value and supreme reality” (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 774). She entertains “a dream of ecstatic union” (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 781) with him, a total merger in which her own self would be effaced and submerged into his (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 774), hoping to be able to partake of his superiority (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 785). Their communion gives her an illusory taste of transcendence, which she fails to derive from her own mundane activity: “she also experiences a passionate desire to go beyond her own limits and become infinite, thanks to the intervention of another who has access to infinite reality” (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 781). In her love for the man and the ability to serve him obligingly, she locates the entire justification of her existence (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 793), wherein lies the paradoxical nature of her situation: “in order to save herself, she ends up totally disavowing *herself*” (*Second Sex* 781). The individuality of the woman in love is obliterated as she willingly relegates herself to the position of the man’s “too-docile mirror, . . . too-faithful echo” (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 796), who looks at the world through his eyes, adopting his interests and viewpoints as her own. Furthermore, with the passage of time, the woman in love commences to restrict the lover’s liberty as well, expecting his steadfast gratitude and loyalty. The man’s affection, however, tends to grow ever weaker, as he finds her slavish subordination tiring. Consumed by jealousy, she thus finds herself entrapped in a romance that no longer enlivens her but only arouses torment.

The mechanism through which the mystic renounces her subjectivity essentially parallels that of the woman in love, the difference being that the object of her devotion is God. By the same token, she assumes the position of a passive servant, seeking a self-obliterating union with the worshiped deity who has deigned to confer some of his own glory upon her (Beauvoir, *Second* 807). The sexually tinged trances of religious frenzy when the mystic believes to transcend herself to unite with God mark moments when her own self becomes extinct: “Ecstasy bodily mimics this abolition of self; the subject no longer sees or feels, he forgets his body, disavows it” (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 807). Just as is the case with the narcissist and the woman in love, her project of finding justification outside of her own agency fails miserably: “she has no grasp on the world; she does not escape her subjectivity; her freedom remains mystified” (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 810).

It must be indicated now that, much as the catalogue of people who deny or misread the implications of their freedom described in the preceding paragraphs may appear to bear affinity with Sartre's account from *Being and Nothingness,* Beauvoir, as a matter of fact, takes noticeable distance from her partner's judgmental manner of using the concept of bad faith, which saddles individual existents with the whole blame for their existential failures. Lundgren-Gothlin remarks that she prefers to "[speak] instead of people's potential to live 'authentically' as against 'inauthentically'" (*Sex* 159), and Le Doeuff avers even more definitively that "[i]n Beauvoir's work the notion of bad faith is merely on the horizon" (92). Further, Beauvoir visibly refrains from placing herself in the position of moral superiority over those whom she criticises and claiming to "have access to the other's inner consciousness" (Le Doeuff 93). As has been repeated throughout this chapter, her work tempers Sartre's radical postulation of absolute freedom with the idea of situated freedom, which assumes that social and cultural arrangements conspire to structurally hinder some groups of people from coming to the genuine awareness of their self-making power and practicing it or at least entice them to escape from the challenges of authentic existence. This is particularly the case with women, who are embroiled in the oppressive structures of patriarchal society that elude their control. "For Beauvoir," asserts Barbara S. Andrew, "women are situated in ways that make it less likely that they can act on their freedom" (40). In *The Second Sex*, in Le Doeuff's opinion, "all the evil is blamed on the situation, the set of harmful traditions and perverse ideologies" (93). In contrast to *Being and Nothingness,* the work displaces the centre of critical gravity from ontology, or rather what Sartre believes to be "pure ontology," to "sociology and politics" (Moi 171).

This approach takes shape as early as in *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* where Beauvoir argues persuasively that slaves should not be held culpable for their lack of initiative to seek liberation, as their oppressors have inculcated them with the false sense of their circumstances being "immediately given by nature, by the gods, by the powers against whom revolt has no meaning," the result being that they "can not even dream" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 85) of change. "Their situation has so penetrated even their ontological freedom, so modified it" elucidates Kruks, "that not even the commencement of a transcendent project is possible" (*Situation* 97). Women, according to Beauvoir, have been confined to the same disadvantaged position. Similar to children, "having been kept in a state of servitude and ignorance, they have no means of breaking the ceiling which is stretched over their heads" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 37). Although they have not been divested of their freedom in the same way as slaves, "they can exercise [it] . . . only within this universe which has been set up before them, without them" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 39).

The restrictive impact of external factors on women's possibilities of authentic existence is accorded prominence also in the portrait of the narcissist in *The Second Sex*. Beauvoir has no doubt that "circumstances invite woman more than man to turn toward self and to dedicate her love to herself" (*Second Sex* 756), taking into consideration both their biological constitution and, more crucially, cultural positioning. First, whereas the boy can alienate himself in his penis, the girl does not have any body part that could perform the same function for her; it is thus a doll that serves as her double. The penis, however, symbolises "autonomy, transcendence, and power," allowing the boy to "boldly assume his subjectivity"; a doll, in stark contrast, "on the one hand . . . represents the whole body and, on the other hand, it is a passive thing," so the girl identifies "her person as a whole" with "an inert given" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 340). As she grows up to adolescence and adulthood, a doll is replaced in its role of a vehicle of self-identification by a mirror-image. Once again, the problem is that patriarchal society has taught the woman to look at herself as an object of sexual attraction for men, her beauty thus having "the passivity of immanence" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 757). She "really believes she is seeing *herself* in the mirror: passive and given, the reflection is a thing like herself" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 758). Further, she is coerced into roles that involve the daily performance of repetitive and commonplace activities, such as cooking, washing, cleaning and attending to children, that are intended solely to perpetuate life, without allowing a space for creative self-expression: "She is busy, but she does not *do* anything; in her functions as wife, mother, and housewife, she is not recognized in her singularity" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 756). The woman is deprived of space where to give vent to her transcendence; "not being able to accomplish herself in projects and aims," she thus "attempts to grasp herself in the immanence of her person" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 756). As neatly summarised by Arp, "[t]he narcissist attempts to achieve her individual salvation by realizing her transcendence in the immanence to which she has been condemned by her upbringing and culture" ("Beauvoir's Concept"169).

While describing the woman in love, Beauvoir by the same token directs attention to the fact that the patriarchal system is organised in such a way that that "everything incites her [the woman] to take the easy way out" rather than "to fight on her own account" (*Second Sex* 775-776) by engaging in transformative projects. *The Second Sex* posits an obvious link between the female tendency to invest freedom in attachment to the male lover and the hierarchical gender relations, in which men form a privileged class of superior human beings, taking advantage of women. While the former enjoy the status of the essential Subject, the latter are constructed as the inessential Other, an opposition that will be explored in the last section of this chapter. Considering that the woman has been "destined for the male from her earliest

childhood, used to seeing him as a sovereign, with whom equality is not permitted," it is hardly surprising that a merger with the beloved appears to her to be the only possible gateway into transcendence (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 774). Her idolatrous worship of the lover is similarly prompted by the trappings of patriarchy: "Since she is, in any case, condemned to dependence, she would rather serve a god than obey tyrants" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 774). In a bid to obscure the truth of her inferior position, "she chooses to want her enslavement so ardently that it will seem to her to be the expression of her freedom" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 774).

1.4.2 AUTHENTICITY IN INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

The preceding pages have problematised (in)authenticity predominantly in terms of how the individual should approach their own existence. Still, the paragraphs discussing Beauvoir have hinted that being authentic is also a function of one's engagements with other people. As demonstrated earlier, Heidegger, Sartre, and Beauvoir conceive of the human being not as an entity separated from the world by the boundaries of their consciousness but, quite the contrary, as an active and participating presence in a communal environment. It follows that the quest of authenticity must extend beyond the sphere of one's individuality. As remarked by Cooper, "to be an authentic individual entails that one stands in appropriate relationships to other human beings" ("Existentialism" 44). In this section, a closer look will be taken at how these three philosophers incorporate the intersubjective aspect of human existence into their expositions of the concept at hand.

As far as Heidegger is concerned, it is apposite to begin by recalling the ambiguity inscribed in his idea of the they-self: on the one hand, it blinds *Dasein* to its power of self-creation, sinking it in de-individualised conventions; on the other hand, it delivers the necessary background of meanings, serving as a point of reference for self-interpretative activity and communication with other *Daseins*. Consequently, while one should seek a way out of lostness in the public world, it is impossible to entirely disconnect oneself from it. Heidegger asserts emphatically that "[r]esoluteness, as *authentic Being-one's-Self*, does not detach Dasein from its world, nor does it isolate it so that it becomes a free-floating 'I'" (*Being* 344). Authenticity in his understanding is foreign to any note of solipsism (Golomb 87; Mulhall 69; M. O'Brien 544). It entails taking ownership of one's own existence through self-chosen and self-directed projects instead of unreflectively accepting externally imposed arrangements, but this enterprise is always embedded in a shared field of understanding and open to other people. "Dasein must stand alone, but it must do so not out of a naïve and misguided understanding of its own isolation from others," elucidates Tina Chanter, "but rather in the knowledge that it has had the strength

to tear itself away from the opinions of the they" (94). As a matter of fact, authenticity inevitably intertwines the personal with the communal, considering that "I am only through language and the social relations, practices, and institutions it enables" (Vogel 45). Olafson thus heavily criticises the common misconception that "one has to be original in order to be authentic" (39). What one is required to do is not to reject the content that originates from outside of oneself but to use it in a creative manner (Vogel 47).

Furthermore, Heidegger establishes an express link between *Dasein's* personal authenticity and the authenticity of other *Daseins*, with the former determining and inspiring the latter. By living one's life with an urgent sense of the demands, limitations, and possibilities that it involves, one sends "a call to others to strive to become authentic as well" (Golomb 79):

> Dasein's resoluteness towards itself is what first makes it possible to let the Others who are with it 'be' in their ownmost potentiality-for-Being and to co-disclose this potentiality in the solicitude which leaps forth and liberates. When Dasein is resolute, it can become the 'conscience' of Others. Only by authentically Being-their-Selves in resoluteness can people authentically be with one another. (Heidegger, *Being* 344)

While commenting upon the foregoing passage, Vogel observes that it establishes "a norm of reciprocal freedom, and so a moral orientation toward the other as an end-in-himself" as one of the prerequisites of authenticity (67). Just as every individual aspiring to authenticity is supposed to exercise their personal freedom in full awareness of their mortality and thrownness, so they have the ethical duty to create such conditions as will enable the self-determining agency of the other to flourish (Vogel 68).

Following Heidegger, Sartre also links the concept under consideration to openness to the human community in which one lives. T. Storm Heter notes that, contrary to prevalent opinion, the philosopher comprehends authenticity as "a social, other-regarding virtue" (75; see also Golomb 94). This claim is certainly corroborated by *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, which leaves no doubt that existence can be lived well exclusively when one advances the freedom of other people: "Consequently, when, operating on the level of complete authenticity, . . . I must will the freedom of others" (Sartre 49). These two freedoms are interlocked, feeding on each other for sustenance: "in thus willing freedom, we discover that it depends entirely on the freedom of others, and that the freedom of others depends on our own" (Sartre, *Existentialism* 48). As paraphrased by Heter, "[t]o be authentic I must respect others because others make me who I am" (75). In *Notebooks for an Ethics*, Sartre reinforces this message, averring that "in oppression the oppressor oppresses himself" (428). By denying others their possibilities of

autonomous self-formation, the oppressor destroys the shared ground on which to authentically pursue their own existential projects. The philosopher thus concludes that the authentic individual must assume "all at once the responsibility for himself and for the universe" (*Notebooks* 493), ensuring that both they and those around them may act as free subjects.

Nowhere, however, is the communal dimension of authenticity given a more pronounced emphasis that in Beauvoir's writings. It has been demonstrated earlier in this chapter that she locates human existence firmly within the interpersonal realm, where individual interests and goals come into constant interaction. In "Pyrrhus and Cineas," she sketches the idea of existence that "refers [one] to that of all men" (111). "[W]e need the Other to act as witness to our actions," as commented by Ursula Tidd ("Self-Other" 230), as well as a contributor to our projects (Bergoffen, Introduction 85). "A man alone in the world," believes Beauvoir, "would be paralyzed by the manifest vision of the vanity of all his goals" ("Pyrrhus" 115), their existence lacking the necessary validation from outside. In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, she upholds this position with the claim that "no existence can be validly fulfilled if it is limited to itself" (Beauvoir 67). One may develop a genuine relation to oneself only in the midst of the human environment, facing the "the risks and the inevitable element of failure involved in any engagement in the world" against the temptation to seek shelter in isolation (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 67). More than that, for Beauvoir, the intersubjective world is the arena in which the human being "must realize himself morally" (*Ethics* 70). With *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, she "change[s] existentialism's focus on one's own freedom into a focus on the freedom of others," as argued by Arp (*Bonds* 7), by developing her unique concept of "moral freedom," which is "freedom that one achieves by reaching out towards other freedoms" (Arp, *Bonds* 136). The philosopher contends in very definite terms that "the existence of others as a freedom . . . is even the condition of my own freedom" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 115), hence also a crucial constituent of personal authenticity. It is imperative not only to further one's own causes and goals but also to work towards the other's ability to succeed as a free existent with their personal projects.

Now that it has been established that existential authenticity is inextricably accompanied by an encounter with the other in their inalienable freedom, it is necessary to reconstruct the philosophers' understanding of interpersonal relationships and (in)authenticity within them. Heidegger is the most reticent one on this subject. He limits himself to distinguishing and briefly characterising two "extreme possibilities" (*Being* 158) of connecting with other people: leaping in and leaping ahead, only the latter being authentic. In the leaping-in mode, which is also the more prevalent one, *Dasein* "take[s] away 'care' from the Other and put[s] itself in his position in concern" (Heidegger, *Being* 158). One assumes charge of someone else's life, dictating how

they should respond to existential challenges. This, as remarked by Aho, is often done with the best intentions, an example being an "overprotective mother" who wants to shield her adolescent child against any kinds of mistakes (*Existentialism*). The result, however, is deleterious: "[t]he Other . . . steps back so that afterwards, when the matter has been attended to, he can either take it over as something finished and at his disposal, or disburden himself of it completely" (Heidegger, *Being* 158). Their "authentic horizon" and "innate potential" for being the master of their own existence is obstructed (M. O'Brien 545) and replaced by re-enactment of pre-given scenarios. The leaping-in solicitude makes its object "dominated and dependent" (Heidegger, *Being* 158), robbing them of autonomy. It is a flawed form of assistance that displays no regard for the fundamental existential truths: "(1) that the other Dasein is a fellow human being; (2) that she has projects (and selfhood) of her own; and (3) that she is capable of carrying out her projects and of becoming a self" (Freeman, "Love").

Leaping-ahead, by contrast, involves connecting with the other "not in order to take away his 'care' but rather to give it back to him authentically as such for the first time" (Heidegger, *Being* 159). This mode of solicitude "helps the Other to become transparent to himself *in* his care and to become *free for* it" (Heidegger, *Being* 159). It strives to unlock the other's responsiveness to their own being, allowing space for their self-responsibility. As underscored by Vogel, it is thus a strictly "ontological" rapport (83), oriented not so much on securing the happiness and safety of another person as on stimulating their "capacity for having an authentic relationship to [their] own existence" (78). In leaping ahead, *Dasein* does not attempt to make any existential choices for another *Dasein* but alerts them to the importance of self-ownership and creates such conditions as to allow them to take benefit of their freedom.

As opposed to Heidegger, Sartre brings human relationships to the foreground of his *opus magnum*, providing an extensive and in-depth analysis of their dynamics. While, as argued previously, the French philosopher accords centrality to the freedom of other human beings as the necessary condition of personal authenticity, he argues at the same time that it is "precisely because I exist by means of the Other's freedom" that "I am in danger in this freedom" (*Being* 366). The account elaborated in Part Three of *Being and Nothingness* insists that any encounter with the other is fraught with tension, leading to conflict that can hardly be assuaged. First and foremost, this encounter is structured by the experience of the look, whereby one apprehends oneself as a disempowered object at the mercy of a transcendent subject. Sartre illustrates this idea with the now famous description of an individual peeping through a keyhole to see what is happening behind the door (*Being* 259). The person is captivated by the spectacle unfolding before their eyes to the point of becoming "a pure consciousness of things" (Sartre, *Being* 259).

Being alone, they hold full perceptual control over the world upon which they are spying, being comfortably positioned as the "master of the situation" (Sartre, *Being* 265). Then, this absorption is abruptly interrupted by the sound of footsteps in the corridor, making the peeper realise with embarrassment that they have been caught in the act by someone else. The awareness of this presence leads "to a decentralization of the world which undermines the centralization which [they are] simultaneously effecting" (Sartre, *Being* 255). Most significantly, it results in a seismic reorientation of their self-consciousness: "all of a sudden I am conscious of myself . . . in that I have my foundation outside myself" (Sartre, *Being* 260). While a moment ago the person imposed meaning upon the space around them, now they find themselves "reduced to an object in that other person's perceptual field" (Reynolds 94).

"'Being-seen-by-the-Other,'" remarks Sartre, "is the truth of 'seeing-the-Other'" (*Being* 257). When catching the gaze of another person,[26] one is brought face to face with one's own self: "the look is first an intermediary which refers from me to myself" (Sartre, *Being* 259). Taken for granted so far, it emerges into conspicuous view as that which is exposed to definition from outside. The experience of being looked at is thus characterised in *Being and Nothingness* in terms of disempowerment. No longer a sovereign commander of their environment and their own identity, the individual metamorphoses into "the unknown object of unknowable appraisals—in particular, of value judgments" (Sartre, *Being* 267). They are perceived in a way into which they cannot penetrate, being incapable of standing at a distance from themselves, and on which they have no influence. Their image in the eyes of the Other slips beyond their control, confining them to a position not of their own choosing: "the Other's look fashions my body in its nakedness, causes it to be born, sculptures it, produces it as it is, sees it as I shall never see it. The Other holds a secret—the secret of what I am" (Sartre, *Being* 364). In this Sartre identifies the root cause of the unease integral to the confrontation between the Self and the Other, a factor that tips the balance of power in favour of the latter, establishing a relationship of domination and subordination between the two: "In so far as I am the object of values which come to qualify me without my being able to act on this qualification or even to know it, I am enslaved" (*Being* 267). The look brings "the solidification and alienation of my own possibilities" (Sartre, *Being* 263), converting transcendence into facticity. The feeling that prevails in this encounter is thus shame arising from "the recognition of the fact that I am indeed that object which the Other is looking at and judging" (Sartre, *Being* 261).

[26] Sartre understands the look not necessarily as a visual experience but as any sign revealing the presence of the other: "But the look will be given just as well on occasion when there is a rustling of branches, or the sound of a footstep followed by silence, or the slight opening of a shutter, or a light movement of a curtain" (*Being* 257).

As mentioned earlier, the individual-as-seen, who grasps themselves in their facticity, at the same time inevitably experiences the disclosure of the Other's transcendent subjectivity (Sartre, *Being* 270). Before being congealed by the external gaze, they enjoyed an unbounded liberty of shaping themselves. Now they come to realise that the same freedom is vested in the Other (Sartre, *Being* 263). For Sartre, this revelation stems from a logical implication: there could be no objectification without a subject who objectifies (*Being* 257). It is only a "free being" that has the capacity to pass judgements and bestow identity upon another individual (Sartre, *Being* 267). Consequently, "in the look the death of my possibilities causes me to experience the Other's freedom" (Sartre, *Being* 271). Most disturbingly, this foreign freedom resists familiarity and comprehension, representing an unresolvable enigma for the self (Sartre, *Being* 270).

To recapitulate, the Other acts as "the enemy, and the danger" (Warnock, *Philosophy* 126), an inscrutable intruder bringing disruption to one's world and autonomy. It is yet necessary to stress that, at the same time, the Other's presence recalls and discloses the self to itself: "By virtue of consciousness the Other is for me simultaneously the one who has stolen my being from me and the one who causes 'there to be' a being which is my being" (Sartre, *Being* 364). When suddenly dispossessed of self-determining possibilities, the individual grows extraordinarily alert to the significance of their own existence as a value that needs to be claimed through personal effort: "I am revealed to myself as responsible for my being" (Sartre, *Being* 364). Sartre asserts that, for all the concomitant distress, the experience of being objectified "stands as the indication of what I should be obliged to recover and found in order to be the foundation of myself" (*Being* 364). As put by Bergoffen, the self is "far from welcoming [the] theft" of their agency and self-command ("Existentialism" 105). Once the initial sense of petrification subsides, one develops an urgent impulse to recapture the lost subjectivity. The problem is that there is no other way to satisfy this desire but to reverse the existing dynamic of the looking/looked-at relationship by thrusting the Other into the position of vulnerability. In Sartre's scheme, regaining personal freedom "is conceivable only if I assimilate the Other's freedom" (*Being* 364). "Thus my project of recovering myself," concludes the philosopher, "is fundamentally a project of absorbing the Other" (Sartre, *Being* 364). In this lies the source of incessant tension that underpins human relationships as conceived of by Sartre. "Conflict is the original meaning of being-for-others" (Sartre, *Being* 364) because each consciousness either attempts to rob the other of freedom or struggles to escape their own enslavement. He makes a point of excluding the possibility of any mutual recognition of freedoms between two subjects

(*Being* 408).[27] Interpersonal engagements are deadlocked in an "unstable shifting" (Barnes, Translator's Introduction xli) between being objectified and objectifying and, for that matter, between relating to the Other either as a subject or as an object (Sartre, *Being* 366). Crucially, neither of these two polarities can grant one any sustained sense of fulfilment (Sartre 408). Once the Other is cast as an object, one loses a foil against which to build a sense of selfhood, so the need arises to "*resurrect* the Other as a subject" (Gardner 180).

Human beings are condemned to repeat the same cycle: "one must either transcend the Other or allow oneself to be transcended by him" (Sartre *Being* 429). As graphically described by Grene, "it is a treadmill from which . . . I can never find escape" (*Dreadful Freedom* 87). For this reason, all interpersonal relationships, especially the most intimate ones, are enmeshed in futile strategies of avoiding the threat of the look, each of them bearing the seeds of its own failure. On the one end of the spectrum, there are love and masochism, which pursue the project of "[assimilating] the Other's freedom" (Sartre, *Being* 364), simultaneously involving self-objectification; on the other end, these two are juxtaposed by indifference, desire, sadism, and hate, which "appropriate the Other's freedom" (Sartre, *Being* 380). The following paragraphs will briefly characterise each of the aforementioned relations.

The idea of love developed by the philosopher is that of a site laden with contradictions, one that brings the unrealisable desires of both lovers into collision, ultimately offering them nothing but insecurity and frustration without any hope for resolution. "In Sartre's writing, there is no happily ever after," as categorically opined by Cleary (115). First of all, Sartrean love is possessive, albeit in a peculiar way whereby one seeks both to preserve the Other as an autonomous subject and curtail their freedom in order to protect oneself, that is, "to possess a freedom as freedom" (*Being* 367). When divested of their agency, the beloved would not be capable of validating the lover's existence, so it is only natural to yearn that they reciprocate the feeling out of their own volition and continue to act in full freedom (Sartre, *Being* 370). More than that, this yearning goes hand in hand with the wilful acceptance of one's own position as an object (Sartre, *Being* 367). Sartre even goes as far as to define love "as the project of making oneself be loved" (Sartre, *Being* 375). By no means, however, does the type of objectification to which he refers here welcomes the uncomfortable fixing into the meaning determined by the Other as is involved in the dynamics of the look. The lover's ambition is to be privileged as the most precious object, which renders the existence of the beloved meaningful; in love, one "wants to be the object in which the Other's freedom consents to lose

[27] In this respect, he rejects Hegel's resolution of the master-slave conflict (Gardner 179), a point on which he differs markedly from Beauvoir, as will be discussed at a later point.

itself, the object in which the Other consents to find his being and his raison d'être as his second facticity" (Sartre, *Being* 367-368). The chief paradox is thus that the lover "wants to be loved by a freedom but demands that this freedom as freedom should no longer be free" (Sartre, *Being* 367). Sartre concedes that once such a configuration is achieved, one can indeed momentarily feel satisfied, without any uncertainty about one's own existence, believing, as one does, that now "it is taken up and willed . . . by an absolute freedom which at the same time our existence conditions and which we ourselves will with our freedom" (Sartre, *Being* 371). This state of joyful plenitude, however, cannot be sustained, for "the original character of the relationship is contradicted by its own fulfilment" (Grene, *Dreadful Freedom* 83). When the beloved loses themselves in passion for the lover, the positions are reversed. The former "is swallowed up in [their] objectivity" (Sartre, *Being* 376), as a result of which the latter regains their subjectivity. Thereby, the hope of becoming a unique object embraced absolutely by pure freedom morphs into sore disappointment, ultimately referring both lovers back to responsibility for their own unjustifiable and contingent being (Sartre, *Being* 376).

The overall conclusion drawn by Sartre is that love is irremediably tension-ridden in a threefold manner (*Being* 377). First and foremost, as sketched above, it deceptively conceals its own intrinsically unfulfillable character only to spiral into dissatisfaction, reneging on the promise of self-completeness and self-justification. Second, it may die any moment, so each lover faces the enduring risk of being looked at by the beloved as a mere object like any other, "hence [their] perpetual insecurity" (Sartre, *Being* 377). Third, any romantic relationship between two persons is always framed in a broader human space, being vulnerable to interference from third parties, whose look may dispel the illusion of the absolute indispensability of the lovers to each other (Sartre, *Being* 377).

The frustration resulting from the failure of love may drive one to re-channel energy into the equally futile enterprise of masochism. Whereas a person in love pursues the contradictory goal of simultaneously saving the other's freedom and taking hold of it to curb the impact of the look, the masochist "hope[s] that this freedom may be and will itself to be radically free" without any reservations (Sartre, *Being* 378). In contrast to the former, who dreams of being glorified as a privileged object, the latter wishes to be degraded into "one object among others, as an instrument to be used" (Sartre, *Being* 378). "[I]t is my transcendence which is to be denied," defeated and disposed of by this infinite freedom at will (Sartre, *Being 3*78). The masochist takes a perverted relish in being humiliated, thereby obtaining a confirmation of their own status as a thing-like object (Sartre, *Being* 378). Sartre contends that what fuels this fantasy is an urge not so much to inspire lust in another person as "to cause myself to be fascinated by

my objectivity-for-others" (Sartre, *Being* 378). This is a vain hope, however, because no one is capable of grasping oneself as an object "such as it is for the Other" (Sartre, *Being* 378). More than that, persistent attempts to succeed in this inherently impossible mission only have the reverse effect: "[t]he more he tries to taste his objectivity, the more he will be submerged by the consciousness of his subjectivity—hence his anguish" (Sartre, *Being* 378). Furthermore, by manipulating the Other into pain-inflicting practices, the masochist essentially uses them as a means to their end, the result being that it is "the Other's objectivity" that they confront (Sartre, *Being* 378), whereby masochism miserably fails to fulfil its own goal.

Indifference, as opposed to both love and masochism, is the refusal to address "the Other's absolute subjectivity as the foundation of my being-in-itself and my being-for-others" so as to retain a firm sense of control over one's own identity (Sartre, *Being* 381). One prefers to believe that other people are only distant actors, forming a shadowy background to one's life without exerting any formative influence on its shape: "I brush against 'people' as I brush against a wall" (Sartre, *Being* 380). In this way, as clarified by Jonathan Webber, "the status of other people as subjects with characters and perspectives on the world" (139) is denied. Much as this illusion may be obstinately fostered even for a lifetime, by no means can it guarantee any stable satisfaction. Quite the reverse, it only exacerbates existential anxiety by bringing the vertiginous extent of one's responsibility before oneself to plain sight: "Without the Other I apprehend fully and nakedly this terrible necessity of being free which is my lot" (Sartre, *Being* 381). Furthermore, it is anyway impossible to exist in the world without having at least an intuitive awareness of the Other's freedom and one's own objectivity (Sartre, *Being* 381). In addition, once indifference finally collapses, the experience of being looked at assumes an even more exasperating character, as it catches one unawares (Sartre, *Being* 382).

The fundamental project of sexual desire, in turn, is to "get hold of the Other's free subjectivity through his objectivity-for-me" (Sartre, *Being* 382). As conceptualised by Sartre, it thus can hardly be identified with a physical lust pure and simply. It may be "the desire of one body for another body" (Sartre, *Being* 389) but only insofar as this body constitutes a means through which a foreign consciousness materialises itself for one's grasp. In this sense, "desire is the desire to appropriate this incarnated consciousness" (Sartre, *Being* 398). To complicate matters further, Sartre establishes a distinction between body and flesh. Whereas the former is "a body in situation . . . hidden by cosmetics, clothing, etc.; in particular . . . hidden by movements," the latter is a body in-itself deprived of transcendence (Sartre, *Being* 389). What desire craves is to reduce the body to flesh and then to possess it (Sartre, *Being* 389). In order to attain this end, the lover "make[s] [themselves] flesh in the presence of the Other" (Sartre,

Being 389) and then turns the Other into the same flesh through caress, thereby producing a relationship of reciprocity: "At this moment the communion of desire is realized; each consciousness by incarnating itself has realized the incarnation of the other" (Sartre, *Being* 396). Be that as it may, Sartre does not believe that desire can break the Gordian knot of the looking/looked-at conflictual dynamics. After all, it has at its core the unachievable aim of entrapping the Other's consciousness in the inert materiality of flesh to contain the threat of being judged and simultaneously preserving the Other's freedom to receive validation as a subject (Sartre, *Being* 394). Desire slides into failure with the very sexual act, which shatters reciprocal incarnation (Sartre, *Being* 398). For one thing, once the lover lays claim to the Other's freedom, their own body loses its fleshliness, and so does the Other's body, both transforming back into mere instruments (Sartre, *Being* 398). For another, pleasure nullifies desire because the desirer "turn[s] . . . inwards" (Reynolds 106), concentrating on their own sexual experience to the neglect of the Other.

A failed desire is wont to degenerate into sadism, which pursues the same objective, yet with "the emphasis . . . on the instrumental appropriation of the incarnated-Other" (Sartre, *Being* 399). Whereas a desirous subject consents to incarnate themselves in order to impel the Other into incarnation, the sadist attempts to do so without becoming flesh. They actually revel in "the non-reciprocity of sexual relations," acting as an oppressor who can wield unrestrained control over their victim (Sartre, *Being* 399). Their enterprise involves capturing the Other's subjectivity through violence, by humiliating and torturing their body so that it "appears under the aspect of the obscene" (Sartre, *Being* 402). Still, sadism is doomed to be unsuccessful since, irrespective of how much pain the sadist inflicts on the Other, forcing them into docility, the Other's freedom cannot be annihilated (Sartre, *Being* 405-406). As a matter of fact, their look continues to jeopardise the sadist, impervious to their command, and its "explosion . . . causes the meaning and goal of sadism to collapse" (Sartre, *Being* 406).

The last attitude studied by Sartre is hate, whereby one "consents to being only for-itself," transcendence resisting entanglement in any external limitations (Sartre, *Being* 410). Since any foreign freedom restricts their own freedom, the hater reduces the Other to an object and then covets their destruction in order to make oneself immune to the risk of becoming caught in their objectifying look (Sartre, *Being* 411). The paradox is that, by expending so much energy on denying the Other's freedom, one actually invests it with the greatest significance (Sartre, *Being* 411). Apart from that, the project of hate fails anyway, considering that the abolition of the Other does not erase their memory (Sartre, *Being* 412). Taking pleasure in victory over the no-longer-present Other is tantamount to affirming that they used to exist and exert a consequential

influence on one's identity. Sartre avers that this trace of the Other's power is bound to define the self for a lifetime, without ever vanishing: "What I was for the Other is fixed by the Other's death, and I shall irremediably be it in the past" (*Being* 412).

Sartre's vision may definitely appear to be an unremittingly bleak one, without providing for any way out of the blind alley of interpersonal conflict into mutual harmony and gratification. Various scholars insist, however, that this account actually refers not to human relationships *per se* but only to human relationships as lived out by consciousnesses caught in bad faith (Webber 119; Cooper, *Existentialism* 197; T. Anderson 146). It is only when people cling to inauthentic fantasies about their existential condition that they find themselves locked in frustrating battles. Thomas C. Anderson argues that such an interpretation is valid in particular from the perspective of *Notebooks for an Ethics* (146). In this never-finished treatise, Sartre expressly admits that "there is no ontological reason to stay on the level of struggle" (*Notebooks* 20).[28] "[T]he Hell of passions" (Sartre, *Notebooks* 499) portrayed in *Being and Nothingness* can be remoulded into a reciprocally beneficial relationship through what he calls a "conversion to intersubjectivity" (Sartre, *Notebooks* 407). With this notion, the philosopher makes "a significant advance beyond the narrow subject-object human relations described in *Being and Nothingness*" (T. Anderson 148), opening an avenue for reciprocal recognition, whereby both parties embrace themselves as object and subject at the same time, surpassing their drive for domination and fear of subjugation. If one forgoes the bad-faith project of becoming in-itself-for-itself and wilfully accepts "the fact of being free and an object for other people" (Sartre, *Notebooks* 20), the Other's freedom and its objectifying capacity is no longer countered as a menace but assumes the dimension of "a positive enhancement of [one's own] existence" (T. Anderson 147): "he [the Other] enriches the world and me, he *gives a meaning* to my existence *in addition* to the subjective meaning I myself give it" (Sartre, *Notebooks* 500). This shift from either/or to both/and logic lays down the foundation for "authentic love," which seeks to generously contribute to the lover's freedom; "to unveil the Other's being-within-the-world . . .; to *rejoice* in it without appropriating it; . . . and to surpass it only in the direction of the Other's ends" (Sartre, *Notebooks* 508).[29]

---

[28] Assuming a feminist point of view, Deutscher maintains that this is not an extension of Sartre's position but its overall revision (37-40).

[29] Gothlin notes that even if Sartre integrates the idea of reciprocal recognition of freedom into *Notebooks for an Ethics*, he does not entirely depart from the conflictual vision of romantic engagements ("Beauvoir and Sartre" 137-138). He maintains at the same time that there can be "[n]o love without the sadistic-masochistic dialectic of subjection of freedoms that I have described" and further that "to attempt to bring about a love that would surpass the sadistic-masochistic stage of desire and of enchantment would be to make love disappear" (Sartre, *Notebooks* 414).

It was not Sartre, however, but Beauvoir who expounded and championed the idea that conflict between two freedoms can be surpassed on the condition that both exert themselves to rise out of inauthenticity. According to a number of scholars, her ethical theory constitutes "her greatest contribution" to existentialist philosophy (Stanley 442; Lundgren-Gothlin, "Gender" 4; Mahon 90). In putting it forth, she mounts a critique of the patriarchal structures, demystifying the ways in which they thwart this conversion into reciprocity by instituting structural inequalities between men and women to the detriment of the latter.

As explained earlier, Beauvoir appropriates the Heideggerian concept of *Mitsein* to mitigate the one-sided stress placed by Sartre on interpersonal hostility; at the same time, in a nod to her lifetime partner, she acknowledges that "[i]f the original relation between man and his peers had been exclusively one of friendship, one could not account for any kind of enslavement" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 91). The human being, in her view, is indeed tainted by a form of imperialism of the self, to which they have succumbed throughout centuries. When elaborating this thought, Beauvoir draws heavily on Hegel's master-slave dialectic as reconstructed by Alexandre Kojève (Gothlin, "Reading" 58). Following him, she analyses "self-consciousness and historical development as arising from a confrontation with the Other" and the resultant "life-and-death struggle" (Gothlin, "Reading" 58). The Other, a category "as original as consciousness itself" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 26), has crucial significance for individuals, as well as communities, as a point of reference against which to establish self-definition; it is through antagonism that a sense of subjectivity emerges and takes a definite form: "the subject posits itself only in opposition; it asserts itself as the essential and sets up the other as inessential, as the object" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 27). Nevertheless, forming a part of a larger world, the self must sooner or later become aware that they are not alone in their demand for sovereign subjectivity. "[T]he other consciousness has an opposing reciprocal claim"; in the eyes of this foreign subject, one is also the Other (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 27). Thereby, otherness loses its absolute character; "whether one likes it or not, individuals and groups have no choice but to recognize the reciprocity of their relation" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 27).

According to Beauvoir, this reciprocity, for no inevitable reason inherent to "human ontology" (Gatens 269), has been prominently missing from the relations between men and women (*Second Sex* 27). The latter have been defined from time immemorial in negative terms as non-agents, subordinate, inferior and secondary to men, who, by contrast, have enjoyed the privilege of non-relative autonomy and power: "she is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 26). Once having been relegated to subservience, the woman "never returned to the essential, as the absolute

Other, without reciprocity" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 194), her identity and life opportunities being firmly restrained, fixed, and kept under control by men. The principal problem that Beauvoir sets out to tackle in her monumental work is why and how the dialectic of the self and other as played out between the sexes has been glaringly asymmetrical, entrenching oppression of women by making their alterity absolute to the exclusion of reciprocity (*Second Sex* 27). Furthermore, what puzzles her, considering that "in order for the Other not to turn into the One, the Other has to submit to this foreign point of view," is what inhibits women from "[contesting] male sovereignty" and winning the status of free agents and subjects in their own right (*Second Sex* 27). "Where does this submission in woman come from?" (Beauvoir 27) is a question that drives much of her inquiry in *The Second Sex*.

The answer to this quandary is gleaned by Beauvoir from her analysis of the gendered division of labour in primitive societies. First of all, she observes that the factor that allows the master in Hegel's account to secure ascendancy over the slave is "the affirmation of Spirit over Life in the fact of risking his life" (*Second Sex* 99-100). Prior to surrendering to the master's authority, the slave yet actually "experience[s] this same risk" while participating in the life and death struggle (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 100). In the prehistoric times, it was only men who jeopardised their lives, vying with other men for food, space, and other resources and opposing the treacherous forces of nature. Whereas women, by virtue of their biological constitution, over which they had no command at the time, occupied themselves exclusively with bearing and rearing children, men used to be hunters and warriors, responsible for the protection, survival and welfare of their tribes. This enabled them to gradually rise above the established boundaries and give birth to new creations, thereby taking full benefit of their transcendence. Their feats of strength, prowess, skill, and valour gave them "supreme dignity" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 99), entirely inaccessible to women, who were forced to act as guardians of the hearth, reproducing and maintaining life through mothering. Since "it is not in giving life but in risking his life that man raises himself above the animal" (Beauvoir *Second Sex* 99), this early delegation of tasks excluded women from the struggle for self-recognition, situating them wholly "outside the dialectic" (Lundgren-Gothlin, "Gender" 6): "there has never been combat between the male and her" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 100). Originally deprived of the possibility to confront men with a reciprocal claim to subjectivity by being "denied access to transcendent work" (Mussett 289), they have stood susceptible to objectification as the inessential Other, without a sense of an independent communal identity and history founded on their own creatively forged values, projects and "dreams" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 196). Although it is

distinctly human to continually aspire to transcendence, the woman has been trapped in "the compulsions of a situation in which she is the inessential" (Mahon 115).

Throughout history, this vulnerability has been eagerly exploited by men, assuming the dimension of systemic oppression. In order to "maintain masculine prerogatives" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 100), they have anchored women in a life of "repetition and routine" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 587) devoted to performance of familial functions within domestic confines, thereby engulfing them in immanence. Inculcated with a sense of obligation to "subordinate their desire for reciprocity and recognition to the demands of the bond" (Bergoffen, "Simone de Beauvoir" 259) by patriarchal ideology, women, on their part, have obediently conformed to the assigned roles. Thereby men have been conveniently able to "escape the inexorable dialectic of the master and the slave" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 194) with the attendant anxiety of balancing between the positions of subject and object. The Other has been successfully disarmed of their power as "a threat and a danger" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 113).

In this context, marriage, as the bedrock of patriarchy, has served, in Beauvoir's view, to institutionalise women's subordination and enclosure in immanence. Its irredeemable flaw consists in perverting the spontaneous movement of love into the shackles of duty by imposing specific requirements on the spouses. This way, it establishes a relationship "based on domination as opposed to companionship" (Pettersen 164), one that fuels the man's "capricious imperialism" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 566). Beauvoir condemns it in very harsh terms as a vehicle of legalised oppression, which is essentially akin to prostitution (*Second Sex* 680): "the woman *gives herself*; the man remunerates her and takes her" (*Second Sex* 444). Thrust into the role of a servant to her husband, she cannot grow as an authentic individual (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 587-588). As for men, despite apparently having their needs attended to by women, they are also usually barred from deriving self-fulfilment from conjugal life. Starved for a sense of accomplishment and purpose, which is not supplied by her mundane occupations, the wife places a constant pressure on her husband to achieve success so as to be able to vicariously taste transcendence, thereby causing his frustration (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 590-591). The bitter conclusion is that although the institution of marriage undergoes transformations, "it still constitutes an oppression that both spouses feel in different ways" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 589).

While Beauvoir lays the blame for gender inequalities on the trappings of patriarchal culture, she does not disregard the role that women themselves play in their own undoing. As early as in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, she asserts that "the oppressor would not be so strong if he did not have accomplices among the oppressed themselves" (97). It is often the case that women "at least consent[]" to abdicate their freedom and do so through mere "laziness and timidity"

(Beauvoir, *Ethics* 45). *The Second Sex* similarly makes an important point about female participation in the patriarchal machine: "men encounter more complicity in their woman companions that the oppressor usually finds in the oppressed and in bad faith they use it as a pretext to declare that *woman* wanted the destiny they imposed on her" (Beauvoir 852). It is well known from the earlier analysis that for Beauvoir, just as for any other existentialist, freedom is an ongoing challenge of self-creation and re-creation, one that does not offer any prospect of ever attaining a sense of plenitude and hence instigates disquiet. As a result, "beside every individual's claim to assert himself as subject . . . lies the temptation to flee freedom and to make himself into a thing" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 30). The situation of the woman is particular insofar as social factors conspire to nourish her natural urge to take a flight into facticity. Starting from the very childhood, she is indoctrinated with the false idea of her destiny being fixed "without ever being taught the necessity of assuming her own existence," and "that is the worst of the crimes committed against her" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 853). Groomed to be docile and raised in the insidious belief that her sole destiny is to be mother and wife, she is all the more inclined to abdicate the burden of responsibility for self-constitution (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 359-360). She acquiesces to stagnation in the functions allocated to her so as to "elude[] the metaphysical risk of a freedom that must invent its goals without help"; "it is a pernicious path," continues Beauvoir, "[b]ut it is an easy path: the anguish and stress of authentically assumed existence are thus avoided" (*Second Sex* 30). All in all, women's complicity is thus attributed by Beauvoir both to the impact of the patriarchal structures and to their own existential inauthenticity, induced and sustained by these structures: "woman makes no claim for herself because she lacks the concrete means, because she senses the necessary link connecting her to man without positing its reciprocity, and because she often derives satisfaction from her role as *Other*" (*Second Sex* 30).

Although the account of human relationships outlined so far foregrounds conflict, Beauvoir simultaneously stresses that this conflict lends itself to resolution (Lundgren-Gothlin, *Sex* 2). "[I]n spite of legends," she avers, "no physiological destiny imposes eternal hostility on the Male and Female as such" (*Second Sex* 848). As explicated by Bergoffen, her idea of putting an end to mutual enmity and inequality does not yet provide for "a role reversal" in the master-slave dialectic, where women would simply wrench power back from men (*Philosophy* 34). The way out of conflict, as conceived of by Beauvoir, leads rather through reciprocal recognition, which supersedes the logic of "combat or competition" privileged by patriarchy, with its use of violence as a tool of self-assertion (Bergoffen, "Simone de Beauvoir" 259), to make room for the logic of generosity. In order to bring this shift into the reality of interpersonal

engagements, it is necessary for each party to "[posit] both [themselves] and the other as object and as subject" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 193). In other words, two individuals need to embrace each other in their mutual ambiguity (Arp, *Bonds* 39), resisting the compelling urge to dominate. When authentically facing the two irreducible sides of their own existential situation, each existent realises that they are "always in some sense permeated with others/otherness" (Bergoffen, "Between" 189). This is where Beauvoir opens an entirely new perspective, re-imagining alterity in terms of strangeness that may be integrated into one's self-concept rather than obliterated, pushing the Hegelian-Sartrean associations with an irremediable threat into the background (Bergoffen, "Between" 191). The Other represents a freedom which does not necessarily destabilise one's own freedom but, quite the contrary, "completes and sustains" it (Wilkerson, "Different Kind" 55). The relation of opposition is replaced by "interdependence in terms of subjects' mutual need to be confirmed by the other as a freedom" (Deutscher 165). All human beings "have the same essential need of the other; and they can take the same glory from their freedom" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 859) instead of engaging in destructive struggles. This idea, as underlined by Liz Stanley convincingly rectifies the shortcomings of Sartre's theory outlined in *Being and Nothingness*: "it presents the relationship of being and Other as both reciprocal and as encompassing communication and cooperation as well as confrontation and conflict—which Sartre's longer-winded discussion actually fails in" (442).

The preeminent importance of reciprocal recognition, which takes delight in encountering foreignness, is brought to the fore in the Beauvoirian concept of authentic love, originating from *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* where the philosopher proclaims that "to love him genuinely is to love him in his otherness and in that freedom by which he escapes," an ideal that can be approached exclusively on the condition of "renunciation of all possession" (67). In *The Second Sex,* she continues in the same vein that a romantic bond may burgeon into authentic love only when the lovers undertake a concerted effort to abandon the desire for thing-like solidity "in order to assume [their] existence" in its permanent indefiniteness and precariousness (Beauvoir 194). Two people who are willing to accept the vulnerability at the heart of their own being will no longer feel the need to seek self-protection by depriving each other of agency, the result being that "neither would abdicate his transcendence, they would not mutilate themselves" (*Second Sex* 798-799). Not only will their love not generate incessant frustration, but it will "be the revelation of self through the gift of self and the enrichment of the universe" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 799), hence a locus of personal growth. This respect for the elusive and impenetrable alterity of the loved one must be accompanied also by a robust sense of one's own individuality and uniqueness (Pettersen 165). In contrast to inauthentic love, which places the lover on the

pedestal as the entire justification for one's own existence (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 785), genuine affection resists "the temptation to idolize a lover because it means voluntarily subordinating oneself" (Cleary 132). It remains perfectly aware of "the other's contingence, that is, his lacks, limitations" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 785), thereby also averting the risk of self-obliteration. Much as it is alluring to fantasise about love as a complete merger, which offers the otherwise inaccessible feeling of plenitude (Cleary 133-134), existential authenticity requires that it should be rather founded on the "comradeship" (Beauvoir 663) of two perfectly equal agents, who are mutually supportive in their respective enterprises.

Crucially, as intimated at the outset of this discussion, authentic love is driven by "the generosity of the gift" (Bergoffen, "Simone de Beauvoir" 262). Whereas the subject within the Hegelian and Sartrean framework can have their freedom confirmed only by demanding it through violence, on Beauvoir's account "ideas of victory and defeat" may be erased with the lovers assuming the project of "free exchange" (*Second Sex* 825). An authentic individual who wilfully elects to reach out to the loved one in their inalienable subjectivity does not elicit any form of repayment but "only appeal[s] to their generosity" (Wilkerson, "Different Kind" 55). If their disinterested gift is welcomed and reciprocated, then a mutually sustaining bond may be born. Beauvoir does not yet paint a naively romanticised picture of perfect harmony: the magnanimity of a consciously ambiguous self exposes it to the risk of rejection and abuse, as the other remains at liberty to refuse to make a gift of themselves. For this reason, "man is ceaselessly in jeopardy in his relations with his peers" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 194). "[O]ur need and desire for response from the other," notes Deutscher, "renders us constitutively vulnerable subjects" (168). The readiness to accept this risk, associated not with violence but with "our ambiguous subjectivity" (Bergoffen, *Philosophy* 6), as a staple of an authentically lived existence is yet precisely the value on which Beauvoir's "ethical ideal" of love is hinged (Deutscher 169). "[I]f there were not the risk of loss," she insists, "there would not be salvation either" (*Second Sex* 281). Importantly, building an authentic romantic relationship, with all its attendant "risks and promises" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 305), can never be condensed into a one-time accomplishment. Just as personal authenticity, it is always a tenuous process. "[A] struggle endlessly begun, endlessly abolished" (Beauvoir, *Second* 194), authentic love may be won only thanks to the continually sustained and repeated commitment of both lovers to relinquish their penchant for domination through the lucid acknowledgment of their mutual ambiguity. "[T]he space of generous intersubjectivity," to use Bergoffen's phrase ("Simone de Beauvoir" 263), requires a never-ending confrontation with one's own existential frailties as well as "repeated leaps of faith" (Cleary 158) in movement towards the other and their freedom.

The sphere privileged by Beauvoir as that which provides the most fruitful ground for human beings to approach themselves in the spirit of generosity is eroticism. The sexual act, at its very core, is well positioned to "most poignantly [reveal] to human beings their ambiguous condition . . . as flesh and as spirit, as the other and as subject" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 476). If the man does not see his female lover as a mere tool of gratifying his own physical needs but gently shows her "both desire and respect" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 475) and the woman does not surrender to the man but seeks to "reconcile her metamorphosis into a carnal object with the demands of her subjectivity" (Beauvoir, *Second* 466), each of them can take their share of bliss by giving the "voluntary gift" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 859) of their body to the partner. In opposition to Sartre, who holds that the experience of pleasure in lovemaking severs the connection between the lovers, enveloping them within the confines of their own consciousness, Beauvoir claims that it brings their closeness and interdependence into joyful prominence, as both alike are able to locate the "source [of their pleasure] in the other" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 475). While retaining their singularity, they are simultaneously drawn together into unity, where "autonomy is simultaneously enacted and dissolved" (Gothlin, "Beauvoir and Sartre" 138), with otherness arousing wonder instead of unease (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 475). This way, the ideal of authentic love comes to full fruition: "the reciprocal recognition of the self and the other is accomplished in the keenest consciousness of the other and the self" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 475).

1.5 CONCLUSION

Commencing with the discussion of how Heidegger, Sartre, and Beauvoir conceive of the human being as an individual existent and as a part of an intersubjective community, the chapter has furnished a detailed overview of the concepts of anxiety, ambiguity, and (in)authenticity. It has shown that, despite differences in points of emphasis, the philosophers share a number of essential affinities in their understanding of human existential experience.

First and foremost, they all place a marked emphasis on the "emergent, ecstatic, transcendent elusiveness" of existence (Macquarrie 48), figuring the human being as an unalterably indeterminate reality without any pre-determined and fixed essence or destiny towards which they would be inevitably heading, apart from death itself. It is only through personal choices translated into practical actions that one gives oneself a meaningful, albeit not permanent, shape. Existence thus consists in self-making, which, as long as one lives, will never reach a point of satisfactory completion. This state of flux drives a fundamental lack into the constitution of the human being, a lack that should be embraced positively as that which opens

space for freedom. At the same time, however, this movement of self-surpassing is necessarily intertwined with the aspects of facticity since, as argued most emphatically by Heidegger and Beauvoir, existential liberty unfolds itself only within a specific material reality. Significantly, this reality includes a communal context. The human being exercises their agential capacities not in solipsistic isolation but within an interpersonal arena, their private projects being enmeshed in and acquiring significance from a nexus of social relations.

This truth of existence as a continual self-creative process without any foundation in externally determined values usually remains veiled from the eyes of human beings as they are busily engaged in daily routines. It gains conspicuous visibility only through the mood of anxiety, which "jerks us out of . . . pseudo-securities" (Macquarrie 130), dismantling the bulwark of socially-instituted interpretations and laying bare the void at the heart of being. Anxiety re-connects one with one's actual existential condition through an urgent awareness of death, as emphasised by Heidegger; freedom, which saddles the human being with full responsibility for self-determination; and ambiguity—the central notion of Beauvoir's philosophy—which throws existence into an unresolvable tension between subjectivity and objectivity.

Being authentic involves living in this unsettling awareness, with a strong commitment to autonomously chosen projects and loyalty to one's own values, taking into account the limitations of facticity without passively succumbing to them. As the ultimate existentialist virtue, authenticity does not imply, however, a permanent state of being. Inherently indefinite and incomplete, the human being cannot become authentic with the solidity of a thing but must rather take a renewed effort not to lose their individuality in the social world. Nevertheless, one often chooses to renounce this effort, a creative process of self-definition thus giving way to the reiteration of ready-made patterns. As incapacitating as they are, these external scripts anaesthetise the anxiety of impermanence and instability, instilling the comforting illusion of plenitude. The reluctance to confront the truth of existence pushes human beings also into inauthenticity in their mutual relations, most importantly in romantic ties, a consideration occupying the forefront of Sartre's and Beauvoir's thought. Intent on reinforcing the sense of sovereign subjectivity, existents engage in power struggles instead of relating to both themselves and the other as equal in their existential ambiguity.

The last question that may appear pertinent is how the philosophical investigations sketched throughout the chapter could relate to specifically female problems, serving as a critical framework for the textual analysis of Duckworth's novels. In Beauvoir's case, the link is readily obvious, as her philosophical inquiry is centrally concerned with the situation of women,

specifically with how patriarchal injunctions structure their existential experience, immuring them within the inertia of inauthenticity, where their agency as meaning-making subjects responsible for self-modelling is truncated. At the same time, she furnishes an incisive exposition of women's own readiness to settle in debilitating arrangements imposed upon them from outside. As for Sartre, his insights into the human tendency to obstinately waive the project of freedom and the conflict-ridden nature of interpersonal relationship, despite their implied male-centred orientation, excoriated on various accounts by feminist critics,[30] chime prominently with the way in which Duckworth represents some of her characters as well as with her enduring preoccupation with the hazards of human bonding. Finally, as far as Heidegger is concerned, even if the concept of *Dasein* ignores gender specificity and that of the they-self takes no regard of the patriarchal context (Aho, *Heidegger's Neglect* 58), both can be adapted into valuable tools for exploring literary works set in women's reality. Their responsiveness to feminist concerns is brilliantly revealed, *inter alia*, by Nancy J. Holland, who in her article "'The Universe Is Made of Stories, Not of Atoms': Heidegger and the Feminine They-Self" gives a fresh twist to Heidegger's theory by reading it alongside Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* to argue how the feminine they-self in the patriarchal world has no way out of a very limited set of "banal" paradigms (139) and "carries with it special temptations to ignore the call of authenticity" (137). This link is demonstrated also by Lauren Freeman, who asserts that Heidegger's philosophy strikes a chord with feminist critique in "the project of reconceiving selfhood—the traditional notion of the autonomous subject—as fundamentally relational" ("Reconsidering" 363). The chapters that follow will hopefully demonstrate that the ideas of these three philosophers, most significantly their insights into the concepts of anxiety, ambiguity, and authenticity, can be successfully blended together to prompt a number of insightful readings of the existential experience of Duckworth's heroines.

[30] Still, there are female scholars who defend Sartre against accusations of a steady masculinist bias and blindness to the perspective of women. One of them is Barnes, who, while acknowledging that the philosopher at times displays misogyny, simultaneously refutes claims that "Sartre's entire philosophy is so irremediably male that it excludes women" and that "it is based on the notion of a purely male consciousness" ("Sartre and Feminism" 23).

CHAPTER TWO: EXISTENTIAL QUANDARIES IN DUCKWORTH'S MEMOIR

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Prior to embarking upon a close analysis of Marilyn Duckworth's fiction, it is fitting to devote a fair share of attention to her memoir. Published in 2000, after all of the works that will be explored throughout the following chapters, *Camping on the Faultline* merits discussion not only as a fascinating glance into the writer's life but also as a vibrant testimony to her unflagging preoccupation with her own condition as a human being in a world "filled with possibilities but short on certainties" (Duckworth 225), in view of which the existential flavour of her fiction could hardly be deemed accidental.

Although nowhere does the writer profess taking conscious and informed inspiration from the philosophy of existentialism, she reveals at least a degree of familiarity with and attraction to its general mood in two references to Albert Camus. First, while mentioning her radio post-mortem tribute to the philosopher, she lauds his profound ethical orientation: "First and foremost he was a moralist, and only secondly an atheist. . . . This idea of conscience and moral choices in a world without God absorbed me . . ." (Duckworth, *Camping* 266). Second, even more importantly, she reminisces about detecting an echo of a curious incident from her adolescence in *The Stranger*: "While I was reading *L'Etranger* I suddenly thought of my fifteen-year-old reaction to the sight of a man mowing his lawn: the feelings of absurdity that swamped me, the mechanical nature of people's lives. Camus would have understood this feeling" (*Camping* 117). It appears that parallels with existentialist ideas could be drawn also for other episodes recollected in *Camping on the Faultline*, some of which have been visibly weaved into the plots of Duckworth's novels, true to the resolution she made as a budding writer: "I realised I would invest my writing with the same sort of private significances, atmospheric auras and personal morality which I had imbibed since my childhood and there was no escaping that. I didn't want to escape it" (136). The aim of this chapter is thus to trace *Camping on the Faultline* for content pertinent to the subject matter of the entire dissertation with a view to demonstrating how the themes that structure it—anxiety, ambiguity, and authenticity—derive to a large extent from Duckworth's private experience. It commences by providing a sketch of the writer's anxious attunement to the precariousness and indefiniteness of her existence. Next, it proceeds to examine her personal maturation in the awareness of human ambiguity and mortality as well as the challenges of authenticity that she has faced throughout life. The chapter closes by recounting Duckworth's fortunes and misfortunes in interpersonal relationships.

2.2 A CAMPER ON THE FAULTLINE

Camping on the Faultline opens with a highly self-conscious reflection, which sets the tone and direction for the entire memoir, illuminating issues that will be thematised throughout its remainder: identity, self-definition, and personal authenticity: "I look at a photograph of myself as an infant and try to imagine my mind housed behind those round eyes. Is it possible? Today I use the same, older instruments of eye and brain to register impressions. I feel as uniquely myself as ever I did. . . . Is it the same person still inside these eyes in 1999?" (Duckworth 7). The passage expresses Duckworth's concern as to the possibility of achieving a sense of self-constancy amid the numerous transformations that she has undergone over the years. At the age of sixty-four, as a woman with an extremely rich and complex personal story and a rewarding professional career, the writer apparently struggles to gain a broader view of her own tumultuous life and pinpoint certain mainstays that would give it unity. Most significantly, the answer that she provides to these self-enquiries consorts perfectly well with the characteristically existentialist emphasis on the ever open and fluid nature of human identity. In "Pyrrhus and Cineas," Beauvoir states memorably that "[h]owever long I look at myself in a mirror and tell myself my own history, I never grasp myself as a solid object" (116), stressing how the human being is an inherently incomplete and unstable reality. In a somewhat similar vein, the only constant on which Duckworth relies is all-pervasive "impermanence and . . . precariousness" conveyed by the memoir's title (Wevers, "New Zealand" 1130). Using the image of a faultline, she conceptualises her lifetime experience as a continual balancing act between two sides of a rift that remain in tumultuous interaction despite the gaping chasm that separates them, forming a treacherous terrain that must be negotiated without any fixed point of support. Being a camper, she is yet well-placed to accept transience, instability and risk as inevitable.

The profound sense of existential fragility has been visibly shaped in the writer by the vicissitudes of her life. Instability became its fixture as early as during childhood, when she was moving with her family from place to place (Duckworth, *Camping* 8). As a result, Duckworth has never conceived of home as a safe haven impervious to the tribulations of the external world: "The concept of home to me is totally movable" (Duckworth, *Camping* 262). Born in New Zealand and raised in England for several wartime years, after which she returned to her homeland, she tasted the feelings of deracination and alienation "in a country [she] had thought was [her] own" (Duckworth, *Camping* 101). It was probably the estrangement experienced in a seemingly familiar place that first awakened her to the overall uncanniness of human

existence. The writer reminisces how as a girl she was plagued by a sense of existential strangeness on an almost daily basis, her spontaneous reactions to various everyday situations often glaringly mismatching customary expectations:

> I often cried when I was supposed to laugh. When my aunt at eight years old mistook soap for cheese and ended up with a mouthful of bubbles I slid under the table to hide my tears of sympathy while Fleur and Joan snorted with amusement. (Duckworth, *Camping* 21)

> Walking home from the tram stop I passed a neighbour mowing his lawn. He looked so serious about it. All at once I was stricken by the sheer absurdity of life. I wanted to laugh. And then I knew this reaction was out of place. . . . perhaps I wasn't normal? I wondered if I was going mad. I wound myself up and confessed this fear to Mother. She reassured me that many people found life absurd from time to time. (Duckworth, *Camping* 61*)*

Both these memories show her as particularly attuned to the arbitrary character of meanings and values usually taken for granted as natural givens. The latter additionally exhibits her extraordinary capacity for discerning the ultimate emptiness of those everyday ventures that often serve as a shield against the unsettling dimension of human existence.

This dissociation from social conventions, coupled with a turbulent family life, apparently incited Duckworth to engage in constant self-questioning and challenge the borders of the acceptable. Most importantly, it also stimulated her penchant for fiction, given vent in the storytelling with which she and her sister entertained themselves as children: "Fleur and I went on to invent a shared land we called Dreamland since the stories we told each other about it were part of our bedtime ritual. Gradually the stories became part of our daytime life as well" (Duckworth, *Camping* 18). The writer believes that their favourite pastime performed a vital psychological function; "[t]here was probably too much fantasy in my life, but I seemed to need it," Duckworth admits (*Camping* 54), intimating that the stories offered her the sense of control that she lacked at the time. It appears also probable that the storytelling reinforced her desire to probe those aspects of existence that tend to pass unnoticed amid daily routines. Indeed, prior to the publication of *Camping on the Faultline,* Duckworth admitted in an interview that, as suggested by Sarti, those troubled years had exerted a formative influence upon the focus of her early fiction on "absurd, sometimes even paranoid, abnormal situations" (23).

2.3 DUCKWORTH'S MIRROR ENCOUNTERS WITH THE TRUTH OF EXISTENCE

Duckworth's account of her childhood brings to the fore also her confrontation with the truth of human ambiguity and mortality. The very opening sets a surprisingly grave tone for the exploration of a time commonly associated with joy and insouciance; the writer reminisces how she grasped herself for the first time as a situated existent by intuiting the precarity of her own position: "Fear was the sensation that brought my early world into focus. My first memory is of being laid on the back seat of a car and fearing that I might slip down inside the crack and suffocate" (Duckworth, *Camping* 7). While this memory obviously invites psychoanalytic readings, another significant encounter with the shadow of death recounted by the writer carries a much more prominent existential tinge. The first of a number of mirror-looking scenes that recur meaningfully throughout the memoir, always marking privileged moments of self-revelation in Duckworth's life, explicitly articulates the acute sense of evanescence and finitude that accompanied her as a child:[31]

> One day I caught sight of myself in the hall mirror. . . . I went up close and looked at myself. I had a face. I was a person! I stared at myself, seeing my eyes watching me. It was my first real awareness of my physical appearance.[32] But it was something else as well. It was the beginning of my sense of relating to the world. It was the beginning of my awareness of the passage of time. I would grow older. I was mortal. (Duckworth, *Camping* 41)

Self-gaze—notably a motif that is used on a repeated basis by Beauvoir in her fiction to suggest philosophical meaning (Fullbrook and Fullbrook, "Beauvoir and Plato" 59-60)—apparently uncovered the girl's existential condition as a being whose "every living movement is a sliding toward death" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 127). Moreover, by positioning her in the dual role of perceiver and perceived, it allowed her to face herself simultaneously as an active subject with capacity for self-determination and as a passive object, an ambiguity captured most graphically in the girl's "seeing her eyes watching her," whereby a part of her body functioned both as her tool

---

[31] Contrary to possible intuition, Duckworth's encounter with the reality of death was not exceptional for a child. In his *Existential Psychotherapy,* Irvin D. Yalom observes, based on extensive clinical experience and research, that "[n]ot only are children profoundly concerned with death, but these concerns begin at an earlier age than is generally thought" (76). In addition, this preoccupation often "[arises] unprompted by any external stimulus" (77). Interestingly, in *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, Beauvoir also reminisces about her childhood premonition of non-being: "In . . . the silence of inanimate objects I had a foreboding of my own absence" (qtd. in Simons, "Bergson's Influence" 121).

[32] This childhood epiphany was woven by Duckworth into the experience of little Glenny in *The Matchbox House*: "she had caught sight of herself in the long mirror opposite—the straight brown frock of rough material with bumps on it, and above this brown oblong, the face. This was the most surprising thing. It seemed to her that she had never noticed the face before. . . . Glenny giggled and had time to see the expression change. It was fascinating. She was a person. And then the shiver came back to her again" (14).

and an extraneous entity inspecting her as if from outside. thereby making her "the Other in relation to [her] eye" (Sartre, *Being* 304). On the one hand, the act empowered her by stimulating the emergence of a discrete self, contemplated with a mixture of wonder and an enhanced corporeal feeling. It was through the body that the girl acquired the sense of both connection to the world and separate subjectivity. On the other hand, this empowerment coincided with the disquieting insight into the death-bound nature of her existence. Simultaneously with developing selfhood borders, she noticed how fragile she was in her susceptibility to uncontrollable processes leading to one ineluctable end.

The awareness of mortality proved to be a pestering presence throughout Duckworth's childhood. "I was very nervous at the time, afraid of dying," she confesses (Duckworth, *Camping* 45), adding that her anxiety soon came to be augmented by a fear of impending doom: "I looked up into the sky again and got very scared that the world would end" (Duckworth, *Camping* 48). Duckworth supposes that her continuing obsession with death, not only its inevitability but also its possible imminence, could have been engendered by her mother's poor health and stay in a health home (*Camping* 45). Significantly, at the same time, she traces the inception of this unease to the memorable self-examination in the mirror, thereby clearly framing it in terms of an existential mood. The moment of looking at her own reflection appears to have been an epiphanic disruption to what would be characterised by Heidegger as her average everydayness, bringing her face to face with the reality of Being-towards-death.

Another two memories that Duckworth has of studying her own reflection in the mirror highlight how the robust sense of self had been lost without trace once the woman entered adulthood. In the first one, the writer, engaged to be married at the age of twenty, casts her mind back to the episode from her childhood, treating it as a yardstick against which to appraise her current existential condition:

> I listened to 'The Critics' discussing plays and books on the radio. When the Third Programme suddenly went off the air I sat in a silent room and measured the length of the scarf, feeling unreal. I looked at myself in the little mirror and thought the girl in there looked more real than me. It was ten years since I had studied my reflection in the hall mirror at Lanherne. I had felt real then. (Duckworth, *Camping* 94)

The juxtaposition of the two moments brings to full light the extent to which the woman had abdicated her individuality. Whereas as a girl she was able to recognise herself as a self-constituting subject who formed a part of the external world without being dispossessed by it, at that point she suffered from acute self-alienation. The budding capacity for authentic self-

definition had been stifled through her unreflective embrace of the widely accepted conventions of womanhood, symbolised by the quintessentially feminine activity of knitting.

When already married and pregnant with her first child, Duckworth was painfully aware of the artificiality and restrictiveness of the ready-made patterns that guided her life. Nevertheless, in order to earn the approval of her family, she chose to forsake the enterprise of self-creation and conceal all those aspects of her identity that diverged from external expectations: "I felt . . . that I was acting a part. . . . My eye shadow and shipboard tan were all part of a new makeup that hid the real me. Where was I? I knew I was inside somewhere, but desperate that no one would look for and find me ever again" (Duckworth, *Camping* 102). Her slavish obedience to social norms notoriously pushed her into self-effacement, as exemplified most startingly by the decision not to share the news about her excellent university exam results with her husband, whose own performance was substantially worse, lest this should undermine his sense of self-confidence: "It wasn't polite to do better than one's own husband" (Duckworth, *Camping* 106).

The other memory of looking at herself in a mirror, dating back to the writer's late twenties, involves an equally perplexing revelation: "I caught sight of myself in the mirror, ugly with despair, and thought, Who is this person? I didn't recognise myself" (Duckworth, *Camping* 141). No longer tormented by the fear of death, Duckworth was drifting unreflectively from one activity to another. She passively succumbed to whatever happened to her, evading the effort to forge her life resolutely, a trait in which she resembled the heroines of her early novels. There was a noticeable dissonance between her feelings and actions, as well as between her private and public self, leading to a sense of self-estrangement, re-affirmed in even stronger terms later in the memoir: "I wanted to laugh because I was such a sham" (Duckworth, *Camping* 168). This declaration provides probably the most gripping illustration of how the pressure of social demands placed upon her as a mother and wife deprived her of independent subjectivity, the word "sham" connoting objectification and lack of agency, hence her incapacity to act as a source of her own values and ultimately inauthenticity.

2.4 DUCKWORTH'S EXPERIENCE OF INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

As hinted in the foregoing paragraphs, Duckworth's fall into inauthenticity is narrated principally in the context of her engagements with other people. Two sites of interpersonal relationships that take centre stage in *Camping on the Faultline* are motherhood and marriage, both of which put a brake on the writer's personal projects by casting her in roles governed by rigid social scripts.

While recounting the time soon after she gave birth to her first child, Duckworth describes how her postpartum elation, when she felt enriched as a person, transmuted into a feeling of entrapment and isolation following her husband's attempts to confine her authentic impulse to enjoy the new situation "truthfully and freely" (Beauvoir, *Force* 201) to restrictive patriarchal demands:

> Back home I felt transformed, extended by my new role, tingling with love, watching Helen grow. . . . One evening he [her husband] delivered a short speech to me which I translated as: 'Now that we have a child you have to understand that she comes first and you will have to take a lesser place in my life.' I felt suddenly puzzled and crushed. I began to feel lonelier. I missed my friends. (Duckworth, *Camping* 105)

It is vital to note the glaring hiatus between Duckworth's state before and after the man's speech, coloured by the careful choice of vocabulary. Whereas such words as "transformed" and "extended" evoke the ability to grow as a person in positive directions, "puzzled" and "crushed" raise associations with a loss of self-integrity and unwilling submission to extraneous forces, an opposition that appears distinctly congruent with the polarity between "creation or transformation" and "stasis" (Deutscher 100) or, for that matter, between transcendence and immanence. Motherhood as regulated by patriarchal strictures both deprived her of control over her own life and diminished her ability to connect with other people. It enclosed her in the sole role of a caregiver, thereby condemning her to an impoverished existence without any leeway for the pursuit of other resolutely chosen ventures. Most crucially, Duckworth admits that it was not only her husband who acted as a patriarchal discipline keeper but also the children themselves, whose expectations posed a threat to her autonomous subjectivity: "The children would still pop up in unexpected places, having pushed me secretly and exclaim, 'Aren't you lucky we love you so much?' I knew I was lucky but I yearned after a little space to breathe without the iron lung of my family" (Duckworth, *Camping* 206). The writer makes it clear that their love, even if indisputably precious, could not give her a sense of self-fulfilment.

While Duckworth's account of her experience of motherhood centres around the problem of restricted freedom, her reflections on marriage turn the spotlight on the life of false pretenses into which she was propelled by her second husband:

> The real estate agent had called our house a 'doll's house' and I felt what went on in our marriage was often as unreal and make believe: 'playing happy families' as Ian was fond of saying. It mattered to him a great deal that we looked happy but he seemed not to care how

> we behaved when no one was looking. I felt I had to enter into the conspiracy. (Duckworth, *Camping* 165)
>
> I couldn't believe how small and battered I had let myself become, isolated in Eastbourne, playing happy families as Ian insisted we must do. I had lost sight of myself as a successful novelist. Ian had been turning me into something else. (Duckworth, *Camping* 167)

Her lack of determination in defying external constraints contributed to erasure of her own identity, thrusting her into artificial scripts from which she felt disturbingly alienated. Their marriage deprived her of the power to develop authenticity by following the path that she had chosen for herself as a writer.

Duckworth confesses frankly that the strategy that enabled her to reclaim a sense of unique individuality was compulsive adultery: "With that act I was relinquishing my painful hold on not just my marriage, one that I had struggled to believe in, but perhaps marriage itself. It was opening a floodgate to let in dangerous tides of true feeling" (Duckworth, *Camping* 130). In Beauvoir's writings, as expounded by Tove Pettersen, "[t]raditional marriages commonly epitomize inauthentic love, since the relation between the spouses in such relationships is based on domination as opposed to companionship. . . . Consequently, adultery can sometimes manifest authentic love and moral freedom" (164). Potentially subversive, marital unfaithfulness indeed served the writer as a vehicle of resistance to the falsity and restrictiveness of social norms and ultimately a self-defence mechanism. By refusing to cling to relationships that no longer satisfied her, Duckworth protected herself against stagnation in pre-defined patterns. She used adultery to her advantage as a precaution against de-individualising absorption in what could be identified with the Heideggerian they-self and, most importantly, as an outlet of authenticity that allowed her to evolve as an individual.

With all these experiences in mind, while taking a reflective look back on her entire life near the end of the memoir, an occasion to see also her own oeuvre as a coherent whole with certain unifying and pervasive themes, Duckworth envisions interpersonal bonding as a site of anxiety-provoking ambiguity:

> In my writing as well as in my life I've been occupied by the tension between needing love and needing independence. This theme had made a habit of sneaking into nearly every novel I have written and becoming dominant. The paradox I've aimed to explore is that love, which is as necessary as the air we breathe, can also be the very thing that suffocates. (Duckworth, *Camping* 291)

Her focus on the inherently conflicting character of love as both the moving spirit of human existence and a threatening limitation upon personal autonomy resonates distinctly with Beauvoir's approach to the problem. It should be reminded that, on the philosopher's view, we "are separate, individuated existences, yet our actions may acquire their meaning only through the presence of others" (Kruks, *Simone de Beauvoir* 7). Much as other people form the horizon of all our endeavours, their presence is also a source of ongoing strife: "Desiring different ends, we will encounter others as impediments or as threats" (Kruks, *Simone de Beauvoir* 7). Taking these two premises into consideration, Beauvoir regards human relationships as an "ambiguous admixture of freedom and constraint" (Kruks, *Simone de Beauvoir* 7), a polarity in which Duckworth herself has been also clearly caught, as underlined by the metaphor of breathing and suffocation. On the one hand, the comparison that she draws between love and air depicts companionship as a necessary and inextricable part of human existence rather than a mere option, a conviction that resounds prominently throughout *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. Duckworth admits that the specificity of New Zealand as a global village where "there's no end to the crosscurrents and coincidences," as quipped by her sister (Duckworth, *Camping* 255), has made her particularly alert to human interrelatedness. On the other hand, the image of suffocation evokes strong associations with threat, violence, and death, all being crucial elements in the Hegelian scheme of a struggle between two consciousnesses. Although critically necessary for meaningful existence, they simultaneously endanger one's own subjectivity, so Duckworth "[has] spent most of [her] adult life learning to be alone, not to depend" (*Camping* 291) against the temptation to let herself be dominated by loved ones.

The inexorable tension between the desire for connection and that for personal freedom is not the only manifestation of ambiguity inherent in relationships to which *Camping on the Faultline* alludes. It has been mentioned that the memoir casts the changeability of human existence as one of its guiding themes. It should be added now that it portrays interpersonal ties as equally fragile and volatile as people who build them. Bereft of a stable home as a result of the war upheaval, the writer has always treated personal attachments as her point of reference: "I calculated my life in terms of people rather than places" (Duckworth, *Camping* 25). From tender years, however, her hopes for making them a safe harbour in the risky world and the cornerstone of her identity have clashed with the unreliability of the people around her and the resultant precariousness of her ties with them.

The writer relates how as a girl she suffered a disheartening disillusionment when she realised that her mother was not the unwavering bedrock of support and protection that she had expected her to be. Having misinterpreted messages exchanged between little Marilyn and her

female friend as confessions of their romantic feelings for each other, Mrs Duckworth admonished her daughter against lesbianism, leaving her dismayed, not only by the first encounter with the concept of same-sex love but also by the fact that her mother could err so gravely in her judgment. A person supposed to know her through and through proved to be distant or even hostile: "I learned a hard truth that afternoon: that my mother's love, which I had believed unconditional, unassailable, could be as brittle as a fingernail" (Duckworth, *Camping* 62). Importantly, the episode plainly exhibits the writer's conviction—one that is reflected in her novels, as will be discussed later in this dissertation—that mother-child relations are not immune to the conflictual dynamics that fuel all other interpersonal ties. Mothers, just as lovers, may be untrustworthy and treacherous, their feelings towards their children not as unequivocal as patriarchal society imagines them to be, an idea that figures large in Beauvoir's philosophy: "The key to understanding Beauvoir's concerns about motherhood lies in noticing that she construes the mother-child relationship in exactly the same structural terms she employs in her picture of the man-woman relationship" (Bauer, "Simone de Beauvoir on Motherhood" 155).

The insight into the fragility of human bonds gained at that time has been corroborated by all the divorces and break-ups witnessed or faced personally by Duckworth in her adult life. "Romance wanes because life is impermanent. . . . At every moment, possibilities lie before us, meaning that lovers and feelings are liable to change," recapitulates Cleary (166) the existentialist idea of the vagaries of love, an understanding that appears remarkably close to the writer's private experience: "I was practised at abandonment and separation" (Duckworth, *Camping* 110). Similar to Beauvoir, Duckworth has thus learnt to approach relationships as a challenge that one has to shoulder, striving to negotiate conflicting desires, none of which can be satisfied in full and for ever: "It is a human dilemma—a condition I recognise particularly in myself" (Duckworth, *Camping* 291). Mastering this task has required her shrewd use of various strategies, one of them being the ability to assume different masks: "I love fitting in with new people and pretending to be a different kind of person" (Duckworth, *Camping* 85). Although her conduct may at first glance appear a form of conformism or duplicity, Duckworth in hindsight treasures this adaptability not only as a facilitator of communication with other people but also as a tool of self-development, one that has opened her to new possibilities, also in writing, and has allowed her to transcend herself: "It didn't occur to me that this curiosity and willingness to inhabit new spaces might be a part of being a writer" (Duckworth, *Camping* 85-86).

This is not to claim, however, that Duckworth treats human relationships in an instrumental manner for pursuing her private goals. Quite the contrary, the way she describes her ties with

other people evinces her profound concern for their ethical dimension. Just as Beauvoir, who persuades that "to love him genuinely is to love him in his otherness and in that freedom by which he escapes" (*Ethics* 67), Duckworth believes that one of the prerequisites for building a mutually rewarding bond is to acknowledge the idiosyncratic individuality of the other: "Life had given me a respect for people's strangeness" (*Camping* 264). Her ethical sensibility comes to surface also in her final reflection on the nature of love: "Pain, responsibility, is a condition of life, the price of love—who would be without it?" (Duckworth, *Camping* 292). For the writer, much as love may bring one happiness and satisfaction, it also inescapably involves tremendous responsibility for loved ones. It thus represents simultaneously a burden and the essence of humanity, necessary for leading a meaningful existence. Consequently, she sees no other way than to face the risks implicated in relationships, or, in Beauvoir's phrase, to "accept the tension of the struggle . . . without aiming at an impossible state of equilibrium and rest" (*Ethics* 96).

2.5 CONCLUSION

The chapter has sought to demonstrate that *Camping on the Faultline* evinces Duckworth's enduring concern with questions of a manifestly existential nature even if she does not couch them in explicitly philosophical terms. The part in which she looks back to the first years of her life chronicles primarily a confrontation with her own ambiguous condition as a human being. The writer portrays her childhood as a period of very acute self-reflection and a collision between her nascent selfhood and the growing awareness of forces more potent than herself, most critically her mortality. When she begins to revisit her adulthood, the focus of the memoir shifts to her gradual plunge into inauthenticity as a result of her entanglement in the social world and interpersonal relationships, tracing the ongoing negotiations of her female identity under the pressure of other people and their expectations.

The writer's autobiographical account of interpersonal relationships strikes noticeable parallels with the visions of Beauvoir and Sartre. Just as these two philosophers, she conceptualises them in terms of threat and struggle to retain one's own freedom, making no exception for mother-child relations against the prevailing myths of "unconditional" and "selfless" maternal love (Rich 22-23). *Camping in the Faultline* is a testimony of a woman whose hopes for a bond that could be the keystone of her identity have clashed with the brittleness of human feelings and whose natural craving for love has often stood at odds with the equally deep need for personal autonomy. More akin to Beauvoir than to Sartre, however, the writer conceives of these conflictual dynamics as an inevitable risk that one must accept in good faith, apparently sharing the former's belief that "what marks us as human, as capable of

subjectivity, is our risking ourselves . . . in order to create a world for ourselves with others" (Bauer, *Simone de Beauvoir* 236).

The memoir thus concludes on an optimistic note, showing Duckworth victorious in the strife between external demands and her own projects, with a definite sense of direction in life and capable of self-creation:

> It strikes me that I have come full circle, back to the street where my adult life began. I have come to rest in a nest of my own, where I can be that solitary thing—a writer —a destination I must have known I was heading for all of my life. Here I am, a New Zealander in her 'wooden tent above a fault-line', practising the trick of permanence. (*Camping* 293)

What remains unchanged is her conviction about the unpredictability and insecurity of existence, captured in the images of a wooden tent and fault-line, persistent even if she has achieved a dose of stability. Having reclaimed her own authenticity, the writer avows her readiness to respond to these unrelenting challenges in a truly creative and independent manner.

The crucial themes running through *Camping on the Faultline*—anxiety, fragility and ambiguity of existence, authenticity, negotiation of personal freedom, and the conflict-ridden nature of human relationships—form also the fabric of Duckworth's novels. The remainder of this dissertation will analyse how the problems that have been so pressing in Duckworth's life are represented in her selected works of fiction.

CHAPTER THREE: ANXIETY AND AMBIGUITY IN DUCKWORTH'S FICTION

3.1 INTRODUCTION

As indicated in the Introduction, throughout her career Duckworth has displayed a pronounced tendency to place her heroines in states of chaos and disorientation, similar to those she has experienced in her own life. The crisis situations to which they are exposed may be domestic dramas, social upheavals, nightmare-like misadventures, or a mix of those. In all these cases, the long-cherished notions of reality fall into disarray, urging the women to redefine their lives. The present chapter explores Duckworth's fiction first by tracing the theme of anxiety and next by framing it in the context of human ambiguity. It seeks to explicate the existential import of the disquietude that afflicts Duckworth's heroines by drawing on the Heideggerian concept of anxiety as occasioned by an observant glimpse into the structure of human existence, Sartre's and Beauvoir's ideas about anxiety of freedom, and, as already announced, Beauvoir's notion of ambiguity, simultaneously presenting Duckworth's idiosyncratic style of addressing the problems. Since the two topics encompass and intersect with the other overarching issues around which this dissertation is organised, i.e. (in)authenticity in self-determination and interpersonal relationships, the present chapter should be treated as laying ground for the following ones.

The first section elaborates on Janet Wilson's perceptive remark that "Duckworth, in novel after novel, has effortlessly captured the flavour of life's strangeness" where "[t]he normal and the bizarre interact" ("Art"). It is demonstrated that the writer has a predilection for portraying her heroines as increasingly dissociated from the external world, which reveals itself as inscrutable and unpredictable, other people, and, not least of all, themselves. In doing so, she avails herself of various generic conventions, often merging realism with non-realist elements. In the second section, it is argued that thereby the eerie underside of the human condition, so far comfortably concealed from sight amid daily routines, is brought to stark light. When the familiar categories collapse, the arbitrariness of social conventions, indeterminacy of existence, freedom of self-determination, and human mortality develop into a conspicuous, disruptive, and burdensome presence that the women are at pains to handle. The third section elaborates on this insight by showing that the feeling of unease is prompted in some heroines also by the realisation that their existence is schematic, repetitive, and ridiculously insignificant when considered from a broader perspective. Further, it is observed that some of the novels discussed place special weight on the bodily character of anxiety. The final section shifts attention to the

question of existential ambiguity, which brings together most of the concerns explored previously.

3.2 "THE UNFAMILIAR INTRUDING UPON THE EVERYDAY"

It is useful to remind at the outset that anxiety in Heidegger's understanding always unsettles *Dasein's* unreflective engagement with reality, lifting it out of "complacent absorption in everydayness" (Guignon, "Authenticity" 228). Withy underlines that "[i]n the mood of angst, things that were familiar and homely become strange. The world in which we make our home suddenly seems alien to us" (2). This comment resonates quite distinctly with Wilson's lively characterisation of Duckworth's fiction as imbued by "[t]he heightened sense . . . of the unfamiliar intruding upon the everyday, as if a stranger had entered the bedroom . . ." ("Art"). The type of anxiety that figures most prominently in a number of her novels is precisely that arising from the breakdown of familiarity not only with the surrounding material environment but also with other people, most painfully those nearest and dearest. As will be illustrated further on, this experience assumes different dimensions, being either entirely private or shared with a community, and varying degrees of severity, depending on whether the writer remains staunchly faithful to realism or chooses to destabilise its conventions. Even if the latter is the case, however, there is hardly any doubt left that what is at stake is neither a speculative glimpse into the future nor feats of literary imagination but rather the unmasking of the-taken-for-granted in human existence.

In *Unlawful Entry* (1992), the sense of uncanniness is alluded to in a thoroughly realist plot whose spotlight falls on the tricky and tense relationship between three generations of women struggling with unresolved grief from the past. The novel opens with a recollection from years ago when Joan, now an elderly widow whose only daughter committed suicide some time ago, unexpectedly found herself cognitively estranged from her husband. One day, without any reasonable explanation, the man who returned home after work suddenly struck her as someone wholly unknown to her:

> Joan lost her husband in 1947, much as another person might lose an umbrella. Umbrellas are easy to lose. People are always losing umbrellas. . . . Much the same thing had happened in 1947 with her husband. . . . There was something about his gait which bothered her. No, it couldn't be Dick. But it was. . . . He came close and closer and as his features sharpened into focus his mouth flickered a bored, husbandly recognition which was unmistakable. He was a husband, and he seemed to think he was hers. . . . But he wasn't Dick. His face was

> altered. He didn't have Dick's face. He wasn't the man she knew. . . . She felt a spin of vertigo. (Duckworth, *Unlawful* 1-2)

A bit later the same vague but nagging impression of unfamiliarity beset Joan in her daughter: "It had seemed to her that as Hilary progressed into her teens she began to look more like the replacement Dick, who claimed he was the man Joan had married. . . . It was as if this changeling husband was making a changeling out of her lovely Hilary as well, her baby" (Duckworth, *Unlawful* 65).

The curious affliction experienced by the heroine bears affinity to a phenomenon long and well known in psychiatry as the so-called Capgras delusion, which is "the belief that one or more familiars have been replaced by impostors" (Ratcliffe 139), one of its major symptoms being "a conspicuous feeling of unfamiliarity, *the feeling that something is absent*" (Ratcliffe 148). Indeed, the novel refers to "the absence of resemblances which had confronted [Joan] in her new husband" (Duckworth, *Unlawful* 12). Despite these parallels, however, Duckworth displays hardly any intention of diagnosing the heroine with a grave mental disorder. Joan, "a serious person, thirty-five years old" (Duckworth, *Unlawful* 1), retained the lucid awareness that her altered perception of Dick was only a subjective impression, not corroborated by any undisputable facts. Although the uneasiness persisted, she took utmost care to prevent herself from spiralling into a private realm removed from reality: "Joan became very busy from that moment, secretly, frantically working to close the crack and restore her focus. . . . Going about her job as mother, wife and teacher . . . she was busy making her terrified adjustments, exercising new muscles, like a person following a partially disabling stroke" (Duckworth, *Unlawful* 2-3). Importantly, she resolved to hide the truth from her husband and daughter and "has never ceased in all those years . . . to be the model, efficient wife and housewife" (Duckworth, *Unlawful* 3).

Joan's malaise should be thus rather construed in terms of what Ratcliffe defines as a "changed existential feeling" (12). It was "[a] crack in reality" (Duckworth, *Unlawful* 2), which disturbed the heroine's usual orientation towards the world. In this sense, the manner in which it is described in the passage quoted on the previous page sheds a valuable light on Duckworth's overall vision of life's strangeness. By comparing the woman's experience to an occurrence as trivial as losing an umbrella, the writer depicts the sense of the uncanny as an ordinary and commonplace part of human existence. One is prone to make attempts at effacing its disconcerting presence, as Joan does, but it always lies beneath the veneer of cosy domesticity, sometimes erupting into full visibility.

The experience is embedded in the plot also as a metaphor gesturing towards a more general problem concerning the unknowability of the other, a recurring consideration in Duckworth's fiction, which will be investigated in greater depth in Chapter Five, and articulating the heroine's inability to establish sound interpersonal relationships based on meaningful communication. Joan's desperate efforts to pretend normalcy backfired by casting a shadow of emotional distance over her ties with both Dick and Hilary: "It had certainly made her life difficult, having to remain on guard constantly so as not to let the new Dick know she was aware of the transformation. It made her more rigid in her treatment of Hilary" (Duckworth, *Unlawful* 46). Most excruciatingly, disconnected from her daughter, the heroine did not recognise her deteriorating psychic condition and its root causes. It is hinted at a later point that Dick abused her daughter sexually. Joan, on her part, must have turned a blind eye to the girl's suffering, thereby miserably failing to prevent her from a plunge into suicidal depression.

The eruption of the uncanny constitutes the entire subject matter of *A Gap in the Spectrum*, Duckworth's first novel, which, in contrast to *Unlawful Entry,* ventures beyond the limits of realism by showing Diana Clouston mysteriously catapulted into London, in an almost amnesiac state, "without the faintest idea of where or what London is or how she got there" (Benson 208), thus thrown into the un-homely in a very literal sense. What the heroine does remember initially is only that London is the name of a fantasy land that she and her sister invented as children:[33] "We had made it a distorted reflection of the world as we knew it—at the same stage of civilization and made up of the same ingredients. Only the quantities of these ingredients varied" (Duckworth, *Gap,* 5). Although the kernel of the plot is unrealistic, it soon proves that, as will be demonstrated further, the bizarre only exhibits the precarious borders of the everyday instead of obliterating them. Duckworth does not represent an alternative reality of her own design but one that the reader knows perfectly well. Apart from specifying the exact geographical location, she draws a picture of a recognisable cityscape with a shoe-shiner, newsstand, church, buses, and other staple landmarks. The heroine herself admits after a time that "[her] surroundings . . . differed little outwardly from those [she] had been used to" (Duckworth, *Gap* 20). This well-known environment, however, appears thoroughly bizarre to the heroine, in which, according to Benson, the novel is reminiscent Sartre's *Nausea,* where "Roquentin describes how the world he had always taken for granted and had always been able to control with words and their fixed meanings had lost its boundaries" (210).

[33] Duckworth clearly harks back to the stories of Dreamland that she used to invent as a child together with her sister (Benson 209).

Blattner compares Heideggerian moods to "atmospheres in which we are steeped" as opposed to "interior private states" (81). Indeed, the opening turns the spotlight on how Diana's perceptual bewilderment radiates outwards, encompassing the entire world around her, as what should be overfamiliar to the point of invisibility becomes extraordinarily noticeable to the senses by virtue of defying tacit assumptions: "The air is quite a different colour here. I don't know when I first began to notice it, but gradually it has crept up on me—the different colour of the air— the different taste of the water" (Duckworth, *Gap* 1). This impression grows stronger when she goes outdoors to explore the city and finds herself incapable of identifying even such natural phenomena as snow (Duckworth, *Gap* 7). Her attention is particularly drawn to the colour red—the titular gap in the spectrum in Micald, her lost homeland—which strikes her as something new and peculiar: "But it was at the shoe-shiner I found myself staring in a hypnotic manner. At the colour of his coat—a shiny, glowing, crackling colour. Red. My eyes ached as I stared, . . ." (Duckworth, *Gap* 9). The longer the heroine roams through the streets, the more detached she grows from the world, which is "full of horrible, meaningless things" (Duckworth, *Gap* 21). Just as the imaginary land from her childhood, this one appears to operate by dream logic, being composed of well-known ingredients that are taken out of their usual context, turned upside down and distorted:

> My perceptive powers seemed to have sharpened and all at once I noticed something about the people around me which I had missed before. Some of them were exaggeratedly thin, some terribly fat. . . . here and there an extreme stood out, and these seemed to me sinister, even deformed. . . . I remembered a frightening dream I had once had, when things had swelled to abnormal proportions, and then diminished sickeningly. (Duckworth, *Gap 22*)

In consequence, Diana dithers between contradictory emotions. On the one hand, she is filled with the thrill of adventure in the face of the unknown: "I watched the bus route with an excited curiosity, . . ." (Duckworth, *Gap* 8). On the other hand, an irrational fear of confinement takes the upper hand: "I was certain now I was being held against my will" (Duckworth, *Gap* 2-3). In the absence of any identifiable cues, the heroine is "paralyzed and bewildered, unable to press forward into the future, because there is nothing that stands out as significant or meaningful anymore" (Aho, *Existentialism*). It is the external reality that wields control over the woman rather than the other way around, petrifying her with an irresistible feeling of vulnerability: "My sense of insecurity grew. This was a world of extremes" (Duckworth, *Gap* 22).

After this initial period of confusion, the heroine attempts to erase anxiety and find her bearings in the new reality by obediently following the expectations of people who claim to be her family and friends. This strategy proves successful inasmuch as she recovers inner tranquillity while taking comfort in the commotion of daily life but only to a limited extent. It should be reiterated that for Duckworth the sense of the uncanny appears to be not a condition that could be cured but a latent element of existence. In the novel under consideration, it lies in wait, resurfacing, albeit only for a moment, after a church service that Diana attends, and later, with much greater intensity, after her stint as a nurse at an old ladies' ward:

> I woke up to an empty room, buzzing with flies. I remember the flies particularly. They were all part of the horrible, brooding atmosphere. My mind had grown dark with apprehension, and I felt as if I was looking out on to the sunlight from somewhere deep and a long way off. I wandered about, touching objects in the room and handling them absently. (Duckworth, *Gap* 176)

The passage foregrounds how once again the heroine's "absorption [in the world] simply ceases" (Dreyfus 179). By touching the objects around her, she attempts to maintain her grounding in the material world, but the connection is apparently severed. Now it is only through the mood of anxiety that she is able to grasp her surroundings.

In *Married Alive,* the theme of the uncanny is cast into stark light through a blend of realism with distinct touches of science fiction and dystopia, coloured by the characteristically Gothic tropes of madness, enclosure and violence. The epidemic of insanity that sweeps across New Zealand in the wake of flu vaccine contamination demolishes comforting ideas about the world as a homely and safe space, fuelling fears of impending doom: "Orwell's 1984 has come and gone, with his worst predictions unrealised. But what would he make of this year in time? People are going mad all over the country—up and down the islands, North and South. One in five, they say" (Duckworth, *Married* 8). Those who have had the misfortune to be administered their dose now face the risk of developing a mental disorder in "an acute form of schizophrenia, with periods of intermittent violence, difficult to disguise" (Duckworth, *Married* 8), which may pose a possibly lethal threat both to the patient and to people who come into contact with them. Most worryingly, the disease may progress latently, unbeknownst to anyone, manifesting itself through fits of rage only after a time, so no effective safety precautions can be undertaken. Little wonder, then, that the country descends into an atmosphere of uncertainty and mutual distrust.

Mark Williams somewhat caustically avers that the writer does not make the utmost use of the speculative potential opened up by this plot: "But Duckworth ruthlessly suppresses any

tendencies her theme might have towards apocalyptic fantasy and allows the distorted sexual and interpersonal relations of post-vaccine New Zealand to comment on the quotidian present of suntan clinics" ("Literary Recession" 20). Although it could be argued and will be hopefully proved in the course of the dissertation that the critic fails to appreciate the underlying message of the novel, he is certainly right in noticing that Duckworth is not really preoccupied with what the future could possibly bring to the human race. Her interest lies instead with the condition of human existence; the non-realist conventions, in turn, are incorporated as a means to the end of dramatising its strangeness.

Forty-year-old Francie, a business woman running a suntan studio in Wellington, differs from Joan and Diana insofar as her perceptual alienation from external reality does not constitute a purely private experience but has its identifiable origin. It is entwined in the progressing social mayhem, when "[t]hings have been reversed—nothing is as it was" (Duckworth, *Married Alive* 91), prodding her to discern surprising and hitherto ignored facets of the everyday. The opening scene, showing the heroine in a stand-up sunbed, exemplifies this type of defamiliarisation, triggering an immediate association with the previously quoted remark about "the normal and the bizarre" (Wilson, "Art") brought into proximity in Duckworth's fiction. A piece of equipment that would not be normally given any thought at all here comes to the fore and, pulled out of its usual context and imagined as a site of death rather than beautification, provokes the woman to reflect on her own mortality: "A coffin lid. If she kept her thumb on the control button she could make herself into a neat jam sandwich" (Duckworth, *Married* 7). It does so following a hazardous incident that took place in Francie's parlour the previous day: "Yesterday she came close to killing a customer. There was a lot of blood. And noise. . . . Without lights it was mercifully less gory. Like an old black and white TV programme on a poor set" (Duckworth, *Married* 7). The quoted passage underscores the feeling of derealisation that afflicts the heroine, uncannily blurring the boundary between life and fiction. With the memory flooding back only in fragmented bits and pieces, she appears unable to fully grasp what unfolded before her very eyes. Most strikingly, she sees herself in the position of an aloof spectator rather than an active participant of the events. Importantly, contrary to William's criticism, this "quotidian present of a suntan clinic" (20) is not dwelled upon for its own sake. When it transpires at a later point that the almost fatal accident could have been an intentional act on her part—her mind being already tainted with a germ of madness—the cubicle becomes a token of the closeness and mundanity of the threat that people pose to one another.

It is precisely human unpredictability and unknowability as well as the resultant risk involved in interpersonal attachments that form one of the primary concerns of the novel. While the subject will be carefully analysed in Chapter Five, also with respect to later developments in the plot, for now suffice it to say that once fundamental familiarity between people is shattered, the customary way of perceiving the external world, which, as interpreted by Heidegger, is "a meaningful nexus of social relations" (Aho, *Heidegger's Neglect* 122), undergoes a radical transformation as well. Overwhelmed by the havoc wreaked as a result of the epidemic, Francie no longer fully differentiates between what is real and what is only a mirage since appearances prove more misleading than ever before. For the heroine, reality becomes reduced to "[t]he nightmare of suspicion and fear" (Duckworth, *Married* 10), a message reinforced later with a reference to Lewis Carroll's classic tale: "She is more cautious than Alice in Wonderland and has no faith in labels" (Duckworth, *Married* 84-85). In contrast to still naïve Alice, Duckworth's heroine is fully cognizant that the link between phenomena around her and the meanings customarily assigned to them has been unmasked as untenable and irretrievably lost.

This intertextual reference leads to *Rest for the Wicked*, which, as will be indicated in a moment, also alludes to *Alice in Wonderland* to illuminate the puzzlement of its female protagonist. In the novel, the bounds of realism are stretched even further with science fiction motifs and horror overtones. Fatigued by the daily drudgery of being a full-time housewife and mother to two children, thirty-eight-year-old Jane decides to temporarily leave her family to take part in an experimental project in the Sleep Research Centre, where she soon engages in an affair with a fellow patient, Allister. As the novel progresses, the seemingly innocuous enterprise proves to be a possible front for a morbid interest in post-death research on the part of its supervisor, enigmatic Lenard, who is suspected of killing his patients. Increasingly afraid for her life and ridden by guilt for marital infidelity and negligence of her maternal responsibilities, the heroine begins to lose her hold on sanity. The boundary between dreams and reality grows shaky, at times leaving also the reader confused.

Nevertheless, even with these bold departures from realism, the odd in the novel again performs mostly a subservient function with respect to the quandaries of everyday existence. This time, uncanny bafflement insinuates itself into the very heart of patriarchal structures, which have been so far the linchpin of Jane's life. The novel opens by alluding to the piece of advice offered by the King in *Alice in Wonderland* to the White Rabbit and, at the same time, flatly repudiating it: "Begin at the beginning and go to the end. Why isn't it like that? They promised her it would be like that. . . . Present, past, future. She tries—God knows she tries—to

keep them in the right order. . . . But they start to swing like flying trapezes, passing her from one to the other and back" (Duckworth, *Rest* 7). The socially instituted frameworks have apparently ceased to coincide with the heroine's lived experience. Although by patriarchal measures the roles of mother and wife are expected to be "everything [she] could possibly want" (Duckworth, *Rest* 14), she is no longer able to find them satisfying.

Without delving into the particulars of the heroine's relationship with her family and approach to social expectations, a consideration that will be explored in the context of authenticity, it is necessary to mention at this point that this crisis undermines Jane's sense of security in her surroundings, which unveil itself as pure chaos. Her home loses its familiar character, emerging paradoxically as thoroughly un-homely due to its association with onerous duties: "the house will attack her in the form of cries and scolds, demands for sympathy, advice, small change, judgments, decisions" (Duckworth, *Rest* 12); "Her sink bench, her oven top, present hostile faces to her, insistently dirty" (Duckworth, *Rest* 13). Most strikingly, what is supposed to be an oasis of safety, cosiness and personal freedom transmogrifies into a realm of menace and claustrophobic confinement, with which Jane can hardly feel any emotional or perceptual connection.

This section has so far dealt chiefly with how the engagement of the heroines with external reality is jolted out of its ordinary course by the penetrating sensation of unfamiliarity, which "reveals the groundlessness of the world and of [their] being-in-the-world" (Dreyfus 179). Now, it is essential to notice that this mood usually goes hand in hand with a no less troubling experience of self-alienation. The women in the novels under consideration develop a heightened consciousness of their own existence only to discover with dismay that they have become or are becoming strangers to themselves.

In *A Gap in the Spectrum*, soon after the cryptic arrival in London, Diana manages to recognise her own name despite initial disorientation but does so only with a note of detachment typical of someone adopting an extrinsic standpoint: "Then, suddenly, my eyes leapt back from a blue airmail form, almost in fright. It bore my own name—*Diana Clouston*" (Duckworth 3). Whereas the heroine finds the written emblem of her identity well known at the cognitive level, she apparently has difficulties identifying with it in affective terms. The name is an empty signifier, which does not instil in her the confidence of being at home with herself: "Who was I? What had I been up till now, in this funny, new place? Did I even look the same? Turning slowly, I jumped to see someone staring at me out of the mirror. It was my old, familiar face—smooth, mousy hair and small, pointed chin" (Duckworth, *Gap* 4). In her study of madness as a textual strategy in Beauvoir's fiction, Allison Holland reads the recurring images of

"[r]eflections in mirrors" through the prism of the Gothic tradition as evocative of "a sense of alienation and unreality" (*Excess* 53). Similarly, in the course of Diana's self-examination in front of the mirror, the familiar and the unfamiliar collide, the uncanny seeping into the very heart of the heroine's sense of self. This uneasiness intensifies when she realises that what has befallen her is entirely out of place and not shared by anyone else: "Inside my mind—surely that would mean I had lost control of my mind—was insane?" (Duckworth, *Gap* 5). The doubts obviously add to the woman's self-estrangement, leaving her wary as to whether she can trust her own feelings and perceptions as a reliable point of reference.

The epidemic of madness leads Francie into a similar predicament. At one point, the heroine recollects an episode form her childhood that may be interpreted as a vivid symbol of the process of people coming face to face with their mutual strangeness: "As a child she and her next door friend had played a game where one of them addressed the other's upside-down face, observing the distorted expressions. A smile was a frown, eyelashes wagged from the wrong place, nostrils became obscene" (Duckworth, *Married* 59*).* While the children were taking turns to examine their unnatural-looking faces, each of them must have not only noticed the grotesque aspect of the other but also gained the implicit awareness of the same trait in himself or herself. By analogy, seeing their compatriots abruptly gripped by fits of insanity, the characters cannot evade the tormenting apprehension that the disease may be already developing in their own organisms, altering their behaviour in unexpected ways. This is why the heroine is agonised by the suspicion that the near-burning alive of her client was not a result of sheer carelessness: "Has she gone mad and attempted murder? Fussy, fat, tittery Mrs Gordon has always irritated her. . . . It is perfectly possible that Francie is mad" (Duckworth, *Married* 8). It has been implied earlier that the somewhat matter-of-fact tone in the account of the accident attests to Francie's disconnection from her own actions. Although the woman prefers to dispel the idea of a murder attempt, she commences to regard herself as possibly ignorant of her own intentions and capacities. With the situation being as it is, she is driven to pose questions about the precarious limits of human self-transparency and its effects: "One's own psyche is the norm, the yardstick. If it twists and curls, who is to say the curl is not natural?" (Duckworth, *Married* 43). The creeping possibility of madness, one that is not confirmed further in the plot, makes her at least partly inscrutable to herself.

As for *Rest for the Wicked*, Jane's problem with feeling alien to herself is the natural consequence of her disenchantment with the patriarchal scripts that she has re-enacted all her adult life so far. As the plot opens, the illusion that the role of a housewife with its attendant responsibilities could constitute the pillar of her identity crumbles: "She bought a big black

diary and shut up everything she did inside it, but when she read it again it had all leaked away. A visit to the dentist, a school fête, a new household appliance. Was that her?" (Duckworth, *Rest* 11). The woman's existence is a series of automatic acts that do not lend themselves to being moulded into a meaningful whole; the bid to use self-narrative as an instrument of healing the fissure between internal experience and external performance paradoxically brings this problem to an even more prominent light. The woman's self-dislocation manifests itself also while she is striving to take a panoramic view of her life:

> Jane is the name of a child, a small girl. It is also the name of a woman. A tall, wide-hipped woman with a round chin and big feet. Somewhere this happened—the name grew, like lettering scored on a baby marrow, until the vegetable has distended, toughened, matured, leaving the lettering larger, spelling—incredibly—the same name. Now this vegetable may win a prize, feed a dozen people instead of one, but the word is the same, Jane. Thirty-eight years of Jane. (Duckworth, *Rest* 8)

The prominent use of free indirect discourse in the foregoing passage foregrounds Jane's tendency to look at herself as if at a stranger. She conceives of her maturation throughout the years as a process that has been taking place somehow beyond herself, without her active involvement, now generating only a sense of curiosity.

The stay in the Sleep Research Centre is intended to be a remedy to this loss of a firm sense of self. Contrary to Jane's plans, however, the intimidating atmosphere of the place only destabilises her selfhood to a further extent. Since the patients are treated as mere guineapigs, the woman begins to have difficulties in differentiating herself from animals and plants: "Jane isn't a white rat or a white rose, although in dreams she has had moments of confusion about this" (Duckworth, *Rest* 8). As in *A Gap in the Spectrum*, the escalating self-alienation of the female protagonist is underlined by the motif of her catching a glimpse of herself in the mirror, as usual a moment of shock and dissonance, a collision between perceiving subjectivity and petrified objectivity: "Suddenly she registers the expression on her face. Horrible. She reels as the glass throws her reflection at her" (Duckworth, *Rest* 79).

3.3 CONFRONTATIONS WITH THE TRUTH OF EXISTENCE

After having scrutinised the modes of anxious uncanniness sketched in the selected novels, it is opportune to go one step further and expound their existential purport. While discussing the cultural and historical context for the emergence of existential philosophy, Barrett makes a remark that appears to bear relevance to the problem at hand: "It appears that man is willing to learn about himself only after some disaster; . . . What he learns has always been there . . ."

(35). The crises depicted in Duckworth's novels in many respects not so much generate tensions as only exacerbate them, thereby recalling the characters to their urgency. Withy, whose interpretation of Heideggerian anxiety has to a large extent guided the previous section, stresses that "the experience of angst is not just a breakdown of familiarity but a breakdown that reveals something" (3). With this in mind, it has been already signalled that the anxiety besetting the heroines often uncovers the arbitrariness and socially constructed character of the structures upon which their world is built. In *Married Alive,* the epidemic debunks the idea of romantic relationships, primarily the socially endorsed forms of bonding such as marriage, as a bulwark of safety and benevolence. *Rest for the Wicked,* in turn, targets the patriarchal understanding of female identity and women's role within family and society. The unmasking to which Withy refers strikes yet much deeper than the façade of social conventions: "the uncanny experience is not a negative revelation of what everyday life has been like but a positive revelation of what the human essence is like. . . . Feeling uncanny is in some sense feeling what we are" (4). The discussion of the aforementioned issues will be thus postponed until the subsequent chapters to give precedence to the heroines' confrontations with their true condition as human beings: the indeterminacy, changeability, freedom, and finitude of existence.

Nowhere is the existentially revelatory character of anxiety more palpable than in *A Gap in the Spectrum*. By radically uprooting Diana from unreflective everydayness in a well-known environment, the bizarre situation transforms her existence from an invisible presence taken for granted into a matter of explicit concern, at the same time disclosing a number of its aspects. First and foremost, the heroine's involuntary exile from her homeland into a place not of her choosing almost literally captures and overemphasises the Heideggerian state of thrownness, i.e. being situated "already in a definite world and alongside a definite range of definite entities within-the-world" (*Being* 264). *Dasein's* condition is such that it is "brought into its 'there', but *not* of its own accord" (Heidegger, *Being* 329). Similarly, Diana finds herself, without any deliberate action on her part, in a world governed by a set of specific rules, which strike her as entirely unfathomable. She is forced to confront her own situatedness, entailing vulnerability to external circumstances into which she has fallen by chance, hence, at least in part, the irrational sensation of entrapment despite there being no sign that anyone connives to deprive her of freedom. It is also vital to note that at no point is her mysterious arrival in London clarified in any way, an ostentatious omission that clearly highlights the contingency and groundlessness of human existence. Duckworth represents the woman's presence in the place as purely accidental and devoid of any justification. Just as Heidegger's *Dasein*, Diana "is simply there, without explanation or rational support" (Schrag 62).

Most importantly, having only a vague memory of her past and no acquaintance with the conventions of the place, the heroine is perfectly placed to grasp the fundamental nothingness of her being. Let it be reminded that "anxiety in its anxiousness feels its lack of an object; it feels *Nichts* (nothingness, non-Being)" (Golomb 73). As understood by Heidegger, the mood reveals the status of *Dasein* as an entity whose "*essence . . . lies in its existence*" (*Being* 42), or, in other words, one that has no pre-given attributes. Indeed, it is the predominant feeling of absence and lack that attunes Diana most poignantly to her own existence: "I was left instead with an impression of rawness, nakedness, and exciting defencelessness. It reminded me of how one's finger feels after the days' old sticky plaster had been removed from it" (Duckworth, *Gap* 9). In Micald, the woman remained oblivious to her "ownmost nullity" (Heidegger, *Being* 379), being frozen in the received models of life, which offered her an illusory sense of plenitude: "My lack had not stood out against anyone I had known there" (Duckworth, *Gap* 20). Once the veneer of the socially constructed elements of her identity is shed, the heroine must come to terms with the reality of having no intrinsic nature. In an attempt to rid herself of this unsettling sensation of inner vacuity, she is frantically searching for "clues about [herself]" (Duckworth, *Gap* 13). In anxiety, however, "we cannot understand ourselves in terms of the world" (Blattner 141). Paradoxically, then, the more clues she finds, the more her existential nothingness becomes conspicuous and severely suffered since they do not strike any emotional chord with her: "Then a swift shame came over me. . . . Could I be lacking in something?" (Duckworth, *Gap* 19). By the same token, the unusual circumstances prove conducive for the heroine to realise that, apart from lacking a fixed essence, her "life has no meaning *a priori*" (Sartre, *Existentialism* 51). What lies ahead is thoroughly indefinite and unpredictable, hence also disturbing: "Anything could happen in this world, I remembered. Anything at all. I began to run" (Duckworth, *Gap* 31). Without social scripts masquerading as entirely natural and inevitable, "anxiety discloses [her] utter helplessness . . . in a world in which there are no protective supports" (Schrag 69), generating a frisson of insecurity: "I felt my feet swing in an irregular, jerky way, as if I was on the stage and not quite sure of the stage directions" (Duckworth, *Gap* 7).

Amid the disintegration of the social order and rampant self-doubt, Francie is also compelled to revisit the ideas about her existence following any pre-determined plan. When she decides to depart with her lover Sidney from chaos-stricken Wellington for the countryside to turn over a new leaf in her life, she makes a telling observation that intimates the same alertness to personal indeterminacy as was experienced by Diana: "Her lack of luggage seems to threaten her sense of identity. If she'd brought a suitcase with her name on it . . ." (Duckworth, *Married*

42). Granted, the heroine has a literal meaning in mind, but the circumstances quite obviously warrant a metaphorical interpretation of the remark. With the epidemic raging through the country, no certainties and fixities are any longer in place: "Sudden irrational behaviour, radical character changes—these are a commonplace" (Duckworth, *Married* 9). The "lack of luggage" may be thus read also as a reference to the absence of any stable inner core through which the woman could achieve a permanent self-definition. She is encountering herself as an almost blank canvas that waits to be overwritten with meaning through future actions.

The aura of constant threat and uncertainty awakens the heroine also to the precariousness of her existence. As usually, in order to reinforce her message through surprise, Duckworth inserts the most vivid revelation of the fragility of being into a highly trivial situation:

> She . . . catches sight of herself in the plastic mirror. Her face looks stricken, bruised. It must be the night air on her skin. Feeling can't be so close to the surface. While she watches, a sneeze convulses the muscles of her face. The mirror rocks on its nails. She laughs, reaching out to steady her moving image. How little it takes to put things out of kilter. Even something as frivolous as a sneeze—Atishoo, atishoo. All fall down. (Duckworth, *Married* 25)

In his *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, Henri Bergson asserts that we laugh when "the image of *the body [takes] precedence of the soul*" (53). When translated into existentialists terms, his remark appears to locate the source of laughter in the juxtaposition of human transcendence against the immanence of the body and the limitations that it entails. It is noticeable that Francie's outburst arises precisely from the incongruous clash between the gravity with which she is examining her face and the levity of her physiological reaction. With a sneeze, the woman's pretensions to self-importance are suddenly pitted against her facticity. The faltering image in the mirror embodies the vulnerability and changeability of her existence, warning her that it may be disrupted at any moment by a seemingly inconsequential factor.[34]

Apart from laying bare existential indefiniteness and instability, the crises of established institutions, meaning-making categories, and values in Duckworth's novels serve also to throw the heroines "back upon [themselves] in [their] unique freedom and possibility" (Macquarrie 130). It is not within the remit of this chapter to dwell on how the women exercise their agency or whether this existential confrontation evolves into a transformative experience since these problems will be given extensive consideration as part of the discussion of authenticity. It is yet

[34] For the discussion of the motif of laughter in Duckworth's fiction, see Orzechowska 18-32 ("Existential Laughter").

imperative to signal at this point that the prospect of freedom is usually approached by the heroines as a bane generating their overwhelming unease.

Once Jane comes to understand that the model of life limited to mothering and housekeeping is not her pre-ordained destiny but merely an artificial patriarchal construct, which does not correspond to her personal needs, she seemingly acknowledges her own power of self-determination, as witnessed by the decision to participate in the experimental project despite the opposition of her husband. As the plot unfolds, however, it becomes ever more evident that her motivation in entering the Sleep Research Centre has not been necessarily to forge a new identity. Although the woman is reluctant to admit this, there are hints that her act may be inspired, at least at the unconscious level, by the desire to adapt better to the social norms rather than to disentangle herself from their tight hold: "Is this why she has come? To fit herself into a comfortable niche? Is this why Jane has come—to slot herself into a hole which will contain her firmly, like an armchair, like crutches? Of course, not. She has come to get away from restricting enclosures" (Duckworth, *Rest* 33).

Her dilemma is vividly condensed in the following episode. Stricken by the sight of her face in the mirror, as described previously, Jane is suddenly gripped by an impulse to go out of the bathroom: "She pulls at the door to get away. It won't open. She tugs harder on the chrome handle, beginning to sweat. . . . The door opens suddenly outward and she almost falls into the passageway. She shakes with hysterical laughter" (Duckworth, *Rest* 79). The closed room appears to symbolically reflect the heroine's imprisonment in the stultifying embrace of social patterns imposed upon her as a woman, mother, and wife. Although she yearns for escape, the moment of being thrown out of the enclosed space into a void does not yet bring her any relief because the pre-given arrangements, even if limiting, have guaranteed her stability and safety. With this in mind, Jane's laughter bears certain affinity to Roquentin's nausea. Just as the latter is the "physical expression" of the "dread of liberty" (Grene 54), so, too, the former manifests the anxiety bound up with responsibility inherent in existential freedom. Wolfgang Iser observes that "we normally laugh when our emotive or cognitive faculties have been overtaxed by a situation they can no longer cope with. The disorientated body takes over the response from it" (159-160). Certainly, the hysterical quality of the woman's laughter bespeaks her utter disorientation and loss of self-control. Similar to Beauvoir's sub-man, she "is afraid of . . . being in a state of danger before the future, in the midst of its possibilities" (*Ethics* 44). This fear lurks in the gaps of her yearning for liberation from the straitjacket of social scripts, overwhelming her to the point of exasperation.

A Gap in the Spectrum portrays how its female protagonist confronts another agitating dimension of freedom. It has been mentioned earlier that, after a period of stabilisation when Diana achieves a measure of success in adjusting herself to the arrangements of her new home, she unexpectedly reverts to the state of inexplicable confusion: "Suddenly terror gripped me. I was aware of a feeling of compulsion. I was going to be forced to do something against my will," she recounts and then continues, "Was I going to jump out of the window? Throw the breadboard into the glass doors of the sideboard. I stood still in the middle of the room, looking round suspiciously" (Duckworth, *Gap* 176-177). It appears that what the heroine superficially takes to be a dread of extraneous coercion could be explained more fruitfully in terms of the Sartrean "vertigo of possibility" (*Transcendence of the Ego* 100). As clarified by Gila J. Hayim, "anguish is the apprehension of me acting upon a situation. . . . anguish is anxiety when faced with the possibility of realizing the freedom of one's *pour-soi*" (17). Diana's frantic ruminations on what she is possibly going to do bring to mind the Sartrean dread "not of falling over the precipice, but of throwing myself over" (Sartre, *Being* 29). It is precisely the unlimited leeway in determining her own fortune, including self-destruction, that confounds the heroine.

At this point, the idea of existence as inherently undefined, unsettled and thus open to human freedom that comes to surface along with the experience of uncanniness must be complemented by the aspect of mortality, specifically the awareness of "one's ownmost Being-towards-death" (*Being* 296), which plays an instrumental role in Heidegger's concept of anxiety. Whereas in everydayness one is wont to relegate death to invisibility, treating it as a distant, almost abstract, perspective—"an indefinite something which above all, must duly arrive from somewhere or other, but which is proximally *not yet present-at-hand* for oneself, and is therefore no threat" (Heidegger, *Being* 297)—for Francie and Jane it becomes a daily companion.

As for the former heroine, the proximity of death comes to plain sight as early as in the previously scrutinised opening scene, where the recollection of the accident juxtaposes the heroine's lived experience against the intuition of mortality. The boundary between being and not being shrinks into an extremely flimsy one as the woman realises that a tiny gesture would suffice to put a definite end to her days. Death is no longer merely a vague horizon of an undefined future but an ever-real possibility and a lingering presence within life. The tragicomic context and tone of Francie's musings only accentuate its banality and ordinariness. Mementos of death disturb the woman also throughout the rest of the novel, starting with the Gothic-like dilapidated country cottage in which she takes residence with her lover Sidney after their departure from epidemic-stricken Wellington, "stinking of death" (Duckworth, *Married* 49) and haunted by the ghost of Sidney's ex-wife, whose corpse is hidden in the garden.

Significantly, all these reminders irrupt unexpectedly into the course of daily activities to reassert the presence of death as an inevitable shadow that ceaselessly hovers over human life, such as "the chilling grey architecture of the War Memorial Museum. Guns and other instruments of death" (Duckworth, *Married* 34) and a blood-soaked bird in its last throes lying by the roadway when the heroine and the man are driving away from the city. It is yet during the couple's wedding ceremony in the middle of the novel that the premonition of death reaches its culmination with an insane clerk pronouncing the couple not husband and wife but "dust to dust" (Duckworth, *Married* 96), a curious slip of the tongue alluding to the possibly lethal risk involved in bonding in the times of the epidemic. Quite ironically and paradoxically, an occasion that should mark a new beginning and, for that matter, give rise to a jubilant celebration of life, evolves then into a distressing *memento mori*, even if the overall tone of the episode is rather humorous. Instead of rejoicing over the bright future that may lie ahead of them, the newly-weds are awakened to their ultimate and unavoidable destiny as finite beings.

As for the latter heroine, the premonition of mortality arises together with the rumour that Lenard is secretly conducting post-death research. Although the threat of murder is not corroborated by any undeniable proof, it is lurking around the corner, thereby being all the more unsettling for the woman: "'Are you afraid?' Allister watches for her fear, as another man might watch for signs of sexual arousal. 'Of dying?' Jane laughs, a high hysterical sound" (Duckworth, *Rest* 117). Furthermore, there are some suggestions that the scientist may be experimenting with borderlines states, pushing his patients to the brink of demise and then resurrecting them (Duckworth, *Rest* 116), a science-fiction vision that renders the process of dying an integral part of life in a very literal sense.

At this juncture, it is appropriate to supplement the discussion with a reference to another work of fiction by Duckworth, one that has not been studied so far due to the fact that is does not feature the motif of uncanny estrangement in such an explicit way as the other novels. Nevertheless, in *Disorderly Conduct*, the "sense of life's oddness is mirrored in a larger social vision of chaos" (Wilson, "Art"). Written in the realist mode, it recounts how Sophie, a forty-year-old single mother of four children born to different fathers, involved in stormy love affairs, is forced to mature into acknowledging the irremediable insecurity of her existence amid the 1981 Springbok Tour, when the apartheid South Africa's rugby team visit to New Zealand led to a country-wide turmoil, unleashing a spate of protests, and "revealed deep rifts within New

Zealand society, shattering its image as a peaceful, homogenous nation with harmonious race relations" (Smith 231).[35]

It is against this background that Duckworth elaborates "[i]ntimations of mortality" (*Disorderly* 119) into one of the overriding themes of the plot. The hypochondriac heroine fixates on the idea of having a neurological disease that is likely to send her to an early grave. While awaiting conclusive medical test results, she is watching herself with inordinate attention, vigilant for any possible signs of approaching infirmity: "Her [Sophie's] progress across the room in the darkness is slow and zombie like. Does she walk in a direct line? She suspects not. People with her disorder usually don't. . . . Not that she has the disease yet, but she knows it is there waiting, embedded in the nerves of her brain" (Duckworth, *Disorderly* 7). While for Francie and Jane death is a threat coming from the outside, Sophie is accompanied by a sharpened sense of carrying a germ of death right within herself. Most distressingly, she is mindful that this germ may deal the final blow at any moment: "I'm not going to die in the night!' But perhaps she will? Perhaps she had told a lie?" (Duckworth, *Disorderly* 7-8). Interestingly, what inspires her utmost trepidation is not the prospect of irremediable and prolonged suffering but rather that of very non-being: "She can cope with pain. It is the idea of numbness she can't cope with, the loss of sensation. Death at close quarters" (Duckworth, *Disorderly* 44). At the same time, the woman yet strives to placate her own anxiety by thinking about death as a natural element of life and shared human lot: "And yet we're all dying, aren't we? Why should Sophie's death be any more important than others, even to herself? Why should she not be able to watch herself run down, degenerate, with an objective eye?" (Duckworth, *Disorderly* 44).

The novel's ending is both surprising and comic, as Sophie learns about being merely allergic to chocolate rather than terminally ill: "Sophie at least is well. . . . Her sentence has been lifted. She is free to go. No crippling diseases for her. She can be grateful for her good health" (Duckworth, *Disorderly* 160). This way, Duckworth deflates the serious tone set by the earlier musings, successfully avoiding grandiloquence and demonstrating that death may be contemplated just as any other subject, also with a note of humour if need be. She does not yet allow either the heroine or the reader to peacefully return to their comfort zone. Ironically enough, it is the wife of the heroine's lover who has been diagnosed with a severe ailment: "Disablement and death—the ultimate broken promises. Poor Pat" (Duckworth, *Disorderly*

[35] In the novel, Sophie is also convinced about the momentous significance of the events for the country: "It is as if the country is stained too. A lost virginity almost. The rest of the world will never look at New Zealand in quite the same way again" (Duckworth, *Disorderly Conduct* 144).

159). Further, the woman's carefree optimism is undercut by the narrator, who cautions the reader that, even Sophie is perfectly healthy at the moment, ultimately "[l]ife is a sexually transmitted terminal disease" (Duckworth, *Disorderly* 160). Although the assertion may sound cliché, it neatly conveys the awareness of human mortality that pervades banal everydayness in Duckworth's vision.

3.4 FEAR OF INSIGNIFICANCE

The previous section has argued that Duckworth's heroines are keenly sensitive to their own existential frailty. Now it should be added that some of them are troubled also by the feeling that their existence lacks uniqueness. More specifically, they realise that it is miserly insignificant, not necessarily due to their own failure to endow it with a meaningful shape, but in the sense that they are only one of many human beings in the world, prone to follow paths that have been already trodden countless times by other people.

One of such heroines is Vivienne from *Seeing Red*, a divorcée and a mother of two adult sons, living together with her lesbian sister Isla, who is still in grief after the death of her female lover. Vivienne's life is shaken by an accidental meeting with Jake and Jennet, nicknamed the Burberries, a mysterious couple claiming to be husband and wife. The heroine soon becomes romantically involved with the man, but, after a time, she learns that the two are siblings locked in an incestuous liaison.

Duckworth opens the novel by drawing a picture of an alienating cityscape, evoking the same uncanny mood as in the previously analysed novels: "She walks feeling like a stranger in a foreign city. None of this is familiar to her. She might be anywhere in the world—except that there is almost no-one about. No people. Eerie. Her footsteps echo. Boutique owners sit in their cages with infinite patience, smiling mechanically like prostitutes" (Duckworth, *Seeing* 20). This tone corresponds to Vivienne's situation in life. Despite priding herself on being "in charge of her life, a working woman with friends and expectations" (Duckworth, *Seeing* 2), she is clearly at a crossroads, vexed by her uneasy relationship with Isla and the approaching menopause, a time when the still strong desire to be attractive jars with the physical signs of time passage. In these circumstances, the woman, similar to Duckworth's other heroines, is able to obtain a glimpse beneath the veneer of everyday stability into existential vulnerability: "It shocks Vivienne to see how easily the walls of the house come down. The iron roof would probably lift as easily and sail off in a hurricane, exposing their silly pretence of living solid rooted lives. A reminder that they are squatting in earthquake country, temporary tenants clinging to the rims of the hillside" (Duckworth, *Seeing* 43). The heroine's anxiety magnifies

during her affair with Jake since his extremely close bond with Jennet, even if pervaded by mutual violence and hostility, continues to exclude her and throw her into the position of an intruder. Its climax comes when the heroine catches the couple having sex: "She had believed to be the central character in this drama but suddenly it becomes obvious that the Burberries are the main protagonists and she has simply got in the way, like a piece of broken glass on a highway, causing a puncture" (Duckworth, *Seeing* 142). At this point, the illusion of self-importance erodes and does so to an even greater extent when she begins to suspect being pregnant with Jake's child. The news incites her all the more to reflect on how human existence is accidental and, more painfully, unoriginal. For one thing, the heroine appears to fear that her child will be a copy of herself, influenced to a certain extent by the inherited pool of genes: "What if there is one another son dormant in her womb, or a daughter, herself repeated? The way life goes on, inexorably repetitious, is terrible" (Duckworth, *Seeing* 145). For another, she finds herself inadvertently repeating a trite script rather than following her individual pathway: "Another woman deserted by another man, another foetus flushed into the harbour, how unoriginal, how pathetic. She sobs and sobs" (Duckworth, *Seeing* 156*).*

All these concerns are re-enunciated in the most striking terms in the novel's ending, which sees a confrontation between the sisters and the incestuous siblings. After Isla has broken the news about Vivienne's pregnancy, Jennet pushes the former in a fit of jealousy and anger, making her that dangerously fall down and strike her head against a glassed cupboard, possibly with a fatal effect, which is not clarified. Distraught both by Isla's accident and Jake's indifference to what has happened through the fault of his sister-lover, the heroine is struck by the unbearable thought that she has only a limited control over the course of events that affect her: "Vivienne raises her muzzle and howls, no more important in the scheme of things than a small blotchy black and white bitch, a soon to be sucked away foetus, an unfinished masterpiece hanging on a workroom frame" (Duckworth, *Seeing* 171). Her despair at being powerless in the face of other people's machinations, suffering, possibly death, and her own physicality is given weight by the scrupulously chosen vocabulary and imagery, most notably words such as "muzzle" or "howl," normally used with reference to animals. The novel does not yet appear to express a message of determinism. The root cause of the heroine's disquiet does not lie in the conviction that her life is heading towards one specific destination without her command. While not repudiating the freedom of choice of in any way, the heroine yet looks at her own existence from a broader perspective in which she is no longer the centre of the world but only its small element, restricted by myriad factors—"an insect within the immense

collectivity whose limits are one with the earth's," as Beauvoir has it (*Ethics* 9)—her will clashing with the will of those around her.

The feeling of insignificance and dread of unoriginality run through Duckworth's other novels published in the 1990s, even if not always as the prime theme. In *Studmuffin,* the self-assertive female protagonist can hardly bear the awareness that her traumatic experience of a child loss is in no way special: "Alice thinks about the social occasion, Kitty's memorial service, and the tiny pastel coffin. She doesn't like to remember that this funeral was a carbon copy of other services for children, the casket from a well thumbed catalogue" (Duckworth 36). The finale of *Unlawful Entry,* in turn, could be probably seen as an antecedent to *Seeing Red*. Dissatisfied with her seemingly uneventful life and still not reconciled to Hittie's death, the friend of Joan's late daughter grieves over her own insignificance in a manner similar to Vivienne: "Perhaps tears for herself? Because she has seen how incidental she is to anyone's life? . . . She has remembered her role—she is the perpetual bystander, chorus, echo. She is understudy, assistant, stage manager, prompt—but never protagonist. At least, she supposes, she will be the centre stage at her own death" (Duckworth, *Unlawful* 193). Here, Duckworth additionally entwines the heroine's ruminations with a reflection on mortality and does so in a way that conspicuously ties in with Heidegger's emphasis on the ownmost quality of death. Whereas life is lived alongside other people and Roey feels that hers has been always overshadowed by the problems of those close to her, she knows that death must be confronted ultimately on her own.

3.5 ANXIETY AND THE BODY

Once an overview of the manifestations and existential meanings of anxiety have been provided, it will be shown now that it is often represented as a corporeal experience. It is appropriate to do so in order to adumbrate the significance of the body in Duckworth's fiction ahead of analysing the theme of ambiguity in the final section. By way of reminder, for the existentialists, with their close ties to phenomenology, the body cannot be reduced to a physical thing. As declared most strongly by Beauvoir, it "is a situation*:* it is our grasp on the world and the outline for our projects" (*Second Sex* 68). In a similar vein, in many of Duckworth's novels, the body noticeably performs the role of a "lived center of experience" (Behnke), emerging from background awareness into focal attention as the women lose their way in the once familiar world. The heroines feel anxiety through their bodies and respond to it with specific bodily reactions. When the narrator of *Disorderly Conduct* warns that being diagnosed as perfectly healthy will not put an end to Sophie's existential ailments, the restlessness that is

likely to mar her days in the future is described as rooted in physical processes: "She can expect a succession of bizarre and distressing symptoms. Small disasters, small rejections, dripping like acid onto her nerves and burrowing into her sense of well being (sic)" (Duckworth 160). Upon learning the truth about the incestuous relationship between Jake and Jennet, Vivienne, in turn, is immediately struck by an attack of sickness, not only an early sign of pregnancy but also an expression of her shock and disillusionment: "Vivienne makes a sound. It isn't a cry, more of a dry retch in her throat. . . . Her stomach churns, echoing the writhing awkwardness on the bed. There is a clump of sickness collecting in her gullet" (Duckworth, *Seeing* 140). While these are only two minor illustrations, in *A Gap in the Spectrum* and, even more notably, *Married Alive,* the body takes centre stage in the portrayal of anxiety.

It has been argued earlier that, in the former novel, the experience of uncanny amnesia makes Diana hyper-attentive to her own existence as a curious and unchartered phenomenon. This sensitivity manifests itself, *inter alia,* in her heightened corporeal self-awareness: "I could feel my coiled plaits, bumpy under my neck—what a lot of hair I had. . . . The perfume of the ointment rubbed into my skin, mingled with the masculine smell of the rush mat, and the harsh effect twanged in my nostrils. Perspiration ran down salty into the corners of my mouth" (Duckworth, *Gap* 1). The initial pleasurable immersion in newly-discovered physicality, however, soon morphs into a searing physical discomfort: "Looking at the scene I was one again conscious of the pain in my head, so sharp that for a moment I thought I was going to retch. . . . My eyes ached as I stared, and as I continued staring the ache began to fade a little" (Duckworth, *Gap* 8-9). As can be seen, Diana's cognitive and perceptual estrangement from the surroundings engenders the resistance of her body, which appears to be overburdened by a plethora of new stimuli bombarding it in the course of her reconnaissance through the place. Dislodged from its usual position, it accommodates itself only gradually, in the same way as the heroine needs time to find her bearings in the world.

By the same token, Diana's self-alienation projects onto her physical state. The heroine's attempts to recover the lost sense of identity while surveying her own face in the mirror are interrupted by a bout of nausea, which takes over the control of her body, a parallel to her failure to make sense of herself: "I felt sick. Water kept rising into my mouth and to swallow the warm liquid made me shudder—even my elbows" (Duckworth, *Gap* 10). Towards the end of the novel, when anxiety returns, as described previously, the body is again felt with magnified intensity, marking Diana's re-awakening from mindless tranquillity and augmenting her sense of being: "I wandered about, touching objects in the room and handling them absently. My

finger-tips seemed especially sensitive, and so did my tongue. I could feel it in my mouth, curled tight as if waiting for something" (Duckworth, *Gap* 176).

In *Married Alive*, by contrast, the body adopts the function of Francie's anchor in the world along with her increasing wariness about her mental condition. The epidemic of insanity forces the heroine to forsake unquestioned reliance on the mind, which now represents an undisciplined and possibly hazardous *terra incognita*, and appreciate the body as the pillar of stability in the tumultuous times. As opposed to former, which may falsify reality, mislead, and propel her to abnormal conduct, the latter appears a much more reliable epistemological and perceptual tool, one that enables her to maintain a solid grounding in reality: "It is not Francie's body that is in question, but her mind" (Duckworth, *Married* 8). It also gains the privileged status of a conscious subject that mediates Francie's emotions, hence anxiety is conceptualised also in physical terms: "The bored loneliness, edged with fear—'free-floating anxiety'—a sensation which fills her veins like an illness, until she would do anything to alleviate it. Swallow any pill or potion . . ." (Duckworth, *Married* 87). It has been illustrated previously how anxiety in the novel takes the form of an altered or extraordinary perception of the world and oneself; now it can be plainly seen that it also stirs the body, tempting the woman to look for a cure in medical substances. The foregrounding of the body as a living entity in this context is illuminated most prominently by the following two passages:

> Some evil is persecuting her through the electric wiring system. She lies in the dark, dwelling on the possibilities. Dust prickles her eyelids, her face feels tight, she can taste her tongue. (Duckworth, *Married* 112)

> Sometimes her feelings of anxiety were so strong she could smell them like smoke in her nostrils. Lying in bed now, beside Sidney, she catches a whiff of that same odour of fright. (Duckworth, *Married* 120)

They appear to echo Diana's overt alertness to her own corporeal existence. Just as the female protagonist of *A Gap in the Spectrum*, Francie feels it with unprecedented force, her body functioning as a keen agent that both expresses and responds to anxiety.

3.6 REVELATIONS OF EXISTENTIAL AMBIGUITY

The previous sections have identified and dissected various facets of the human condition that come into plain view with the experience of anxiety. Diverse as they may seem, their common denominator is "the painful existential fact of human ambiguity" (Bauer, "Simone de Beauvoir on Motherhood" 151). At the underlying level, the heroines confront the tension that plays itself

out at the very heart of their existence—that of being, on the one hand, "a sovereign and unique subject amidst a universe of objects" and, on the other hand, "an object for others" and "a thing crushed by the dark weight of other things" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 7). They grow aware of being simultaneously painfully free to construct their own lives and inevitably entangled in existential situations that cannot be surpassed, such as thrownness, contingency and mortality, and thus set certain limits on the possibilities that they may pursue. The following paragraphs will explain where this ambiguity shows itself with particular immediacy.

The epidemic that triggers the plot of *Married Alive* is in itself highly paradoxical since something supposed to guarantee protection and relief proves to be a weapon of destruction. As such, it also exposes Francie to the ambiguities that suffuse her existence. They are hinted at as early as in the well-known opening scene, where the heroine is revisiting the accident in her suntan studio. It is now worthwhile quoting a larger portion of the relevant passage and re-examine it from the perspective of the problem at hand:

> She [Francie] stands straight and naked in the cubicle, with her knickers over her head. The nylon clutches at her hot face. Although they are freshly laundered knickers there is a crotchy smell. They nylon clutches at her hot face. Her own smell? Or a legacy from earlier customers? . . . Yesterday she came close to killing a customer. . . . A coffin lid. If she kept her thumb on the control button she could make herself into a neat jam sandwich. (Duckworth, *Married* 7)

First, with the woman's smell being hardly distinguishable from that of her clients, the boundary between self and other becomes conspicuously blurred. Paradoxically, isolated in a locked suntan cubicle, the heroine remains closely connected to the external word. Further, in accordance with what has been argued previously, she grasps herself as living but at the same time intuits that "every living moment is a sliding toward death" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 127). Most importantly, the scene gives emphasis to the woman's body as a locus of ambiguity. While she is examining the smell of her private parts, it is posited in the double role of an experiencing subject and an object scrutinised as if from outside, passive and vulnerable, as underlined by its nakedness, hovering on the verge between exteriority and interiority.

All the foregoing aspects mark their presence also throughout the rest of the novel. As has been indicated, death emerges as a recurring preoccupation amid daily routines and mutual interdependence between people, as well as the extent to which they are prone to approach one another as disposable objects to be eliminated at will, gain unprecedented importance. What requires to be elucidated now in further detail is the ambiguous nature of the body. The previous

section has demonstrated that the epidemic brings into the open the tenuousness of the body/mind dichotomy, based on the privileged position of the latter as the centre of everything that determines humanity—consciousness, feeling, thought, and power of agency—and the denigration of the former for its materiality, unruliness, and investment in biological drives. With the waning belief in the superiority of the mind, the body becomes a chief point of reference for the heroine. It is depicted as a subject in its own right, being "an integrated system of perceptual powers . . . by which one has a hold and a unique vantage point on the world" (Fullbrook and Fullbrook, "Beauvoir and Plato" 55).

By no means, however, does this empowering picture gives full justice to Francie's corporeal experience. The body, opines Beauvoir, "is an object of sympathy or repulsion" (*Ethics* 41), an ambiguity which insinuates itself into the novel. The heroine simultaneously lives her body as "a thing of the world" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 44), hence a site of immersion in immanence. In her memories of adolescence, it does not anchor her subjectivity but rather generates ongoing torment and distress, instilling in her a sense of inadequacy and inferiority. First, it sets limits on the range of projects that she may pursue in life. The woman recalls how her father ordered her to abandon ballets classes, believing that her ungainly silhouette would pose an impediment to a successful dancing career. At the time, she was thus provoked to perceive her body as something alien to herself, a cumbersome and unwieldy object hindering her daily functioning. Excessive and disharmonious, it aroused a feeling of awkwardness: "And her legs were certainly getting longer. She had trouble knowing where to put them under the desk at school—and her feet too. Long legs, long feet, long nose" (Duckworth, *Married* 11). In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir underscores how women feel estranged from their own bodies at various stages of their lives, including adolescence, when plainly visible and rapid physical changes weigh heavily upon the girl's self-comfort: "Her whole body is experienced as embarrassment" (399). True to this insight, Francie pubescent body was lived as a spectacle exposed to public scrutiny and judgment, grotesque in its impurity, incontinence, and deformity:

> He didn't think much of her, her father. He was always putting her down. . . . She would sit and think about it for hours on end, trying to discover where was the flaw in her that had turned her father so against her. At puberty she decided it was her womanness, her female odours and curves. . . . She had taken to washing and slouching. Now she doesn't slouch. Male fingers and penises, sprouting throughout her teenage years, have reassured her about the validity of her curves. But she stills washes obsessively, in terror of rejection. (Duckworth, *Married* 11)

Since physicality deprived her of dignity and restrained her possibilities of connecting with other people on equal terms, she approached it as an enemy to be obliterated or subdued, as instantiated by her self-effacing compulsion to wash and her reluctance to hold herself upright.[36] Significantly, although with time the heroine has learnt to appreciate her own physique, what fascinates her is not the potential that it may present for herself as a free subject but rather the allure that it holds for men. Despite the awareness of the power that her female attributes present, the body continues to function as a potential threat rather than as a site of her agency.

The experience of female physiology as inimical to self-mastery assumed even more dramatic proportions after Francie gave birth to her child. Her body revealed itself as "an alienated opaque thing" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 64), slipping beyond the heroine's understanding and command:

> Expressing milk from her swollen breasts in the back room of a private hospital she wondered why it had to hurt so much. Her breasts stung. Her womb went into post-labour contraction, unfairly reminding her of the little lathery animal she had expelled with such a sense of relief. And now there was more pain, lodged somewhere inaccessible, like a toothache, because she had to give away this reproduction of herself. Had to? Well yes. To allow the future. Not very different from taking pruning shears to a tree. (Duckworth, *Married* 15-16)

The excruciatingly painful physical processes reduced the woman to an animal-like state, where childbearing could not be perceived otherwise than as mere furthering of life, foreclosing any space for self-expansion. The shear pruning metaphor corresponds neatly to the discourse of immanence versus transcendence in which Beauvoir frames her discussion of pregnancy, childbirth, and mothering, contrasting them with the enterprises traditionally undertaken by men. As stressed in Chapter One, Beauvoir famously and controversially argues that whereas the latter carry a transformative potential, the former can hardly inspire a sense of achievement, being simple facts of life, which do not involve any measure of creativity. Although her perspective on motherhood has been castigated by various feminists for its alleged biological

[36] In *Femininity and Domination*: *Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression,* Sandra Lee Bartky references the Heideggerian notion of mood or attunement understood as a pre-cognitive relation of *Dasein* to its environment to argue that women's manner of being in patriarchal society is pre-defined by shame: "it is in the act of being shamed and in the feeling ashamed that there is disclosed to women who they are and how they are faring within the domains they inhabit" (93). Her claim appears to dovetail with the description of how Francie's engagement with the world used to be structured and permeated by "the distressed apprehension of the self as inadequate or diminished" (Bartky 86)

essentialism and determinism, the following insight appears to communicate the quintessence of Francie's experience in very precise terms:

> So the woman who gives birth does not take pride in her creation; she feels like the passive plaything of obscure forces, and painful childbirth a useless and even bothersome accident. . . . But in any case, to give birth and to breast-feed are not *activities* but natural functions; they do not involve a project, which is why the woman finds no motive there to claim a higher meaning for her existence; she passively submits to her biological destiny. (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 98)

Similarly, in labour and breastfeeding, Francie's body lost its capacity for expressing her subjectivity, becoming "alien vitality, which can fight against [her] freedom and sense of self" (Groenhout 76). It thrust the heroine into the position of an object doomed to "repetition and immanence" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 98), paralysed and at the whim of her own unbridled biology.

The tensions inherent in the body, which is both an agent in the world and a limiting factor, are given a poignant articulation also in *Disorderly Conduct,* with Sophie at the verge of passage into menopause. It has been mentioned earlier that the body is represented in the novel as a conscious subject through which the heroine experiences anxiety; it must be added now that it also contributes to generating her anxiety. The transformations of her body make the woman acutely aware of its importance. Being gradually deprived of some of its functions, she comes to treasure it as the backbone of her subjectivity, agency, and self-esteem. While wondering whether she might have been pregnant and miscarried, Sophie agonises over the loss of fertility: "Are her insides giving up? Was the foetus malformed? Is she too old to make a healthy baby? The idea frightens her. If she is too old to make a healthy child, does that mean she is too old to make anything else which is properly formed? From now on will all her thoughts, memories, achievements be distorted and incomplete?" (Duckworth, *Disorderly* 141). Interestingly, the ability to conceive is approached as the very root of transcendence, opening the woman to a promising future rather than freezing her in unproductive stasis. In sharp contrast to Francie, Sophie is one of those women who, as Beauvoir at one point concedes, "felt creative power during childbirth" (*Second Sex* 624). Her memories of giving birth to her first daughter, who died before the start of the plot, emphasise a sense of creative elation: "What remains is that indescribable surge of pride at the end of her first labour. She had reproduced herself, incredibly, in another being. More perfect surely than Sophie could ever have been. Declaring itself with a new set of lungs, quite separate from Sophie's own" (Duckworth, *Disorderly* 78-

79). Now the heroine fears that, once her reproductive powers have been lost, she will be no longer able to exploit her potential as a human being in all other areas of life. As a result, she begins to loathe her transforming body, blaming it for her romantic failures: "She can no longer cast herself, even unintentionally, in the role of love object, desirable, pursued by attractive male. . . . Even in waking moments she has become critical of her physical defects in a way she never was" (Duckworth, *Disorderly* 28). In her perception, it morphs into a signifier of lack, foreclosed possibilities, and unrealisable desires: "'Oh I'm so sick of myself—sick of the demands my damned body makes. I'm sick of sex and needing. And wanting. Why can't it stop? When's it going to stop and let me get on with my life?'" (Duckworth, *Disorderly* 105). It is a clumsy thing disconnecting her from the world instead of serving as her grasp on it.

In *A Gap in the Spectrum,* Diana's experience of a confused castaway on quest for identity clearly illuminates her existential condition as both a free meaning-making subject and an object among other people, who strive to fit her into their preconceptions. The subject/object ambiguity is yet most readily apparent in the heroine's continuing engagement in self-examination, when she combines the roles of both an explorer and a passive entity available for scrutiny. Three situations, two of which have been already examined earlier in the dissertation, furnish particularly pertinent illustrations of this tension. The first one is when the woman catches a sight of her own name on an airmail form (Duckworth, *Gap* 3). Seemingly a carrier of her unique subjectivity, the identity of Diana Clouston at the same time becomes literarily objectified by being reduced to a mere inscription, which is something fixed, inert, and external to the woman. The second one is when she looks at herself in the mirror (Duckworth, *Gap* 4), a moment of self-alienation, as already stated, as well as a collision between the position of an active perceiver and that of a static object of perception. The third one, not analysed so far, is when Diana finds some old photographs picturing her in various social situations and can hardly identify with the person that they represent: "I kept coming across new clues to my identity in this world. My first find was a photograph album. I opened it with a curious feeling of trespassing. Well, there I was, accompanied by strangers, at dances, in the street, on the beach. The photos didn't seem in character with myself at all" (Duckworth, *Gap* 13). As contended by Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "[i]n one sense photography inadvertently objectifies people by turning them into things to be looked at" (221-222). It transforms them into inert products of external gaze with a petrified essence, frozen in one specific context. The dissonance that the heroine feels between this externalised picture of herself and her own self-perception thus parallels her existential ambiguity as both a self-determining subject and an object of judgement for others.

The same condition is revealed to Diana during her encounter with the female patients of the mental hospital in which she begins to work towards the end of the novel. The first description of the place associates it in a very distinct way with human physicality in its most crude dimension: "It smelt. It smelt of warm, sour urine, and dysentery and perspiration. The old women were clad clumsily in patched flannel dresses, wrinkled stockings and flowered pinafores" (Duckworth, *Gap* 132). This is also the perspective through which Diana views her patients, conflating them with their "grotesque" (Duckworth, *Gap* 139) corporeality, as accentuated by the focus of the quoted passage on the images of excretions. Incontinent and unruly, their physique turns the women into objects mired in biology and dependent on the assistance of other people. The aging body of one of them breeds such disgust in Diana that she desists from recognising her as a human being at all: "I lifted her, repelled by the feel of her body under the warm flannel dress. That this should be a living person, living flesh, on a mind that was quickly dying, filled me with horror" (Duckworth, *Gap* 133). She approaches her not as an individual with the same dignity and freedom as she herself has but as a passive and helpless thing at the mercy of nature. Diana's revulsion appears to stem to a large extent from the dawning recognition that vulnerability to biological forces, physical decline and objectification also constitutes an inescapable part of her own existence. By refusing to acknowledge human kinship with the patient, the heroine clings to the comforting illusion, reclaimed after the period of initial bewilderment, of having full self-mastery. Only when the old lady confesses to being scared, does Diana finally accord her the status of a subject in her own right and begins to empathise with her suffering: "These last words suddenly made me aware that Mrs Braid was not merely another patient, to be panned and blanket-bathed at regular intervals. She was a person—like myself. And she was frightened" (Duckworth, *Gap* 146). The situation thus opens her eyes to the fact that "all humans share this fundamental ambiguity of being at once subject and object" (Card 15). In aging and illness, especially in alienating hospital settings, the latter status may gain greater visibility, but it does not abolish the former, as both are inherent in the human condition.

Rest for the Wicked also employs the motif of confinement in a hospital-like establishment as a fruitful ground for probing the ambiguity of human existence. In this nightmare reality where people are valued only for their fitness for medical experimentation and threatened with murder, the boundaries between subject and object become entirely distorted. Placed under ongoing medical surveillance, including dream recording, the inmates of the Sleep Research are required to surrender a part of their privacy and sovereignty over their own lives, becoming cogs in the experimental machine, not any better than animals and plants: "Lenard is in charge

of the white rats, the human research subjects and the white roses" (Duckworth, *Rest* 8). If they may be exploited as mere means to scientific ends, their uniqueness as human beings endowed with the power of self-constitution is put into question. The uncertainty about the limits of humanity runs throughout the novel, with the idea of post-death research, whereby people are "reactivated like a puppet" (Duckworth, *Rest* 116), or the image of an unspecified animal that proves to be a human creature in disguise: "a large furry animal in a candy-striped apron is standing in the gutter. . . . It has large round brown ears and a lifeless dragging tail. It is impossible to guess what kind of human being sweats inside the nylon pelt. Jane feels an inexplicable anxiety. There are too many things hidden from her and this is just another" (Duckworth, *Rest* 119). As noted previously, the heroine falls into confusion about her own status among other guineapigs. Obscure medical procedures clearly compromise her sense of self-integrity and subjectivity, constituting an intrusion upon her body: "And the jelly stuff they put in your hair when they attach the electroencephalograph. You think it's odourless until the smell sneaks up on you and becomes the smell of your own hair" (Duckworth, *Rest* 7). The stay in "the cesspool of human survival" (Duckworth, *Rest* 8), as the place is described, thus plunges her into immanence, the very word "survival" denoting a struggle for preservation of life in its basic biological dimension. With time, Jane's ambitions of forging an identity beyond the patriarchal schemas of womanhood diminish into mere attempts not to resist Lenard's machinations. At the same time yet, as also discussed earlier, the heroine retains the awareness of being innately and painfully free as a human being. Her life in the centre is thus stretched between two conflicting pulls: the influence of external factors and capacity for being a master of her own life. She experiences herself as both a vulnerable object and an autonomous subject who may take action to oppose the force of circumstances—"as a synthesis of possibility and necessity" (Schrag 60).

3.7 CONCLUSION

The chapter has shown that Duckworth's fiction is thematically saturated by anxiety ingrained in disruption to the heroines' habitual ways of being in the world, where "[w]hat was before a refuge for security and contentment now becomes strange and puzzling" (Schrag 80). "[A]n inveterate realist," as Murray has it ("Woman"), but also a writer with a proclivity for challenging stilted patterns of approaching long-standing problems, Duckworth brings to focal expression the uncanny that is hidden not so deep in the mundane, adroitly mixing realist and non-realist conventions, so as to give appropriate emphasis to her message. A. Holland characterises Beauvoir's first novel in the following way: "The sense of something strange and

threatening hidden behind everydayness is something that recurs throughout *L'Invitée*, where the banal and the sinister are juxtaposed" ("Identity" 327). The same may be said, to a large extent, of Duckworth's novels. Her heroines grow dislocated from well-established, often tranquilising, ideas about the world, other people, and themselves and begin to view what has been so far unreflectively taken at face value with a sense of estrangement, unease, and curiosity. Their anxiety is represented as a very concrete feeling, which involves not only the mind and consciousness but also the body. More importantly, it has a disclosive character, awakening them to the essential fact that they "exist in a *world* and that existence is [their] *task*" (Sembera 117). The novels discussed portray common preoccupations of women's daily lives, such as identity issues, entrapment in social roles, and intricacies of interpersonal relationships. At the same time, they inscribe them in confrontations with the reality of the human condition: existential indeterminacy and fragility, freedom, imminence of death, and insignificance of individual existence in a broader perspective. At the core of all these confrontations lies the process of the heroines facing their own existential ambiguity as "neither pure receivers of meaning nor absolute creators of meaning" (Bergoffen, "Marriage" 99)—the contradictions of being both subject and object, autonomous and interconnected with other people, living and approaching death.

CHAPTER FOUR: (IN) AUTHENTICITY IN DUCKWORTH'S FICTION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter has ended by bringing to focus how Duckworth's heroines grow cognizant of the baffling ambiguity of their existence. At this juncture, attention will be shifted to the ways in which they negotiate the tensions intrinsic to the reality of being both self-defining subjects and objects constrained by the force of circumstances, or, more often than not, fail to do so. More specifically, the present chapter aims to explore how the heroines as well as the male characters in Duckworth's fiction exercise the freedom to construct their own lives through resolute choices and meaning-giving activities under the pressure of social expectations, power-based interpersonal relationships, and their personal vulnerabilities as human beings who crave tranquillity at the expense of existential authenticity. In Duckworth's fiction, the problem of self-creation and its limits presents itself to most heroines with extraordinary urgency, pushing them into anxiety that arises in the face of responsibility for their own lives. They frequently relinquish it, plunging into self-deception and inauthenticity. As already demonstrated, however, in Duckworth's literary world "nothing stays the same, the boundaries continually shift" (Murray, "Duckworth, Marilyn" 271); accordingly, many of the novels analysed place weight on the process of balancing between contradictory impulses, where even good faith intentions may be realised in an existentially inauthentic fashion. They often provide nuanced portrayals of women who can be neither categorically condemned for their inability to live on self-defined terms nor unequivocally acclaimed as paragons of existential virtue.

The discussion of the aforementioned concerns will be structured as follows. First, it is argued that Duckworth conceives of authenticity, just as the existentialists do, as a never-completed enterprise, which involves an internal struggle against a penchant for losing oneself in social canons, sometimes won and sometimes lost, rather than "just a momentary pathos or event or even an ultimate choice" (Golomb 78). Second, careful consideration is given to the motives behind the heroines' intentional flight from authenticity. It is observed that they include reluctance to carry the burden of existential freedom and temptation to remove it through unquestioning conformity with externally established schemas, which, for all their restrictiveness, function as a point of support in a volatile and treacherous world. Subsequently, it is asserted that Duckworth's heroines, as well as one male character by way of comparison, display a propensity to aim for a fixed identity that will furnish them with an immutable sense of completeness; as a result, ongoing self-formation gives way to role-playing and attachment

to the illusion of an essential core. Finally, the last section provides insights into the ideals of authenticity drawn by Duckworth in two of her novels..

4.2 SISYPHEAN CIRCLE OF AUTHENTICITY

Chapter One has explicated that Heidegger, Sartre, and Beauvoir do not treat authenticity as a fixed state, which, once reached, could persist forever without requiring any further efforts, but rather as an aspirational ideal. While reviewing the concept in Heidegger's understanding, Sembera observes that what is within human reach is only "[m]anaged inauthenticity, or the *acceptance of the necessary and unceasing struggle to maintain authenticity*" (185). Golomb similarly avers that being authentic refers to "a fluctuating state of mind, arrived at through an ongoing struggle against the pull of the public world" (78). The scholar describes the dynamics of this struggle as the "Sisyphean circle of authenticity" (Golomb 73), whereby the possibility of authentic existence is time and again subdued through immersion in the safe shelter of de-individualising schemas: "(1) authenticity, or ownness of my Being-in-the-world > (2) anxiety in the face of (1) > (3) ownness lost by flight and fall into the anyone [the they-self] > (4) latent anxiety and the feeling of *unheimlichkeit* > (5) individualization > (6) authentic ownness of my Being > (7) anxiety in the face of (6), and so on unto death" (Golomb 73). The ebbs and flows of Diana's experience in *A Gap in the Spectrum*—her vacillation between excitement and bewilderment after the mysterious awakening in London—appear to resonate to an extent with Golomb's scheme and may be better comprehended through its lens. It will be claimed in what follows that the vagaries of the heroine's condition are precisely the outcome of a clash between the fledgling potential for reclaiming her life as a self-directed project and the irresistible urge to slip back into the alienating scripts of the they-self.

At the age of nineteen, supposedly engaged to be married, Diana is at the point of transition into the challenges of adulthood, a troubled time that renders the question of who she is and aspires to be more critical than ever. As opined by Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*, "[t]earing oneself away from one's family is a definitive weaning: this is when she [the woman] experiences the anguish of abandon and the giddiness of freedom" (551). The dreamlike situation of being thrown into an alien place, with a very dim awareness of her own identity, gives a palpable taste of the anxiety that accompanies this prospect of freedom coupled with responsibility. In Heideggerian terms, this time similarly appears to be perfectly suited to serve as a stimulus for leaping out of average everydayness, where matters of existential import are relegated outside the sphere of conscious reflection since "[w]e drift along with the crowd, enacting the socially approved roles and identities that are prescribed for us" (Aho,

Existentialism). "In this mode," contends Aho, "we are *inauthentic* because the question 'Who am I?' is not a pressing issue for us" (*Existentialism*).

In the light of the foregoing remark, Micald, from which the heroine has been mysteriously exiled, may be interpreted as a site where inauthenticity is the predominant mode of being in the world. While trying to recover some memories of her past, Diana makes two confessions that strike a chord with the quoted insights into the character of everydayness, focusing, as they do, on the thoughtless reiteration of trite formulas. First, she reminisces about the blandness of life in her homeland: "I had only known one religion in my life—an undemanding set of beliefs which everyone had taken completely for granted" (Duckworth, *Gap* 26). At a later point, she adds: "I had never come up against someone I knew falling in love, in Micald, except in a very dull way" (Duckworth, *Gap* 81). London, by contrast, as noted in the previous chapter, resembles "an imaginary place" (Duckworth, *Gap* 5) that the heroine and her sister invented as children, a peculiarity that produces an impression of creative freedom. Further, while in Micald even the most profound emotions were reduced to insipid routines, the city is associated with intensity, as epitomised by the colour red, a non-entity in Diana's homeland (Duckworth, *Gap* 9). Most importantly, London lacks all the safe linchpins that used to order the heroine's experience at home, anaesthetising her to the strangeness of existence. In consequence, the woman's "everyday existence (inauthentic) falls into a state of confusion; meanings and interrelations are lost . . ." (Magrini 79).

It is necessary to re-emphasise that the accompanying sense of being "estranged within the world, losing it and becoming detached" (Golomb 69) is the factor that visibly opens Diana to the recognition of her true existential condition and, as a consequence, to the possibility of moulding her situation autonomously, instead of accepting the role of a hostage to social formulas. The paramount issue that necessitates in-depth analysis at this point is how Diana tackles this perplexing reality and whether she "take[s] up a project of self-creation by projecting [herself] onto worldly possibilities" (Withy 74).

The heroine's response is mixed and tension-ridden; a "spirit of adventure" (Duckworth, *Gap* 21) mingles with a paralysing "sense of danger and insecurity" (Duckworth, *Gap* 21), exposing the co-presence of the desire to benefit from the authenticating potential of her position and the even stronger urge to revert to the former state of existential tranquillity. It has been already indicated that, for all her bewilderment, the woman is simultaneously thrilled at the promise of an unknown future that may lie ahead. The situation elicits her curiosity coupled with a hope of rejuvenating change: "Was it too fantastic that I had slipped into a complete new world inside my mind?" (Duckworth, *Gap* 5). Most significantly, faced with the loss of identity,

Diana undertakes tentative attempts at self-fashioning, as most obviously manifested by her testing different versions of herself in front of the mirror: "A series of moods began to parade through my mind—childish elation, a sophisticated cynicism, followed by a feeling of abandoned recklessness. I pulled the appropriate faces, talking conversationally to my reflection, drawing my hair up into a pony-tail, a bun" (Duckworth, *Gap* 10). Although in *The Second Sex* Beauvoir interprets mirror gazing as emblematic of female self-objectification insofar as the woman "believes she is seeing *herself* in the mirror: passive and given, the reflection is a thing like herself" (758), in this case Diana's reflection is far from inert. The heroine does not let herself "be caught in the immobile trap of the mirror's silvering" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 758) but retains control of the image that it reflects while exploring her own capacity for transformation and sovereign self-tailoring. These attempts, however, go awry, with Diana succumbing momentarily to alienating bodily processes: "But at the end my face crumpled. I felt sick" (Duckworth, *Gap* 10). It appears that she lacks the tenacity and resolve to persevere in the incipient project of self-creation. The scene thus provides a concise and symbolic illustration of how a burgeoning potential for authenticity may prove too overwhelming to be embraced and consistently fulfilled. What gains ascendancy over inventive openness to new opportunities is a thoroughly inauthentic temptation to assuage the anxiety arising in response to the absurdity of the situation through "a flight back into the security of our public routines" (Aho, *Existentialism*)—the order and stability that are the distinctive marks of Micald.

To this end, Diana implements several strategies of self-delusion, which effectively prevent her from exploiting her freedom. First, the heroine irrationally expects to be rescued from her predicament through an intervention of supernatural powers: "I had a quaint faith in fate. Fate wouldn't let me be alone and miserable if she only knew about it" (Duckworth, *Gap* 11). Second, the woman is convincing herself that she is only dreaming and consequently "that things are not to be taken quite seriously, that you can always wake up" (Duckworth, *Gap* 2). If what is happening is a mere dream, she must linger in the throes of opaque subconscious forces, which cannot be handled or contained through any purposeful effort, the only possible reaction being passive resignation to the given circumstances. This conviction exhibits Diana's resistance to see herself in the role of an agent and originator of values that would endow the surrounding world and her own life with meaning; she rather waits to be given "stage directions" (Duckworth, *Gap* 7) that could be blindly followed.

Labouring under this misconception, Diana forgoes the task of shaping herself anew, free from the pressure of hackneyed social patterns, continuing instead to search for "clues to [her] identity" (Duckworth, *Gap* 13) so as to be able to re-assemble them together into a coherent

whole. This course of action is underpinned by the fallacious belief that identity is not a fluid product of freely chosen projects, changing and evolving over time, but a pre-existing essence, consisting of a set of fixed properties, which have to be sustained. True to this belief, the heroine intends to overcome the impression of inner emptiness by retrieving what she believes to be her lost true core and then striving to coincide with it. As described in the previous chapter, this seemingly straightforward mission proves to pose a tremendous challenge since the hiatus between Diana's present habits, feelings, and self-perceptions and the person that emerges from the disparate pieces of evidence that she obtains or the memories that she manages to revive is hardly bridgeable. Whereas she has been always obedient and committed to satisfying the expectations of other people, now she is disorderly and show little concern for social appearances: "For heaven's sake, the place was in a mess! And I'd always had such a reputation for tidiness!" (Duckworth, *Gap* 12). The man who must have been her lover, in turn, does not inspire any affection: "It was odd how I could summon up no feeling towards this Robert who 'knew I loved him'" (Duckworth, *Gap* 6). The more she learns about her past life in Micald, the more it appears an amalgam of artificial schemas. Consequently, as described in Chapter Three, her existential nothingness marks its presence with even greater force.

Since the bids to recapture her lost self miserably founder, Diana modifies her strategy of coping with the new situation while still remaining in thrall to inauthenticity. Now she resolves to accept the rules of her new home and mimic the image of herself in the eyes of other people: "Meanwhile I would have to adjust myself to my surroundings" (Duckworth, *Gap* 20). She endeavours to erase her bizarre experience for fear of being stigmatised as insane and cast on the fringes of society for transgressing the recognised models of behaviour: "I was going mad! . . . What did the word mean, after all? I would probably be labelled by it, if I tried to tell people of my strange experience of waking up out of another world" (Duckworth, *Gap* 23). The strategy serves its purpose, considering that the disconcerting impression of uncanniness vanishes: "I seemed to have discarded the atmosphere of perilous security and doubt of my sanity. Everything ahead of me was homely, safe and comfortable" (Duckworth, *Gap* 53). In accordance with the Heideggerian cycle of (in)authenticity, however, this quietude implies dispersal in the world. By renouncing the enterprise of self-fashioning, Diana does regain peace of mind but again becomes a prisoner to the "inconspicuous domination" (Heidegger, *Being* 164) of the they-self. From this moment on, she concentrates on performing a stock role scripted for her by social patterns and expectations of other people: "I was astonished at the ease with which I had fitted into the role of my new parents' daughter" (Duckworth, *Gap* 79).

As clarified in Chapter One, the state of fallenness, in which the heroine clearly plunges, is characterised by Heidegger not only by compliance with ready-made formulas but also by curiosity, understood as the pursuit of ever new superficial experiences, which only obfuscate the truth of the human condition: "It [curiosity] seeks novelty only in order to leap from it anew to another novelty. . . . Consequently, it does not seek the leisure of tarrying observantly, but rather seeks restlessness and the excitement of continual novelty and changing encounters" (*Being* 172). Accordingly, Diana decides to benefit from the myriad opportunities offered by London so as to safely ensconce herself in the new circumstances: "I was determined that from now on I would enjoy life for its own sake, and not examine it too closely or brood on my memories of Micald. I had been given a new identity. I would enjoy it my own way" (Duckworth, *Gap* 53-54). The heroine slips into a frenzy of activity: she is buying textbooks to study different subjects without seriously applying herself to the task, frequenting parties, and establishing a number of shallow interpersonal relationships. Despite all this commotion, her life yet lacks a clear sense of purpose or direction, as noticed by her fiancé Stephen: "How can you be happy just not doing anything? . . . Haven't you got some aim in life—something you want badly? I feel as if you're quite content doing the same things over and over. . . . You're in a dead end and you seem to like it" (Duckworth, *Gap* 130).

It should be yet reiterated that Golomb's scheme shows authenticity and inauthenticity to be in perpetual oscillation. The scholar remarks that "[b]ecause escape inevitably discloses the thing one is escaping—namely, anxiety—there is no complete escape" (Golomb 73). Seemingly at ease in her newly assumed identity, Diana is thus unable to fully shake the sensation of restlessness. The possibility of re-confrontation with the uncanny aspect of her existence remains a horrifying prospect: "This new adaptability in myself was something I noticed only recently. It pleased me, because it made my life more comfortable, although at the back of my mind a horror of change still lurked" (Duckworth, *Gap* 51). She thus takes pains to isolate herself from any signs exposing the precariousness of the surrounding world:

> In the homely atmosphere of the Muir household I had almost forgotten the frequent crimes reported in the newspapers. At least, I had decided that they confined themselves mainly to the newspapers and had nothing to do with myself and friends. Unconsciously I had arrived quickly at a fallacy held by many people who had been in this world a lot longer than I had. Looking at the glowing, amused faces around me, I felt the chill of fear die quickly. (Duckworth, *Gap* 64)

Nevertheless, as briefly mentioned in the discussion of anxiety, the feeling strikes anew after a church service: "the mysterious odour and atmosphere of the church remained with me. It made me feel slightly uncomfortable, and reminded me of my feeling of dread and claustrophobia" (Duckworth, *Gap* 58). Even if religious sentiments do not figure in the novel in any prominent way, the church as such may be associated with a mood of reflection, which contrasts with Diana's usual self-complacency. The service visibly shakes her out of unquestioning absorption in social routines and everyday "frenzied activity" (Mulhall 109), thereby re-opening space for authenticity. At this point, the heroine is yet still adamant in rejecting this opportunity, being disconcertingly aware of the burden that it entails.

The other similar opportunity arises when Diana begins to work in the hospital. Let it be reminded that, on Heidegger's account, the prime factor that has the power to disrupt *Dasein's* thoughtless dispersal in the world is the awareness of its "ownmost Being-towards-death" (295). Although the stint at the old ladies' ward does not confront the heroine with death itself, it certainly exposes to her the "force of [her] fragile and finite existence" (Tonner 113). It has been already argued that the episode provides a vivid illustration of how Diana initially refuses to acknowledge that vulnerability to disease, aging, and bodily decline forms part of her own existential condition by dehumanising her patient. It should be added now that despite her initial resistance, the experience clearly re-launches the process of individualisation. At a later point, in a moment of unprecedented self-lucidity, the heroine diagnoses her own affliction in simple but piercingly apt terms: "'I'm so frightened.'. . . Just of being alive!" (Duckworth, *Gap* 139). The woman appears to realise that she has abdicated responsibility for her life by refusing to go beyond the limits of the given; the desire to conceal the instability and indeterminacy of existence has led her to immersion in the illusion of a pre-given identity to the detriment of continual self-reinterpretation. To use Golomb's words, she has "let [her] existence be determined and defined by others, thereby changing its meaning from existence to essence" (66).

Soon thereafter, she also holds an enlightening conversation with Stephen, who attempts to convince her that, despite all the constraints of the situation, she is a choosing subject with agency to pursue self-determined goals:

> '. . . I just can't be sure what I'm going to do next.'
>
> 'God, you're a funny girl. Everybody's got *some* control over their own destiny.' He stared at me.
>
> 'I'm not sure that *I* have.'

> ‘Oh, you’re crazy.’ He rumpled my hair. (Duckworth, *Gap* 155)

After this short exchange, the pretence of homely order and safety collapses again. Diana’s house becomes pervaded by an aura of ominous vacuity and strangeness while she herself is gripped by an inexplicable fear of entrapment akin to the sensation that tormented her at the very beginning of her stay in London. While the city suddenly re-assumes the air of hostility, existence, to paraphrase Roquentin’s phrase from *Nausea*, appears to invade her suddenly, master her, weigh heavily on her heart like a great motionless beast (Sartre 132): “But the atmosphere was there. I could hear it breathing like some big, invisible animal. As I stood there it seemed to grow louder, heavier, as if it were waiting to pounce” (Duckworth, *Gap* 174).

Taking the foregoing into consideration, it may be legitimate to assert that the encounter with the reality of ageing and dying and the instructive conversation with Stephen serve as two powerful triggers for elevating the woman from average everydayness and making her once again poignantly receptive to the uncanny underside of existence. What changes in relation to the novel’s opening is her response to this potentially individuating experience, suggesting that the heroine has indeed undergone a process of existential maturation, now being better prepared to raise to the challenge of freedom. Whereas initially she desperately sought a way of out gnawing anxiety in the shelter of pre-established conventions, now she appears determined to take the initiative to define herself in an autonomous manner. In a sudden surge of boldness, the heroine resolves to dye her hair read, a colour that did not exist in Micald:

> The chemist glanced at my hair inquisitively and I stared back in irritable defiance as I handed across the money. I almost danced through the gateposts and up the dim stairway. With red hair—if it was as red as the girl’s on the packet—I couldn’t return to Micald. There I would be more than a freak. I would be an impossibility. There was just no such colour in the spectrum. I lit the geyser in the bathroom with trembling fingers. The darkness had gone out of mind and it was burning with a bright, white light. . . . My face tightened defiantly. (Duckworth, *Gap* 177-178)

In Benson’s view, the finale offers a clear hope that the recurring feelings of bewilderment, disorientation, and powerlessness will subside permanently with Diana “[declaring] her independence from her past and her intention to manage her future” (208). It is undisputable that, for the first time in the course of the novel, the woman comes close to self-ownership. Dying hair red is a clear rebellion against the commonly accepted standards of behaviour. Previously committed to pleasing other people, the heroine now musters the courage to act in a way that may be scandalising but corresponds to her own needs. Her former posture of

submission and self-erasure is replaced with exuberant self-confidence, symbolised by the transition from darkness into light and underlined by her bold expression. Further, if Micald represents a province of inauthenticity, as interpreted earlier, the heroine's determination not to ever return there could be decoded as her firm embrace of authenticity.

Nonetheless, it is opportune to indicate one less obvious implication of Diana's resolution in order to illuminate the possible ambiguity inscribed in the novel's ending. Significantly, the ultimate goal of her mission to sever all ties with her homeland is apparently to reach a state of stability, which has so far remained ungraspable despite all the efforts to dutifully enact the prescribed social roles: "Was security always to be merely temporary for me?" (Duckworth, *Gap* 144). Authenticity, however, "is connected to seeing oneself (or in Beauvoir's terminology, affirming oneself) as disclosure and not to pursuing the desire of being" (Gothlin, "Reading" 59). Consequently, much as the heroine's act unveils her resistance to received values, it may be simultaneously construed as expressive of an inauthentic longing for the tranquilising constancy of being in lieu of the insecure fluidity of becoming. Diana appears to be convinced that dying her hair will put an end to her malaise once and for all, a belief that is both erroneous, since anxiety is an inextricable part of human existence, and potentially deleterious, since it obscures the necessity to continually surpass the given circumstances and re-assert herself through worthwhile existential enterprises. "Authentic existence," reminds Sembera, "implies the necessity of a constant struggle to preserve the authentic state in the face of the ineradicable possibility of inauthenticity" (185).

The heroine's confidence about devising the definitive solution to her troubles reminds of the ending of *Disorderly Conduct*, with the reaction of Sophie to the surprising diagnosis of being in perfect health. The juxtaposition of these two novels, separated by a span of twenty-five years, not only brings to light the evolution of the writer's literary vision but also may substantially enrich the reading of *A Gap in the Spectrum.* Whereas Duckworth's debut work apparently leaves the reader with an overall impression that Diana is bound to succeed in her mission, without yet providing any definite answers or clear closure, the existentially tinged final comment from the narrator in *Disorderly Conduct*, which is worth re-quoting in full now, contains an explicit caution that the heroine's ailment has its roots in the very constitution of human existence and as such cannot be remedied:

> She is unaware, of course, that her disorder was always more than physical. What she suffers from is the human condition, no less. Nineteen-eighties version—urban colonial. She can expect a succession of bizarre and distressing symptoms. Small disasters, small rejections,

> dripping like acid onto her nerves and burrowing into her sense of well being (sic). Life is a sexually transmitted terminal disease. (Duckworth 160)

This is the truth of which Diana is also ignorant. Still, "it is the striving, the overcoming of difficulties and the acceptance of defeats that endows life with structure, unity and meaning" (Golomb 115). Even if the heroine's attitude remains misguided to an extent, it could be thus surmised that she will not merely "*drift* from one crisis to the next" (Benson 208; emphasis added) but will struggle to face these inevitable predicaments with greater tenacity and ingenuity, as an acting and autonomous subject rather than only a helpless object.

4.3 (IM)POSSIBILITY OF ESCAPE FROM INAUTHENTICITY

The previous section has demonstrated that *A Gap in the Spectrum* portrays the unwillingness of its female protagonist to undertake the anxiety-ridden project of authenticity, resulting in her obedient acceptance of ready-made formulas, which guarantee safety in the precarious world. The question of women's readiness to bind themselves to patterns that restrain their freedom and "doom [them] to immanence," to use Beauvoir's phrase (*Second Sex* 37), is also one of the overriding concerns of *Rest for the Wicked*, which could be imagined, in certain respects, as a possible sequel to *A Gap in the Spectrum*. Whereas the latter novel closes with Diana resolving to dye her hair red, the former introduces the reader to a seemingly liberated heroine whose "hair is [already?] red" (7). Nonetheless, as will be discussed soon, the problems with which Jane is struggling remain similar to those that plagued Diana.

Rest for the Wicked is certainly more overtly feminist in its explicit and emphatic conflation of the indeterminate they-self with patriarchal scripts which demand that women serve male interests through the roles of lovers, wives, and mothers, thereby depriving them of the power of agency to continually remould their identity. By no means, however, does Duckworth exonerate women from responsibility for their plight; the novel reveals, even more graphically than *A Gap in the Spectrum* does, that they acquiesce to inauthenticity of their own accord because it is effortless, even if exasperating. This section will discuss the feasibility and limits of women's flight from the domination of patriarchal norms. It will be argued that such an escape in Jane's case is, to a large extent, only illusory for two reasons: first, patriarchal ideology inevitably infuses all spheres of her life; second, much more importantly, this ideology has been internalised by the heroine and, despite its blatant oppressiveness, it attracts her as a safe framework providing shelter against confrontation with the indeterminacy of her existence.

As already determined in Chapter Three, when the novel opens, Jane clearly finds herself at a juncture in her life. Patriarchal paradigms predicated on the ideals of order and linear progression, inculcated in her ever since childhood, prove to deviate from her lived experience despite their pretence to universal applicability.

> Begin at the beginning and go to the end. Why isn't it like that? They promised her it would be like that. They put books in her hand which went like that. The books began at the beginning—breakfast—and went on to bedtime. They were in the present tense. . . . Then they added the past and that confused her. And now, as if that weren't hard enough, they introduce the future. Her future. And this she is expected to make for herself. It's too much. Present, past, future. She tries—God knows her tries—to keep them in the right order. Begin at the beginning and go to the end. But they start to swing like lying trapezes, passing her from one to the other and back. . . . It's too much. Not like the books they put in her hands at school. She tries—God knows she tries—to do it right. (Duckworth, *Rest* 7)

The quoted passage can be productively examined in the context of Beauvoir's idea of temporality, which essentially converges with Heidegger's exposition of time as the unity of past, present and future, as briefly summarised in Chapter One. For the latter, "[t]he moment of authentic temporality is never simply "now"; rather, it is the existential bond between past and future possibilities . . ." (Schrag 140). Similarly, in the former's vision, "as transcendent beings we must assume our existence as experienced in past, present, and future to develop an authentic project in the world" (Tidd, *Simone de Beauvoir* 62). Among these three temporal dimensions, it is yet the future that enjoys pride of place as the ever-present horizon of ongoing self-development: "When I envisage my future, I consider that movement which, prolonging my existence of today, will fulfil my present projects and will surpass them toward new ends: the future is the definite direction of a particular transcendence" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 115-116). This is exactly the perspective that the heroine rejects, believing that her past, present and future should rather form separate and non-interacting compartments. Just as inauthentic *Dasein*, she exists "scattered across a sequence of past, present and future nows" (Mulhall 183), unable to grasp herself as a person with a history that cannot be reversed but continues to influence her present and future unfolding possibilities that should be actualised on an ongoing basis. Most significantly, she prefers immobility in the present so as to shun responsibility for the challenge of continually inventing and re-inventing herself.

The novel's opening also foregrounds the strain between Jane's growing disillusionment as to the tenability of the commonly accepted norms and her reluctance to shed their shackles by

giving her existence self-determined meaning. Although the heroine, in the same way as Diana, feels estranged from the inauthentic world of the "they"—an allusion both to the Heideggerian term and to her repeated use of the pronoun with reference to the anonymous originators and proponents of mystifying ideas—the emerging freedom to become a self-creator overawes her. The attendant anxiety is apparently alleviated by the delusional conviction that there must exist a set of fixed principles prescribing how she should live to attain true fulfilment. In this lies the major source of her inauthenticity: she does not pursue personal goals but re-enacts pre-established scenarios. Nevertheless, the failings of her approach continue to make their presence poignantly known through the gnawing feeling of self-alienation. Essentially vacuous, the scripted activity that fills Jane's life is only "a series of means-ends strategies for coping with the exigencies of the day" (Leland 113), which can hardly be constitutive of her sense of selfhood: "In her own home Jane's days had been shapeless, like everything else she attempted. She followed patterns and recipes faithfully from start to finish, but on reaching the last letter was left always with a curious misshapen thing" (Duckworth, *Rest* 11).

This slavish adherence to social schemas manifests itself most patently in the heroine's family life, which hides her suffocating entrapment in the roles of a mother and wife under the veneer of a "communicating" and "happy" marriage (Duckworth, *Rest* 14). The heroine's reaction to a letter in which her husband provides an accusatory account of his everyday problems with their children testifies to a destructive tension in the couple's relationship: "The letter when she holds it now feels heavy. It makes demands on her. The phrases coil about her like serpents, fill her mouth and gag her. . . . Why is Julia wetting her bed? Obviously it is her, Jane's fault. Again" (Duckworth, *Rest* 78). The enormity of the psychological influence that Miles exerts on Jane appears astonishing; the authority of his written words emanates from the message and oppresses her in a physically palpable manner. The image of a snake, one that meaningfully recurs throughout the novel both in dreams and reality as a harbinger of horror, could be interpreted in a Freudian vein as a symbol of patriarchal power,[37] which holds the woman in a tight grip, also determining her approach to motherhood. It is remarkable that Jane's concern about her daughter's problems is oriented not so much on the girl's welfare as on her own sense of guilt for falling short of Miles's expectations. Genuine maternal love has been apparently superseded by the ambition to conform to the yardstick against which other people measure her performance as a mother.

[37] In *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, Freud lists snakes among "[m]ale sexual symbols" (163). Similarly, in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, he describes them as "the most important symbol of the male member" (236).

In this respect, the portrayal of the heroine resonates quite distinctly with Adrianne Rich's seminal distinction between motherhood as experience and institution, understood as "the *potential relationship* of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the *institution*, which aims at ensuring that the potential—and all women—shall remain under male control" (13), one that fits cleanly into the existential concepts of authenticity and inauthenticity. The gist of the former lies in the personal response of a woman to the lived reality of being a mother, not distorted by any externally imposed frames, allowing her to face the hardships and joys that the role entails in a self-determined fashion. Consequently, it may be legitimate to state that it offers a fertile ground for developing authenticity. The latter, by contrast, restricts motherhood to a set of rigid standards with the intention of perpetuating women's subordination to men. Motherhood as institution approves only of selected patterns of conduct while censuring all others as unnatural and inappropriate for mothers (Rich 14); for instance, maternal love must be "selfless" and "unconditional" (Rich 22-23) in the same measure as untainted by any negative emotions towards children: "Mother-love is supposed to be continuous, unconditional. Love and anger cannot coexist. Female anger threatens the institution of motherhood" (Rich 46). By tethering women to paths that nip any spontaneity in the bud and foreclose the possibility of self-growth, it thus enmeshes them in inauthenticity.

The distinction proposed by Rich brings to attention the fact that motherhood should not be viewed as intrinsically oppressive: "while motherhood, as an institution, is a male-defined site of oppression, women's own experience of mothering can nonetheless be a source of power" (O'Reilly 3). In this claim, Rich appears to give a more precise articulation to Beauvoir's perspective on the problem. Often lambasted for her derogatory identification of motherhood with self-effacement, the philosopher clarified more than a decade after the publication of her *opus magnum* that she "simply asked that women experience them [maternal instinct and love] truthfully and freely" (Beauvoir, *Force* 201) instead of unquestioningly subscribing to patriarchal prescriptions. Alice Stone defends Beauvoir against the accusations of hostility towards motherhood, observing that she only "seeks to reveal women's experiences of motherhood in all their complexity" (132). Sarah Cohen Shabot underscores that what Beauvoir targets in her criticism is only the patriarchal distortion of this uniquely female experience: "Beauvoir's known statements against motherhood should probably be understood—in Adrienne Rich's terms—as more about *motherhood as institution* than *motherhood as experience*" (135). Andrea Veltman supplements this insight by drawing a link between the concept of motherhood as institution and the notion of immanence central to Beauvoir's philosophy: "Critiquing the institution of motherhood rather than the experience of mothering,

Beauvoir herself claims, not that mothering per se is an activity of immanence, but that the occupations consequent upon motherhood tend to mire women in immanence" (124).

The flashbacks to Jane's everyday life at home as well as the glimpses into her thoughts and feelings at the Sleep Research Centre may prompt one to see her as an epitome of enslavement to institutionalised motherhood. Living under the "real dictatorship of the 'they'" (Heidegger, *Being* 164), the woman is clearly unable to appropriate the role for purposes of self-empowerment. The following conversation with Miles throws into sharp relief how Jane engages in self-surveillance to ensure that she acts in a way socially accepted as befitting a good mother, her rapport with her children being regulated by rules not of her own making:

'I shouldn't go out.'

'Whyever not? I expect Jenny said that?'

'Cathy was crying.'

'You can't be expected to stay around and catch every tear.'

'Yes, I can. I *am* expected.' (Duckworth, *Rest* 85)

It is striking that the patriarchal idea of the mother-child relationship is so firmly ingrained in her consciousness that she does not need any extraneous pressure to coerce herself into compliance with its requirements. Her relentless distress about whether she is properly performing her maternal duties goes to such extremes that she is haunted by the vision of being "caught by them [her children] in the act of escaping their demands" (Duckworth, *Rest* 157).

Most importantly, the woman's genuine emotions and personal understanding of her role fade into complete oblivion, as all her actions and reactions are dictated by the expectations of an invisible disciplinary power. When towards the end of the novel Allister suggests that she does not love her children, Jane grows furious: "'It's *because* I love them,' she splutters, 'that it all hurts so much. . . . 'I *hate* you! . . . You don't know anything about what I need. I hate you!'" (Duckworth, *Rest* 158). Although the man's diagnosis may be far-fetched if taken literally, he appears certainly right in noticing that the heroine does not want to admit to the negative feelings—anger, frustration, and fatigue—that form an integral part of her experience, knowing, as she does, that they fall beyond the patriarchal limits of the acceptable. By so internalising the recognised norms of motherhood, Jane colludes in her own oppression and endorses inauthenticity.

Also worthy of note here, particularly in the light of Veltman's remark about the parallel between institutionalised motherhood and immanence (124), is the animal imagery that recurs throughout the novel with reference to the relationship between the heroine and her children.

On one occasion, the sight of caged rabbits kept in the Sleep Research Centre for experiments immediately provokes Jane to think about her daughter and son: "The white whiskered animals scuffle and breathe at her. How the children would love one of these, to feed and stroke and mother. Jane has fed and stroked and mothered her children" (Duckworth, *Rest* 129). In *Of Woman Born*, Rich argues that "[i]nstitutionalized motherhood demands of woman maternal 'instinct' rather than intelligence" (42). By imagining her children as cubs and herself as an animal mother, the heroine appears to accede to this demand. She reduces her function to instinctual care giving, whose essential goal is to "merely sustain life and achieve nothing more than its continuation" (Veltman 121). For Jane, motherhood clearly represents a locus of immanence, involving, as it does, the mechanical performance of activities that do not require or inspire any ingenuity.

Such an interpretation is corroborated also by an earlier passage from the novel depicting a strict division of functions within Jane's marriage: "Miles loves the machines. He has produced them one by one, complacently, just as she has produced children for him. They are his preserve just as the children are hers" (Duckworth, *Rest* 88). The word "production" appears to have two opposite connotations here, roughly coinciding with the immanence/transcendence dichotomy. In the man's case, it is associated with constructive work, which expresses the man's interests and requires a dose of inventiveness. When used with reference to childbearing, by contrast, it assumes a distinct note of disparagement, if not dehumanisation, signifying factory-like manufacturing of something that is supposed to serve the needs of other people. To use Beauvoir's phrase, for her childbearing is "nothing but a repetition of the same Life in different forms" (*Second Sex* 99). Whereas her husband is able to go beyond the given, she is doomed to a life of stagnation; she "wears herself out running on the spot; she does nothing; she only perpetuates the present" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 539).

On other occasions, the animal metaphors convey the destructive impact of institutionalised motherhood on the heroine's subjectivity. In her case, the role of mother goes hand in hand with "selflessness," understood both metaphorically as self-sacrificing (Rich 22) and literarily as losing a distinct sense of self. Alluding to the myth of the pelican mother, the heroine affirms that it is her duty to renounce herself, even to the point of self-obliteration, in order to ensure the survival of her children: "As long as she lives, she will be cutting slices off herself to feed into the mouths of her young. That's what being a mother is" (Duckworth, *Rest* 126). The process of self-disintegration is yet not solely the consequence of her own decisions; it is also the children themselves, envisioned as predatory dogs, who threaten the woman with their desire for affection and closeness: "There [at home] they [her children] would devour her with

their tongues, like dogs deserted by a loving mistress" (Duckworth, *Rest* 84). Compared to malevolent cats, they demand constant attention, otherwise tormenting her with reproaches: "The other cats prowl around the park seat, rumbling with obscene purring, miaowing through battered vocal chords. Jane has shut her eyes and hears the voices of her children. Accusing voices" (Duckworth, *Rest* 147).

All the peculiarities of Jane's situation discussed so far combine to form a portrait of a woman who strives to obey the patriarchal codes of conduct with unremitting submission. It must be reiterated, however, that despite the ambition to adhere to the accepted standards, the heroine grows increasingly incapable of fostering the illusion that they give her a true sense of personal satisfaction. "Other women were content. Why not her?" (Duckworth, *Rest* 154), she wonders in desperation, apparently wrestling with what Betty Friedan famously labels in *The Feminine Mystique* as "the problem that has no name" (15). Although "[i]t can be less painful for a woman, not to hear the strange, dissatisfied voice stirring within her" (Friedan 21), the heroine does acknowledge the intuition that the roles of a housewife and mother blatantly fail as linchpins upon which she could construct a sense of self-integrity. Neither does the affection of her children confer any meaning upon her life. When they ask her, apparently acting as the voice of patriarchy, "'[a]ren't you glad we love you so much?,'" "ambiguous tears" (Duckworth, *Rest* 157)[38] are her only reply, whereby she contradicts the taken-for-granted belief that children's love is sufficiently empowering to compensate for any concomitant toils.

Jane also doubts whether motherhood could constitute the nucleus of her identity. Rich remarks that under patriarchy "[w]oman's status as childbearer has been made into a major fact of her life" (11). Indeed, the heroine notices that everyone who makes acquaintance with her at the Sleep Research Centre tends to enquire about her children in the first place, a habit that undermines her self-worth as a unique individual who cannot be defined through one perspective only: "It strikes her as odd that the number and ages of her children should be considered the most interesting aspect of her identity" (Duckworth, *Rest* 30). In reality, motherhood not only does not constitute the most noteworthy area of Jane's life but also contributes to diminishing her self-esteem, as most powerfully evidenced by the fact that she envies her sister Gaby for being a nun, knowing that her position bestows upon her the modicum of power that she herself lacks: "But she has God and the nun's habit to back up her authority. She has a still youthful body, uninvaded by man or child" (Duckworth, *Rest* 78).

[38] Duckworth clearly draws on her personal experience of motherhood. The question asked by Jane's children echoes the writer's memory recounted in *Camping on the Faultline*: "The children would still pop up in unexpected places, having pushed me secretly and exclaim, 'Aren't you lucky we love you so much?'"(206).

Most crucially, Jane is discerning enough to acknowledge that her discontent with life cannot be blamed solely on external factors. It is her continuous yielding to the egoistic expectations of her children and husband, described in the following passage in terms of a physical assault on her self-integrity, that constitutes the main tool of her destruction: "It's her own fault. She has surrounded herself with children whose love and dependence tear her to shreds every day of her life. Each night is spent stitching herself together and every awakening a cry of fear" (Duckworth, *Rest* 12). By allowing the roles of mother and wife to define her existence, Jane has misplaced her individuated self. The boundaries between her children and herself have blurred to the point of erasure, as illustrated by the following passage, in which Jane's body appears to merge into that of her daughter, partaking in the latter's pain: "Julia's finger is dented and slightly torn. She bellows into her mother's stomach, gasping for breath. Jane feels the child's lungs vibrating in her womb. She is churned by this agony so like her own" (Duckworth, *Rest* 91). The heroine realises that the only way out of this predicament is to forge a unique subjectivity, independent of her social functions: "I want to *feel* special to myself" (Duckworth, 78). Her decision to participate in the experimental project at the Sleep Research Centre intersects with this incipient quest for the lost sense of wholeness and selfhood: "Why has she divided herself into so many parts, leaving no centre at all? There must be a centre. She has come here to find it" (Duckworth, *Rest* 78).

The foregoing declarations could be taken at first sight to imply that Jane is on the verge of reclaiming authenticity. They superficially bespeak her intention to escape the straitjacket of patriarchal demands and assume responsibility for constructing an autonomous self-identity with a view to winning control over her life. When examined more closely, however, Jane's motives transpire to be much more nebulous and not readily transparent to the heroine herself. As already mentioned, her stay in the Sleep Research Centre may be provoked by the desire to anchor herself more firmly in the prevailing schemas so as to alloy anxiety rather than to reject them. There are several factors that cast serious doubt on Jane's commitment to become a self-constituting agent. First and foremost, the choice of the Sleep Research Centre as the destination of a self-finding journey is a highly surprising one. Even if it does enable the heroine to flee from her household chores, it is still a hospital-like place of confinement, which can hardly be regarded propitious for testing one's powers of agency. As a matter of fact, the treatment that Jane is undergoing there has a clearly disempowering influence, making her already frail sense of self disintegrate to an even greater extent. Further, it is also important to pay heed to the fact that the Sleep Research Centre is contrasted with the woman's home as a space of shape (Duckworth, *Rest* 8). It shape-ness, however, is associated not with the possibility of achieving

a sense of integrity but with an even more oppressive order based on a set of stringent rules. It gives rise to the increasing feeling of claustrophobia, which surfaces most conspicuously in Jane's recurring dreams about doors leading to other doors without any point of exit.

Further, the facility represents a stronghold of patriarchy, not only with Lenard and his drive for firm control over other people but also with the ominous figure of hooded-eyed Mr Morpeth, another patient at the Sleep Research Centre, whose presence continues to fill Jane with an inexplicable fear. In reality only a nosy and obscene man, at the symbolic level he may be regarded as an epitome of male power, an interpretation robustly supported by the recurring comparisons to a reptile and snake, two potent phallic symbols: "She feels his hand as though it were the snake, as if the snake were transmitted like an electric current from his body to hers. She pushes his hand off her and shudders" (Duckworth, *Rest* 20). The following confession, another one that features phallic imagery, hints that the man indeed personifies the lingering hold of patriarchy over the heroine's life:

> 'He [Mr Morpeth] reminds me of someone I used to dream about when I was little.' . . . It isn't so much his actual appearance, it's the feeling I get when I look at him. This person, or thing, I used to dream about was somehow deformed and slow-moving but he always managed to be where I least wanted him to be. . . . 'I expect there was something sexual in it. I dreamt him around early puberty.' . . . 'Sometimes he took the form of *a large slug* that walked *upright.* Well that's very phallic, isn't it?' (Duckworth, *Rest* 21; emphasis added)

Considering the association with the dreams from the heroine's past, he appears to be an expression of her subconscious fears about the menace posed by the phallus, even more so in view of the fact that the dreams began during the period of sexual awakening. At the Sleep Research Centre, Mr Morpeth similarly plays a leading role in her night-time visions of unwanted sexual advances and physical violence (Duckworth, *Rest* 31). Crucially, he proves to be a voyeur, tracking Jane and Allister and watching them have sex. His morbid inclinations only reinforce his status as an embodiment of omnipresent social surveillance, which never gives Jane license to satisfy her desires without a sense of guilt. All in all, with the prying Mr Morpeth, the tyrannical Lenard and the rigorous routines, the place exposes the heroine to even greater control than she has probably ever experienced at home.

Now that it has been established that the Sleep Research Centre does not encourage the authentic exercise of personal freedom, it is beneficial to once again probe the question of how the heroine approaches her own participation in the experimental project and whether she is capable of undergoing any transformation towards better self-awareness and self-assertion. It

is revealing that Jane welcomes the restrictive character of the institution, hoping that it will be a remedy to her restlessness and inability to create a coherent self out of chaos: “Dreams under controlled conditions are likely to be more confined and mundane than dreams in the freedom of one’s own home" (Duckworth, *Rest* 8). The woman expects that the regime of the institution will help her to cure what she defines as madness while referring to her own sense of discomfort in social roles in a twofold way: first, by allowing her to “avoid considering” her condition (Duckworth, *Rest* 129) and, second, by giving her the opportunity to “offer her subconscious mind to Lenard” (Duckworth, *Rest* 8) so as to undergo a therapy. What Jane takes to be insanity could be yet diagnosed more aptly as her maladaptation to the patriarchal criteria of female experience. It is only Jane herself “who knows she is mad” (Duckworth, *Rest* 8) because no one else realises that the guise of a woman who “find[s] her chief gratification in being all day with small children, living at a pace tuned to theirs” (Rich 22) masks a profound malaise. At a loss to comprehend her own dissatisfaction with a life that should bring happiness to any woman according to what “she has been taught” (Duckworth *Rest*, 14), the heroine lumps all non-normative feelings together under the category of madness and seeks to adapt more effectively to the expected scripts, thereby failing to act as a free agent. Instead of counteracting her predicament through self-determined action, Jane prefers an attitude of passive oblivion or subordination to external machinations, without attempting to “transcend [her] given situations by creating new values, goals and meanings” (Stone 123).

It is true that with the passage of time “[h]er maternal role is slipping, like heavy fur, down her shoulders” (Duckworth, *Rest* 49), just as her sense of wifely duty, while she is indulging in an affair with Allister. The escape from patriarchal ideology, however, is never full. Her purely sexual relationship with the fellow patient “gives her so much pleasure, pleasure so thick you could cut slices off it” (Duckworth, *Rest* 104), but its underlying power structure also relegates her to a subservient position. Just as Lenard and Mr Morpeth, Allister seeks domination over women, albeit in a less forthright manner, as most vividly disclosed in a highly meaningful episode when he asks Jane to let him cut her hair. The very vision of being able to do so arouses him in a somewhat perverted manner: “His thumb and forefinger make impatient scissor movements as if he can hardly wait to get among her red curls. . . . Allister’s expression as he watches her develops a lecherous slant” (Duckworth, *Rest* 120). Initially averse to the idea, Jane finally agrees: “Allister directs her to kneel down on her haunches in front of the mirror. Kneeling behind her he takes up his long scissors. He lifts a heavy lock of her hair with an expression resembling lust. He is watching her face as he begins to slice into it. She feels an extraordinary orgasmic sense of loss” (Duckworth, *Rest* 122). Most strikingly, the process

uncannily resembles an execution. By cutting her hair, the man appears to inflict symbolic violence upon the heroine, deriving sexual pleasure from his uncontested supremacy. Jane, on her part, meekly accepts this subjugation with a mixture of grief and, as is the case with Allister, erotic passion.

When towards the end of the novel Allister warns Jane that Lenard may be a mastermind behind the grisly scheme of killing the patients, she resolves to flee from the Sleep Research Centre. Afraid of castigation from Miles and return to "the tedium of her days" at home (Duckworth, *Rest* 132), she goes on a tour around Europe with her lover. Her hopes for respite from the strain of social norms and the feelings of guilt, fatigue, and confusion are, however, once again foiled. The heroine spirals into an ever more acute disarray, in which dreams and fantasies become hardly distinguishable from reality. Patriarchal schemas prove pervasive and thus always intruding upon her life. When Jane is noticing children all around, anxiety about abandoning her own family escalates to such an extent that she imagines them calling her "mummy" and hears their accusatory voices (Duckworth, *Rest* 136). Further, Jane's affair loses its entire allure when the woman realises that Allister himself is entangled in various social commitments: "She had believed Allister to be a person alone in the world. A stranger in every sense, with whom she could safely indulge her baser instincts. A fantasy figure. . . . Suddenly Allister is too real" (Duckworth, *Rest* 146). What attracted her to the man at the Sleep Research Centre was the fact that he appeared unfettered by any social constraints and fully free to pursue his own will: "Allister has no one who depends on him. All his decisions, all his choices can be selfish ones" (Duckworth, *Rest* 80-81). Once the lover begins to encourage Jane to divorce her husband and proposes marriage, their relationship becomes a threat of stepping into the same oppressive structures that she has striven to evade: "If she doesn't want the things he offers her—love, stability, a home—or so he says—then what can she want? . . . Other women were content. Why not her?" (Duckworth, *Rest* 154). The tension culminates with Jane attempting to strangle Allister—probably only in her imagination or dream, which is never clarified (Duckworth, *Rest* 161). Having once again failed to shoulder the responsibility for her life and attain self-mastery, the heroine decides to return to England.

It can be noticed that Duckworth depicts a vicious circle of escapes. All of them are marked by the heroine's indecision as to her own wishes and ways of realising them; none of them enables her to surmount patriarchal constraints. On her way back from the tour, Jane admits that there is "[n]o rest for the wicked" (Duckworth, *Rest* 164), whereby the novel reneges on the promise made in the title. This begs the crucial question of why Jane has failed in her

mission and whether the writer's latent message is that all women's attempts at liberation from patriarchal ideology are ultimately unfeasible.

The key to the question appears to lie in the following three succinct statements that lay bare the heroine's "anxiety of . . . freedom" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 81): "Life presents you with choices. She isn't good at that. Life is hard work" (Duckworth, *Rest* 126-127). Although Jane prefers to delude herself as to the availability of a predetermined recipe for self-fulfilment, she, in fact, contests a deterministic view of human existence: "Some would say our lives are prefabricated too. Jane wouldn't say that. Not quite" (Duckworth, *Rest* 7). Still, cognizant as she is of her own fundamental capacity for agential choice, she grasps it as an onus, involving risk and effort, rather than an empowering privilege. Consequently, she struggles to disburden herself of it, falling into the type of inauthenticity described by Beauvoir in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*: "But one can choose not to will himself free. . . . My project is never founded; it founds itself. To avoid the anguish of this permanent choice, one may attempt to flee into the object itself, to engulf one's own presence in it" (25-26). It appears that it is partly through mere "laziness and timidity" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 48) that Jane cedes the task of modelling her life to external authorities, "thereby changing its meaning from existence to essence" (Golomb 66).

Duckworth does not yet portray the heroine as doomed to re-enact social paradigms without any possibility of change. The woman remains staunchly loyal to patriarchal norms, but she is ultimately free to "pursue [her] own self-determination" (Murray, "Duckworth, Marilyn" 271) as all the other heroines in Duckworth's fiction are. The novel presents, however, one important caveat that renders flight from patriarchal limitations highly problematic. Its essence is captured by the imagery of the following passage: "In the dream, she is being held . . . by an invisible force. The force may be overcome with will-power but does she have enough? She struggles. The force is at once magnetic and pressing, depending on which way she moves" (Duckworth, *Rest* 93). Although the power of patriarchy can be undercut by the woman's own efforts, the writer emphasises that the task is the more daunting as patriarchal arrangements, for all their oppressiveness, are alluring with the promise of unreflective stability. As the heroine herself remarks, the prospect of lapsing into the immanence of the assigned social role may be captivating to the extent that it induces women to become agents of their own destruction: "To let go and sink into the bog of domestic wifeness is inviting in the way heights invite the dreamer to fall" (Duckworth, *Rest* 57). Success thus requires a leap of courage.

Escape is undertaken by Jane on a repeated basis without ever being fruitfully completed not only because patriarchal ideology has been so deeply internalised that it always recalls her back but also, and even more prominently, because it constitutes the buttressing pillar of her

existence, which is otherwise "*without foundation*" (Cooper, *Existentialism* 4). The enveloping sense of imprisonment in her social roles incites the heroine to search for an avenue of exit, but the "existential void in which [she] haplessly float[s]" (Murray, "Woman") outside of them proves even more forbidding. When the confrontation with existential freedom becomes too great a burden, Jane seeks refuge in social scripts, which "offer precisely the most existentially reassuring path—denial of responsibility for [her] own life" (N. Holland 139). Her choices also illustrate well the point made by Ann Dally in *Inventing Motherhood* that "[m]otherhood is often used . . . by mothers themselves as an escape from the threatening modern world which they feel they cannot face" (18). Patriarchal ideology ultimately places the heroine in a double bind. She continues to veer back and forth between the compulsion to satisfy its norms and the drive for self-determination, growing increasingly alienated both from her roles and the external world.

By no means does the novel's ending bring any definite resolution to this quandary. It is, however, possible to discern in it a fledgling awareness on the part of the heroine as to the absence of any universal values or models of behaviour to be followed. Her final words—"'No key'" (Duckworth, *Rest* 166)—reverberate with a sense of indeterminacy. At the literal level, they are only a response to Lenard's question about the key to the bathroom in which Sylvia, another important female character who will be discussed further in the dissertation, has committed suicide; on the metaphorical one, they appear to be a succinct summary of Jane's multiple unsuccessful bids to discover the ultimate pattern for her life. Finally, the heroine begins to acknowledge what she has been desperately evading all the way through: the nothingness at the core of her existence.

The motif of escape takes centre stage also in *The Matchbox House*. Whereas in *Rest for the Wicked* it has a spatial dimension, in Duckworth's earlier novel it comes into view in the heroine's descent into a world of fantasies and daydreams away from the drab reality of everydayness as a mother to her baby son Brucie and a wife to an unfaithful husband. Thirty-six-year-old Jean Dobie begins to act in an increasingly erratic manner once she becomes a temporary caretaker for the three school-age children of her ill friend and develops an attraction to their father. The woman is deluding herself that Gerald secretly reciprocates her feelings and intends to marry her when his wife dies. As the plot progresses, she spirals into an increasing obsession with the idea and, unable to act upon her feelings towards the man, begins to make advances on his adolescent son. As will be shown further, in this disturbing picture of suburban neurosis, the writer traces the roots of the heroine's ailment to her stubborn denial of

existential responsibility both for the ongoing process of self-formation and for the meaning that her actions create for others.

The information about Jean's past supplied by the novel is sufficient to notice that the woman has been always fixated on gaining the approval of other people as the foundation of her identity and self-esteem; to paraphrase Beauvoir, she has sought herself in the eyes of others before she has fashioned herself ("Pyrrhus" 130). As a girl, she prioritised signs of social success over personal autonomy and freedom of choice: "She [her friend Celia] enjoyed bossing Jean about. And Jean was grateful. Being bossed didn't matter. What did matter was not having a partner for gym and for school outings" (Duckworth, *Matchbox* 23). Over time, her desperate need to be accepted evolved into frustration since she had difficulties in recognising what was expected of her: "When she left school it had got worse—her inability to take the pulse of a situation. She could never anticipate the mood of a roomful of people she had just come amongst—could not expect how they would act. It was hopeless" (Duckworth, *Matchbox* 24). In order to hide this maladaptation, she habitually engaged in pretending: "In any case, it forced her to wear a humorous fixture of an expression on her face, which could have suggested anything but which she hoped suggested comprehension and even profundity" (Duckworth, *Matchbox* 24). Still, Jean did not manage to arouse the attention and respect that she craved, remaining a mere spectator of other people's exciting lives. Her decision to accept Johnny's proposal, in turn, is described as a matter of mere convenience, a deliverance from the toils of securing herself a comfortable social position: "When Johnny offered to take her away, she agreed to marry him, with clumsy relief. She toppled into his lap, too tired to hold on to the tree any longer" (Duckworth, *Matchbox* 24-25). For her, marriage heralded precisely what Beauvoir warns against: "a withdrawal, . . . an escape, a remedy" (*Second Sex* 588).

What may strike in the heroine's demeanour is her absolute and persistent disinterest in taking ownership of her life. Jean regards herself as a person without any individuality: "I haven't even got a personality myself," she admits. (Duckworth, *Matchbox* 22). Most strikingly, she accepts this lack as a given, failing miserably to embrace her existential freedom as "a constantly renewed obligation to remake [her] *Self* " (Sartre, *Being* 35). At no point throughout her life has she considered the idea of forging a self-chosen identity for herself by making independent choices, even if flawed ones. As a girl, Jean waited for other people to set the direction for her actions and feelings. Later, she married Johnny only for fear of being stigmatised as an old maid, having elicited his affection by playing a "nice" girl (Duckworth, *Matchbox* 25), a strategy that is encouraged by the patriarchal system, which propels women to be "always onstage" in their relations with men (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 664). Once she felt

safely ensconced in the role of a wife, she yet ceased to keep up appearances: "He was tired of her because she was awful—that was all. Because she'd given up acting—to see if he liked her in spite of herself, and he didn't" (Duckworth, *Matchbox* 26). Although now she ascribes their conjugal problems to her own inadequacies, she does not attempt to rectify them, taking them for an inalienable part of her nature. Instead of striving to reinvigorate their bond, she simply resigns herself to the dreariness of their everyday life together. It is this lack of even the slightest initiative on her part that exasperates Johnny: "he knew that at least half her attitude was due to laziness—pure laziness. The idea that all he roused in his wife was laziness he couldn't bear" (Duckworth, *Matchbox* 26).

The only remedy to the feeling of malaise to which Jean resorts is the naïve fantasy in which she begins to indulge with the appearance of the children in her house. Fantasising, as argued by Macquarrie, fails to manage a fruitful balance between possibility and facticity, eventuating in "an unrealistic and impractical mode of existence" (157). Indeed, the woman substitutes real action with magical thinking, entertaining the illusion that she has the power to influence the course of events by mere thought: "How often she had thought, I'll *will* Gerald into coming today—and before long, just as she was going to stop hoping, the sound of the van arrived outside?" (Duckworth, *Matchbox* 137). By the same token, she convinces herself that David, her neighbour's eldest son, will miraculously pass his exams although she has goaded him to miss classes to be able to abuse him as a vicarious outlet of her feelings for Gerald:

> This optimism in Jean was not new, but it was becoming more noticeable in her make-up. Before long it would stand out as one of her prominent features—so exaggerated as to be slightly misshapen. . . . It was becoming almost a superstition—this feeling that she could will things into happening the way she wanted them to. (Duckworth, *Matchbox* 136)

Second, while fantasies are often cherished for providing a space of self-invention exceeding the limits of mundane reality, Jean's dream of marrying Gerald and mothering his children expresses the desire not to re-invent her life but rather to step into the position of a person whom she considers more successful in terms of social prestige: "She imagined the astonishment of her old friends, to see her taking over Celia's place in the Hatherley Road house" (Duckworth, *Matchbox* 71). Also, it is a dream of subsuming her identity into that of her male partner: "She wanted to be necessary to his life" (Duckworth, *Matchbox* 140).

Further, as stated earlier, Jean's retreat into fantasy manifests and constitutes her evasion of ethical and existential responsibility. The heroine persists in downplaying the significance and dire consequences of her daydreaming: "Jean was never surprised at any of her thoughts. . . . It

was only a game" (Duckworth, *Matchbox* 71); "[h]e [Gerald] couldn't know she had imagined Celia's own death co callously. She was awful. But after all, it was only a game—a fantasy" (Duckworth, *Matchbox* 77). What she obstinately ignores is the fact that it does tremendously affect not only herself but also those of whom she is supposed to take care. Absorbed in her inner world, she begins to give vent to her hostility towards Brucie[39] and neglects Celia's children, showing scant interest in their problems at school. Most shockingly, she also disavows the true import of her comportment towards the eldest boy: "She had suddenly known what it would be like to be in bed with Gerald—how the hard bones of his body would crash her softness. . . . She hadn't done anything except not let David go when he tried to move. . . . It was only a game. Anyway, it was only a game" (Duckworth, *Matchbox* 84). Being at the most vulnerable age of sexual awakening and temporarily deprived of his parents' protection, David understandably feels "flattered" (Duckworth, *Matchbox* 57) by the attention that the mature woman lavishes upon him and up to a point welcomes her sexually tinged gestures, craving for affection and protection (Duckworth, *Matchbox* 134). The heroine does not yet hold herself accountable for the boy's welfare, treating him first as an accidental confidant and later as a mere means to her imagined end: "Jean had no idea that David was attaching so much importance to her confidences. He was there, so she talked to him" (Duckworth, *Matchbox* 57). The moral aspects of their bizarre relationship are conspicuously not one of her concerns.

Interestingly, Duckworth underscores Jean's immaturity by repeatedly comparing her to a child:

> Jean felt nearer the children's age than her own. . . . she felt like an older sister, envious of their childhood, but with nothing of her own to replace it. (Duckworth, *Matchbox* 32)
>
> I wish I was a child still, she thought. (Duckworth, *Matchbox* 46)
>
> She was so childish in some ways, and he'd [David] feel her come sliding down to his own age level. (Duckworth, *Matchbox* 54)

In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir indicates two hallmarks of the child's existential situation: first, the child takes all "human inventions, words, customs, and values" (35) for granted and non-negotiable; second, they rest assured as to the inconsequence of their own actions. It has been already demonstrated that Jean has failed to outgrow either of these two foibles; it should

[39] "'Oh, do shut up.' She patted him [Brucie] on the back more violently than she had intended, and he hiccupped" (Duckworth, *Matchbox* 145).

be added now, echoing Bensons' remark, that "there is no hint . . . that she will ever modify her condition" (214) as the novel draws to a close.

The ending sees a bitter confrontation between the distraught woman and Gerald, who has become aware of her flagrant inaptitude as a mother and caretaker. The man condemns her in the harshest terms, indicating her infantilism and lack of self-discernment: "I can't get angry with a stuffed dummy. . . . The woman's a fool" (Duckworth, *Matchbox* 189). Under the barrage of his accusations, Jean finally acknowledges that she has thrown her house, family and her friend's children into utter turmoil; she fails, however, to boldly recognise herself as an agent answerable for the inflicted harm. It is striking that what the heroine laments is not the suffering caused to the children through her own negligence but the inability to continue indulging in her fantasies once Gerald takes them away: "There'd be nobody in the house, except just herself and Brucie, most of the time. . . . Herself. I can't bear it, she thought. I want to crack. I want to crack right open! Why don't I?" (Duckworth, *Matchbox* 191). Importantly, Jean's horror is inflamed by the prospect of an encounter with her own vacuity once the illusion that was the pillar of her self-worth is dispelled. It becomes plain that she has not undergone any self-development throughout the course of the plot. Her reaction to the disturbing realisation is as infantile as her previous behaviour: a pull towards self-destruction and incredulity at the indifference of reality to her wishes. The very final scene confirms her incorrigible incapacity to handle her own existence in an active manner: "Mrs. Dobie was being sick in the gleaming chamber pot" (Duckworth, *Matchbox* 192). Vomiting is a clear indication that emergence from the land of fantasy into the real world is an unbearable challenge that the heroine desperately wants to avoid. As opposed to *Rest for the Wicked*, which illustrates a process of gaining a degree of existential awareness, *The Matchbox House* does not offer even a tiny glimmer of hope that the heroine will ever grow capable of leading an authentic life.

4.4 FALLACY OF FIXED IDENTITY AND ROLE PLAYING

The previous sections have focused on how the women in the novels examined deliberately elect to follow the path of inauthenticity in order to sedate the anxiety of freedom and choice. At this point, it is salutary to take a fuller exploration of a theme that has been already adumbrated in the discussion of *A Gap in the Spectrum* and *The Matchbox House* by referring also to other works of fiction by Duckworth. What is at issue here is the erroneous belief shared by a number of her heroines, as well as male characters, that they possess or may possess an invariable identity with a stabilised form. Bewildered by the impermanence and indefiniteness of their existence, they feel "a hunger for greater sturdiness, rigidity, or self-presence: an armor

of identity" (Deutscher 168). This inauthentic longing for the comforting solidity of being-in-itself precludes them from recognising the fact that "[w]hat a person is at any given time . . . is always a function of what he is on the way to becoming in pursuit of the projects issuing from a reflective concern for his life" (Cooper, *Existentialism* 3). As will be shown in what follows, the characters tend to deny their own potential for perpetual evolution through transcendent activities by enacting roles, both socially assigned and self-imposed ones, or clinging to what they mistake for a predetermined and unchangeable self.

"Among Strangers" (1968), one of Duckworth's early short stories, published in *Explosions on the Sun* (1989), furnishes a good starting point for this discussion. In barely four pages, the writer provides an observant and emotion-charged, albeit unpretentious, glimpse into the troubled psyche of a woman who has dismally failed to live a meaningful life by squandering her freedom on inauthentic role-playing. Her existential downfall commenced with a broken love affair with a married man, an experience that for some time deterred her from engaging in any romantic relationships: "It wasn't so much a self-inflicted punishment for her guilt as mixed hope and fear that one day she may look into someone's eyes and find herself again. After all, one likes to think one is unique and has only one reflection" (Duckworth, "Among" 38). The way in which her aversion to romance is explained divulges tension between two opposing forms of inauthenticity. On the one hand, the heroine yearns for a merger with her lover, a perfect union that would give her a definite sense of plenitude once and for all. On the other hand, she dreads losing her sense of sovereign subjectivity to the point of choosing isolation. The former one finally prevails, throwing her into a whirlpool of affairs in search for the perfect mate so as to be able to rest in the state of stable being with a fixed identity: "But as time wore on the dream that this might happen persisted. She began deliberately looking for herself. Of course she was not to be found" (Duckworth, "Among" 38).

The subsequent stage in the heroine's life is marked by a sudden surge of awareness that, along the way of seeking external validation for her existence, she has misplaced her individuated self: "I've put on so many skins. Who am I now?" (Duckworth, "Among" 38). Instead of working towards change, however, the woman undertakes to quell this anxiety by descending into even more severe inauthenticity. With the solemn declaration that "you can fall in love quite satisfactorily with strangers" (Duckworth, "Among" 39), she ultimately renounces the desire to develop a true attachment to another person. Loyal to social conventions, she finally marries for convenience, but the wedding ceremony elicits only a disturbing sense of utter alienation both from her own actions and from her milieu: "I just can't think what I'm doing among all these strangers" (Duckworth, "Among" 40).

As the time passes by, the heroine commits herself to the role of a housewife to the point of making it the axis of her life:

> She was happy. They had a large house, a mixture of healthy children, intelligent friends. She sang over the household chores, learned to think kindly of her neighbours. She also learned a wifely possessiveness which made her hate herself for having taken even the smallest thing from another man's wife. She never flirted, partly because of her remorse, but mainly because she was happy and knew she was happy—as happy as anyone is meant to be. . . . She became tremendously absorbed in her children. (Duckworth, "Among" 40)

The ostentatious repetition of the word "happy" appears far from signifying that she has indeed found genuine self-fulfilment. It rather mirrors her attempts to convince herself that this is the case and make what she takes for happiness the permanent state of her existence—the guarantee of fixity that she was previously unable to achieve.

At the close of the story, the artificial façade of happiness cracks in a moment of a piercingly painful self-discovery during the wedding of her daughter: "She watched her tears run in the car mirror, noting the lines etched above her nose. They were ugly tears. She thought: What have I been doing, living my life among strangers? . . . 'And nothing has happened to me for twenty-five years'" (Duckworth, "Among" 41). The epiphany is followed by the bride's dry remark that "'[i]t's nothing really. Mothers always cry at weddings'" (Duckworth, "Among" 41) and the woman's affirmation that "perhaps it was" (Duckworth, "Among" 41), through which, according to Benson, Duckworth conveys a message of life's inherent meaninglessness (220). Considering the entire plot of the work, it appears, however, that the scholar misses the main point of its ending. The heroine's story does not bear witness to the vanity of human existence as such but rather exemplifies a human propensity to invest efforts in futile ventures through stubborn inauthenticity. Duckworth's concern apparently lies with the woman's culpable failure to endow her life with individual meaning, as underscored by her decision not to name the woman. "And because Dasein is in each case essentially its own possibility, it *can,* in its very Being, 'choose' itself and win itself; it can also lose itself and never win itself," theorises Heidegger (68); the heroine has obviously chosen the latter pathway. She has declined to exercise her power of self-creation, striving to attain the unachievable state of fixity and completeness, first in love and then in a socially scripted role, which has held her in thrall to "the familiar, the attainable, the respectable" (Heidegger, *Being* 239). The story's coda brings the painful awareness that the latter has not enriched her existence in any way, leaving her instead with a sense of gaping emptiness.

In *Rest for the Wicked*, the same flaw can be identified in Sylvia, a widow of a local vicar and an assistant at the Sleep Research Center, who is engrossed in the identity of a wife to the point of existential inertia. The woman's inability to lead a meaningful life outside its bounds leads her inevitably to self-destruction, a counterpoint to Jane, who does survive. In her youth a free-spirited woman, surrounded by "artistic friends" (Duckworth, *Rest* 27), determined to retain personal and economic autonomy as well as strongly averse to the idea of marriage, Sylvia must have obviously traversed a road of self-renunciation. Since the details of her married life are not revealed, it is impossible to assess why and how exactly she has undergone such a tremendous transformation. The focus is placed entirely on the feeling of inner void and worthlessness that engulfs her after she has become a widow. What springs to the fore in the novel's opening is the fact that her selfhood is entirely merged with her husband: "Now she is the vicar's widow. A ludicrous ending—for she thinks of it as an ending" (Duckworth, *Rest* 27). The phrase "vicar's widow" literally conveys Sylvia's lack of independent subjectivity. Her identification with William is so strong that he acts as her entire *raison d'etre*. As a result, with his demise, her life must also come to an end, as exhibited by her curious slip of the tongue: "'Actually, that was the day before we died.' There is something wrong with this statement. She sees Jane looking at her curiously and realises her mistake. 'I mean the day before William died of course'" (Duckworth, *Rest* 53). Even if Sylvia does not die physically, she believes to have irretrievably lost the ability to experience and create anything of value.

Frozen in widowhood, she does not envisage any room for further self-growth, whereby she could "surpass the given toward an open future" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 91). It is easy to conjecture that the busy activity involved in her wifely duties must have offered her both a sense of purpose and a reassuring impression of wholeness. Without her husband, Sylvia confronts her own existential nothingness, but she does so in a deeply inauthentic manner, which inhibits the emergence of transformative self-awareness. The experience of paralysis permeates her entire existence, without any hope for healing: "She is withered inside and out. Her juices have dried up" (Duckworth, *Rest* 66). Such words as "wither" or "dry up" carry a suggestion of irrevocability, stressing her misery and sense of emptiness, in the same manner as recurring comparisons to items of everyday use:

> She looks and looks into herself like an empty cupboard. (Duckworth, *Rest* 28)

> Her spirit feels like a zip fastener irreparably damaged. No matter how much she strives to lock the bits back into working order she ends up weak with effort, as broken as ever. Throw

> it away. People, like zips, are cheap. And perhaps not so well made as they used to be. (Duckworth, *Rest* 67)

It appears that Sylvia sees herself as a mere object with one assigned function that cannot be performed any longer and, consequently, presents no value.

This state similar to death in life radiates outward, taking a visible toll on her appearance. "[P]rematurely grey-haired" (Duckworth, *Rest* 25), she is in physical decline, typical of old age, despite being still in her reproductive years, a fact revealed when she talks about menstruating. The following passage shows how her corporeality simultaneously mirrors and engenders her plunge into debilitating immanence:

> It is as if a great hand has come down over her, trapping her in a stopped moment of time. It isn't only emotions. Her body seems stopped also. She looks at her limbs and they seem brittle, her skin lifeless—like synthetic fibre stretched over bone. She has lost a lot of weight, as Jane at the Centre has noticed. The ribs are outlined on her chest. She bruises easily and mends slowly. Men no longer desire her. . . . She has no electricity. That has gone out of her. It is as if she were ill, tainted with death. (Duckworth, *Rest* 42)

If the body "expresses our relationship to the world," as Beauvoir has it (*Ethics* 41), then Sylvia's relationship is that of alienation and disconnection. The world cannot open her to any opportunities for undertaking worthwhile enterprises or establishing bonds with other people. Helen A. Fielding observes that, in the framework of Beauvoir's philosophy, being old means "to cease engaging with the world, turning the present into pure immanence, and the past into a weight that must be borne" (77), a description that articulates the gist of Sylvia's experience. For the woman, her past as a vicar's wife is a painful reminder of the former sense of purpose in life, one that throws the emptiness of her present existence into the sharpest relief.

Most importantly, on no occasion does the experience inspire the woman to acknowledge that she does not have any pre-existing essence and may use this indeterminacy to her own benefit. Quite the contrary, she makes a point of wallowing in existential stupor: "Sylvia has decided by now she is never going to recover from William's death" (Duckworth, *Rest* 41). Since the idea that her identity may be shaped on an ongoing basis through self-chosen projects appears to be beyond her ken, Sylvia chooses to playact at being a widow in the spirit of seriousness, falling into a similar type of self-deception as the Sartrean waiter, who goes to great lengths to realise his "waiter-ness" through each and every action, thereby attaining the solidity of being-in-itself. By the same token, she takes pains to display her widowhood in every gesture as if this state were the essence of her selfhood rather than only an accidental

circumstance: “So far she has done it right. She has been a ‘good griever’, facing up to bereavement, wrenching herself round to face it just as she had gulped her medicine obediently when she was a child. She has talked about William to all who would listen and let the tears wash her face until her skin became dry as parchment” (Duckworth, *Rest* 41) Importantly, while performing her role, she seeks validation from the people around her, knowing that it is society that defines the norms of widowhood and is vested with the power to verify whether she fulfils them to a sufficient degree. Her illusion of being-in-itself is thus strictly coordinated with being-for-others: “But someone is coming. Possibly a neighbour. Appearances are still important. She straightens up and walks on” (Duckworth, *Rest* 43).

It should be mentioned that at one point the woman makes a tentative decision to overcome this state of stasis. For some time meddling with the idea to commit suicide, she finally devises a plan of self-rescue:

> Goals. That’s an answer. If she has goals she can survive. Even the bath to be cleaned is a goal of a kind. She organises dates in her mind by which she will have completed this or that household chore. She makes interminable lists, giving herself things to do, tradesman to ring. Goals. Ways of spending money. I’ll spend this on that. Must get this and that. As if the aim is to have no money left at all. Spending frantically, stocking up on ‘necessities’ as if for some kind of siege. Hoarding treasured possessions, checking over and over that she hasn’t lost them. (Duckworth, *Rest* 75)

Its apparent pitfall, however, is the fact that it does not provide for the possibility of true transcendence. What Sylvia may accomplish by implementing it is only to change the mode of immanence. The plan is expressive of a thoroughly inauthentic intention to revert to the role of a housewife. The goals that are supposed to justify her existence are not creative assignments but dreary tasks oriented merely on sustaining life. Also, her compulsive accumulation of random items just for the sake of possessing them betokens the desire to mask inner vacuity rather than to fill it with meaningful action. It is from things amassed instead of projects that Sylvia expects to derive the lost sense of completeness. Thoroughly defective in existential terms, the plan does not serve its purpose: the heroine poisons herself in the novel’s finale.

Rest for the Wicked is by no means the first novel in which Duckworth elaborates the theme of overidentification with one’s role and failure to espouse a vision of authentic self-transformation. *Over the Fence Is Out* may be regarded a study in this type of inauthenticity with one male character and two female ones who all, to a greater or lesser extent, labour under the delusion of being able to possess a thing-like essence and “[tend] toward this being which

[they] will never be" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 13). In Benson's interpretation, Gregory is "a kind of negative existentialist" (218) and the whole novel "implicitly disapprove[s] of existentialism" (217). The latter claim, however, is far-fetched and erroneous, especially when considered from the perspective of Duckworth's entire body of works. The writer does not appear to argue that human beings are doomed to follow pre-determined paths or be imprisoned in any permanent identity. Quite the contrary, just as in *Rest for the Wicked,* she berates the assumption that this is the case and unveils its deleterious effects.

While Sylvia was undoubtedly a victim of the patriarchal system, which reduces women to a limited spectrum of social roles, Gregory is a typical patriarchal oppressor, who subjugates his fiancée Marie and later his wife Janfrey, resorting to physical and psychological violence. He takes sadistic pleasure in humiliating and terrorising the former, thereby propelling her to a nervous breakdown and most probably suicide, and later treats the latter with a similar blend of scorn and brutality. In contrast to Sylvia, he is the one who possesses power and makes the women in his life dependent on him. His self-expansion, however, does not imply the ability to transcend himself. The trait that he shares with the vicar's widow is precisely absolute stagnation in immanence. By expanding all his efforts on the wanton abuse of women close to him, Gregory chains himself to the role of a tyrant. He may not feel hollow inside and without a purpose in life like Sylvia, but his obstinacy in asserting dominance over other people constitutes a form of existential immobility. Throughout the novel, he remains a thoroughly static character, who obdurately refuses to revise his behaviour.

In his overbearingness, Gregory exhibits rigid self-consciousness distinctly reminiscent of the Sartrean waiter, who is "trying to imitate in his walk the inflexible stiffness of some kind of automaton" (*Being* 59): "He was a lion. A thick tawny animal more like a football player than the grammar-school teacher which he was. However, his speech was pedantic and slow. It was as if he hung each sentence on pegs to examine it before moving on to the next one" (Duckworth, *Over the Fence* 11). The animal imagery used on a repeated basis with reference to the character[40] underscores his ensnarement in a petrified identity. Just as an animal has a set of permanent characteristics, so Gregory is described as if he possessed an inalienable essence. The truth is yet that he is carefully crafting his persona, investing every mundane activity with

[40] Later in the novel, Gregory is once again compared to a lion and then to a wolf: "By the time she returned his trousers and shirt were hanging over a chair and his leonine head was propping on her pillow. He sat up, revealing naked chest, and grinned with a kind of animal glee, biting his bottom lip" (Duckworth, *Over* 28); "He suddenly grinned at her biting his bottom lip and rounding his eyes. He looked wolfish" (Duckworth, *Over* 75).

exaggerated gravity so as to accentuate his own importance: “He studied them [bills] with serious inquisitiveness—casual curiosity was not one of his habits” (Duckworth, *Over the Fence* 12). Although his conduct may superficially appear a manifestation of attempted self-creation, Gregory does not truly exercise his freedom but only solidifies in what he believes to be his pre-determined nature.

Moreover, outwardly in full charge of his life, the man in fact relies heavily on the approval of his social milieu for self-confidence. In this context, it is worthwhile giving consideration to the following passage:

> domestic surroundings made *him* ridiculous—his body too large and stagy, his face too course and sour, like something out of nature—a mountain or a tree. His eyes would now and then grow bewildered, he wouldn’t know where to lean, would purse and unpurse his lips. . . . One couldn’t help feeling that he had grown up in public spaces rather than in a home and in fact he was a product of boarding school and hostel. (Duckworth, *Over the Fence* 11)

Probably left by his father and orphaned by his mother, Gregory has been shaped by institutions that impose strict discipline and induce strict obedience rather than inviting creative development of individuality. It would be thus probably justified to presume that his tyrannical proclivities may have been generated by the experience of abandonment and uprootedness, serving as a front for a sense of personal insecurity. At the same time, Janfrey reveals that he continues to live under false pretences, having no scruples to harass her but being afraid of social opprobrium: “In fact it was her only weapon against his attacks—the threat of exposure. She knew it meant a lot to him that he should be known as respectable, or at least reasonable” (Duckworth, *Over the Fence* 7).

His obstinate inauthenticity sees its culmination in the novel’s dramatic finale. After having accidentally shot his lover, who was the only woman for whom he has harboured heartfelt love and with whom he has been able to establish a relationship based on at least a modicum of partnership, Gregory for the first time succumbs to emotional vulnerability. His tearful display of grief for Clare wounds Janfrey, leading to a bitter altercation between the spouses, during which the woman recalls her husband’s seemingly inconsequential declaration from the past: “You hate flawed things, remember? When you threw the saucer after the cup the other day?” (Duckworth, *Over the Fence* 191). The man re-affirms his words, then orders Janfrey to get out of the car and commits suicide by driving it off a cliff: “‘You’re right—I can’t stand flawed

things.' . . . Why had he left her there? . . . He hated flawed things. And then, below the road, she heard the crash" (Duckworth, *Over the Fence* 192).

Benson links this desperate decision directly to the man's declaration about flawed things, one in which he caught, in a moment of a negative epiphany, an echo of his own situation: "Once Gregory had become aware of his flawed nature, his self-destruction was inevitable" (217). The scholar aptly deciphers the import of the novel's ending, but one element of her comment requires to be clarified. What she defines as self-awareness is, quite the opposite, an ultimate existential misrecognition. In *Existentialism Is a Humanism,* Sartre famously underscores that the human being possesses an inalienable capacity for remodelling themselves through action: "What the existentialist says is that the coward makes himself cowardly and the hero makes himself heroic; there is always the possibility that one day the coward may no longer be cowardly and the hero may cease to be a hero" (39). Whereas the tragic accident certainly spurs Gregory to an act of self-condemnation for his own irresistible drive towards supremacy over other people, without any consideration for their dignity and freedom, this understanding is coupled with the absolute denial of the possibility of self-transformation. His suicide is thus inevitable only in view of the cardinal fault that he commits by "taking [his] character to be fixed" (Webber 76) and grasping himself as an object with immutable traits, one of the flawed things that cannot be ever rectified.

As for Clare Allen, she is undeniably one of the most complex heroines in Duckworth's novels, combining self-willed opposition to assaults on her subjectivity and determination to be a mistress of her own life with inauthentic role playing. From the very moment of being introduced to the plot, the woman shows unflagging concern with the problem of pretending, either under external pressures or in order to protect herself against harm. When the heroine meets Gregory in a club for the first time, she is strongly intent on preserving her singularity and independence: "Didn't he understand that he was asking her to act falsely? She could dance—of course she could twist with the rest of them—but she wasn't a dancing person any more. All that was over. She *would* not act any more" (Duckworth, *Over the Fence* 70). It soon transpires, however, that Clare is not as straightforwardly authentic in existential terms as might appear on the surface. The woman soon admits that, as a matter of fact, she has been used to concealing her true self from other people all her life so far: "he's [Gregory] just about the first person I haven't acted for" (Duckworth, *Over the Fence 85).*

Her penchant for role playing is brought to an even more prominent light while she is revisiting her past:

> She had been optimistic too, at the time, about making something of her life. That was why she was taking the lunchtime course in journalism. It was why she went to drama classes and involved herself that way. Uncertain of the validity of her background she thought she might act herself into some important role in life. But stupidly the role she most coveted was the role of mother—the role she was least likely ever to be convincing in. (Duckworth, *Over the Fence* 121-122)

It must be stressed that the foregoing passage by no means evinces the woman's inauthenticity, considering that "[a]uthenticity is a matter of the way in which one relates to one's roles, not a rejection of any and all roles" (Mulhall 73). What distinguishes her positively from such heroines as Diana, Jane, and Sylvia is her active approach to reality; she does not rely on received formulas for self-definition but seeks to ground the meaning of her existence in freely determined undertakings. As the plot progresses, however, another problem emerges with Clare's tendency to see her life in terms of role playing. As Benson remarks, it "recalls the habit of mind that Sartre deplored as *mauvaise foi*, when individuals evade taking responsibility for their decisions and actions" (218). The heroine is acting with the insouciance of a child discovering new opportunities without ensuring that her roles "are contributing to composing [her] life story as a whole" (Guignon, *Existentialists* 123).

The first harbinger of this attitude can be identified as early as during the aforementioned meeting with Gregory in the club. The woman is visibly entertained by the possibility to observe the impact that her confessions exert upon the man: "Except that now she knew more about which facts to leave our and all the time she was laughing quietly to herself, thinking it was all a game, seeing the expressions fleeting across his face—surprise, sympathy, puzzlement, fascination" (Duckworth, *Over the Fence* 72). It is tempting to draw parallels between her and the flirting woman from *Being and Nothingness*, whose bad faith consists, as explained in Chapter One, of the refusal to appreciate the implicit significance of the gestures made by her date: "she does not want to see possibilities of temporal development which his conduct presents" (Sartre 55). Similarly, the heroine perceives Gregory's conduct as a stream of disconnected acts, unwilling to recognise them as consequential for their budding relationship.

Clare's reluctance to bear accountability for her own choices manifests itself most profoundly in the way in which she performs the role of mother. Her situation is unquestionably exceptional as compared to all the other heroines in Duckworth's fiction insofar as she placed her son for adoption in the past and resolves to reunite with the boy only after several years. Importantly, her decision is by no means a result of careful deliberation but rather an emotional

whim: “She wanted—belatedly—to look after him. . . . It was a real, strong feeling, like hunger and rage” (Duckworth, *Over the Fence* 122). In marked contrast to the female characters tethered to motherhood by social dictates, Clare assumes it of her own accord and enacts all the related social scripts on her own terms: “In fact she was enjoying herself pretending to be a suburban mother. She had just finished playing this part for five nights at the Concert Chamber and it seemed natural to carry out on in a similar role” (Duckworth, *Over the Fence* 141). Despite the robust sense of agency in determining her own fate, she is, however, equally inauthentic from an existentialist point of view. In her case, overidentification with the role is replaced by excessive distance, whereby she reduces it to a mere part in a play. When mothering ceases to excite her, she simply renounces it without taking into consideration the moral implications of this step, thereby exposing her own existential immaturity: “In any case she was disappointed in herself as a mother. Benjamin was peculiarly unresponsive to her approaches and she was finding herself more involved with her performance for Janfrey than her performance for Benjamin” (Duckworth, *Over the Fence* 163*).*

The aforementioned performance for Janfrey is a reference to Clare’s spontaneous decision to make acquaintance with her lover’s wife as a new neighbour without any hidden agenda behind finding a playdate for her son. While deceiving Janfrey as to the truth about her relationship with Gregory, the heroine is all the time aware of her own artificiality and concentrated on making the desired impression upon the woman:

> ‘Hello,’ said Clare brightly, beginning to act her unfamiliar part. (Duckworth, *Over the Fence* 142)
>
> As she warmed to her part she found her exaggerated New Zealand accent growing stronger. She mustn’t overdo it. (Duckworth, *Over the Fence* 143)
>
> And it’s exciting acting a part—a real part. Much more exciting that the drama club thing. I do it quite well. (Duckworth, *Over the Fence* 148)

It is remarkable that Clare remains thoroughly oblivious to Janfrey’s position as a betrayed wife and the harm that her affair with Gregory may inflict on their family. What matters to her is solely the pleasure taken in the opportunity to test herself in a new situation. In this sense, she has much in common with Beauvoir’s adventurer, “who thinks he can assert his own existence without taking into account that of others” (*Ethics* 61). Even if she acknowledges her own existential freedom, she exercises it in an entirely flawed manner; “[she] throws [her]self into [her] undertakings with zest, . . . but [s]he does not attach [her]self to the end at which [s]he aims; only to [her] conquest” (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 58). Neither motherhood nor the role of

a neighbour constitutes a project that generates any profound meaning for her life, let alone embraces the welfare of the other. She enjoys inhabiting different identities for the concomitant excitement rather than for their existential import, "manipulating them [other people] to further [her] projects" (Arp, *Bonds* 61).

When the joy of novelty is fading, Clare is yet cable to gain insight into her own inauthenticity and its injurious consequences:

> 'I'll never change', she sighed gloomily. . . .
> 'Why do you say this? You're already changing. Do you want to change?'
> 'I don't know.' . . . 'How am I changing?' . . .
> '. . . you're becoming more suburban, almost wifely—like I said you would.'
> 'Am I? I think it's just an act. I think I'm just a series of acts.'. . .
> 'It's beginning to worry me,' she told him. 'That you might be attracted by the phoney side of me—not the real me. And when I stop acting you'll go away.' (Duckworth, *Over the Fence* 163-164)

The passage invites several comments. First of all, it reaffirms plainly that the various roles neither leave any lasting mark upon the woman's identity nor contribute in any way to reinforcing her selfhood. In viewing her life in terms of disparate performances, the heroine apparently lacks a sense of self-continuity. Second, she acknowledges that her addiction to acting does not result solely from the desire for self-mastery. The masks that she assumes one by one are actually fashioned to suit the expectations of other people, even if to the disadvantage of what Clare takes to be her true self. Manipulation is certainly her method of claiming power, but it backfires by embroiling her in falsity.

Last but not least, the woman engages in the same type of inauthenticity as Gregory and Sylvia; despite being able to diagnose her own failings, she does not brook any room for self-transformation, a flaw that is visible in her reduction of people to gender stereotypes and essences that cannot be ever surpassed: "'Being a woman. You can't be unhappy or frustrated without being revolting and gruesome. . . . 'And a woman growing old is obscene and ridiculous, whereas a man growing old can be only pathetic'" (Duckworth, *Over the Fence* 169). Just as was the case with the characters analysed previously in this section, this irrevocable denial of self-transcendence inevitably leads to her tragic and premature death. It does not mean, however, that, by ending Clare's story in such a way, Duckworth aligns herself with a deterministic view on human existence; what she does is rather to deplore stubborn inauthenticity as a road to perdition.

The most potent evidence that the writer does advocate the viability of change lies in the portrayal of Janfrey, the only character in *Over the Fence is Out* who harbours a deeply ingrained need for authenticity and shows a burgeoning potential for freeing herself from her own existential foibles as the novel comes to an end. This appears curious, considering that throughout the plot the idea of self-transformation arouses her anxiety as a threat to her alleged inner essence: "She hadn't changed. She was just as serious-minded and naive . . . as when he [Gregory] first met her" (Duckworth, *Over the Fence* 8); "Janfrey's hair was darker, yes, and her face thinner—but surely she was still the same person she had been in London?" (Duckworth, *Over the Fence* 65). Since "[e]very metamorphosis has something frightening about it," as Beauvoir observes (13), Janfrey prefers not to view her identity as a fluid product of dynamic self-formation but rather as a combination of innate characteristics. Further, a working woman before she met Gregory, the heroine has acquiesced to confinement in the debilitating patterns of housewifery although they have never corresponded to her personal aspirations. As time passes by, she loses the willingness to transcend herself, becoming increasingly incapacitated by her own passivity in the face of her husband's sadism: "She was lonely, but she had resigned herself to that condition. She scarcely noticed that she was finding it more and more difficult to answer the telephone intelligently, or even chat with the dairy proprietor about the twins and the weather" (Duckworth, *Over the Fence* 131).

Nevertheless, it is also Janfrey who voices an astute critique of the spirit of seriousness that consumes other mothers in the neighbourhood, invested in their caretaking duties to an extent incommensurate with the importance of the task:

> She didn't make friends easily and the only women she knew were the wives of Gregory's friends—women who took their domestic roles very seriously and regarded child-rearing as a vocation or at least a chosen career, for which one first acquired the necessary qualifications. There was nothing wrong in this, of course, but it wasn't what she'd been used to. She felt a sense of humour was lacking. Often she wanted to laugh at the mistakes she made with bringing up the twins, but people looked so puzzled and embarrassed. (Duckworth, *Over the Fence* 64)

The woman herself maintains certain distance from her role instead of internalising it as the determinant of her identity. Her laughter apparently serves a debunking function, underlining the ridiculousness of pretensions to gravity in such trivial matters as are often attendant to childcare.

Furthermore, despite persistent submissiveness to her husband's oppressive and objectifying treatment, the heroine nurses a keen, albeit stifled, sense of individuality and self-worth, encapsulated by the term "Janfreyness," coined by her first fiancé, who died in a car accident, to mark her uniqueness among all other women. Although the suffix "-ness" carries an essentialising overtone, in this case it denotes something fundamentally different from fixity. Significantly, the heroine invokes the term during one of her bitter altercations with Gregory: "'You don't even know my Janfreyness'" (Duckworth, *Over the Fence* 159). When the man humiliates her and reduces her to an object intended for fulfilling his needs, "Janfreyness" comes to symbolise the recognition of the woman's inalienable dignity as an autonomous subject.

In the last conversation with her husband, the heroine finally decides to enact this subjectivity by giving an open expression to her pent-up frustration, anger, and pain, thereby communicating with her husband for the first time on equal terms. Also, she once again demonstrates her power of discernment. It is Janfrey who deciphers Clare's duplicity and lays it bare to the man: "The woman I knew apparently wasn't Clare. The woman you knew—was that Clare either? She was a good actress." (Duckworth, *Ove the Fence* 189). It is also Janfrey who prompts him to acknowledge his own faults. All in all, even if she is imperfect, her perceptiveness and yearning for a more authentic life are sufficient for Duckworth to let her survive, as opposed to Gregory and Clare.

4.5 INAUTHENTIC SELF-FASHIONING

It has been just demonstrated that the primary bane of some of Duckworth's characters is their drive towards existential fixity, a flaw that impedes the unceasing process of self-invention. With Clare's compulsive role-playing, *Over the Fence is Out* suggests, however, that authenticity requires much more than control over one's own identity. The problem of inauthentic self-fashioning, spurred by manipulative and deceitful tactics, is dramatised even more powerfully in *Pulling Faces*. Set in a futuristic urban environment, where "the very icons of family life, hearth and home, are converted into modular homes which can be dismantled room by room as the family disintegrates" (Pittaway 54) and featuring a motif of a mental images machine used for abusive ends, it may appear reminiscent of *Rest for the Wicked,* were it not for the reversal of the conventional gender roles in the distribution of power, a strategy that attests to Duckworth's refusal to essentialise and stereotype female experience. The novel under consideration is certainly one of those in her career that go against the grain of widely accepted ideas and portray women as prone to the modes of inauthenticity that are usually

considered to be exclusive to men. Most importantly, it shows how self-creative subjectivity may be distorted into a breeding ground for inauthenticity.

The world portrayed in *Pulling Faces* is one that has already seen the stronghold of patriarchal scripts of women's roles in society crumble or at least significantly falter in various respects. The somewhat disoriented male protagonist is struggling to find his bearings in this reformed reality, which, as will be soon claimed, presents dilemmas of its own. It should be highlighted that Stuart, a middle-aged divorcé, is by no means an incorrigible champion of the *ancien régime,* unable to reconcile himself to the changes that perforce affect him:

> There is a part of him that still hankers after the traditional feminine attributes of a neatly ordered home. . . . But that was Lilian [his former wife] and he rejected all that. Besides, if that is what a man wants, he should set out to achieve it for himself. He knows this now. How can he avoid knowing it when it is fed to him from all angles of the media? His selfishness and male chauvinism in the earlier part of his life astonish him today. (Duckworth, *Pulling* 22)

Quite the contrary, the above passage evidences that not only does he respect women's freedom to define themselves, but he is also committed to self-improvement in pursuit of greater authenticity. The man castigates himself for his former naïve conviction that life can be lived strictly according to patterns: "I read all the books about sex and communication, and roles. It seemed so easy, being written down like that. Like a car manual. I don't know why I thought Lilian would read the same manuals" (Duckworth, *Pulling* 20). It is valuable to note that his criticism of the belief in universal solutions to problems affecting the sphere of human individuality targets also the culture of manuals, which become quintessentially modern catalysts of inauthenticity, relieving people from responsibility for shaping their lives in autonomously chosen directions and intensifying the pressure to conform to the desired standards of conduct. Simultaneously with recognising the baneful effects of mindless reliance on such vehicles of authority, he also draws attention to an often-ignored fact: that men, just as women, fall prey to restrictive schemas that do not correspond to their heart-felt needs:

> In his marriage he had attempted to live by other people's formulae, formulae imposed by society and constantly revised in paperback books on sale in all 'good bookshops'. . . . He had hoped when the marriage broke up that he could begin to live by his own standards. There would be no need any longer for him to show strength where he didn't feel it, to hide emotions and pretend others. (Duckworth, *Pulling* 159-160)

Stuart is also preoccupied with eliminating all the manifestations of falsity in which he has been so far directly or indirectly embroiled: “All that faking. I can’t stand faking.’ Faking. The word sends his thought off at a tangent. Faking politeness. Faking orgasms” (Duckworth, *Pulling* 16). What distresses him is the fact that although gender inequalities have largely vanished, the new world continues to beam with inauthenticity since the new opportunities it plentifully provides are often misused. In this context, he implicitly engages in the critique of the modern beauty industry, popular culture and mass media, which spur women to surrender their individuality and subjectivity in mimicry of popular icons: “The office girls who worked with him had spent long hours turning themselves into plastic copies of magazine models. They lacked a kind of reality. He despises their uniformity, their mask-like make-up” (Duckworth, *Pulling* 73).

Stuart’s anxiety about the fading boundary between reality and appearance, authenticity and performance, as well as truth and deception, augments when he meets Gwyn, for whom creating an aura of secrecy and mystery about herself is the central mission of her life: “‘Jesus—you’re not real!’ . . . The question of Gwyn’s realness bothers him increasingly” (Duckworth, *Pulling* 73). Convinced about her own agency and autonomy, liberated to the point of audacity and domineering, the woman is the exact opposite of the heroines who let themselves be psychologically enslaved by their despotic husbands or lovers and re-enact socially pre-defined scenarios: “I don’t mean to be rude. I just get freaked when people want to own me” (Duckworth, *Pulling* 96). As a matter of fact, she is the one who exploits her lover’s weaknesses as well as his resolution to put a definite end to his “days of being a selfish, thoughtless male” (Duckworth, *Pulling* 41) in an attempt to gain the upper hand of their affair: “He particularly doesn’t want his friends to know how Gwyn controls his actions and how willingly he allows this” (Duckworth, *Pulling* 159). Also, the woman rejects most of the commonly recognised values, approaching the world in her own way: “She’s got a different code of morals from us . . .” (Duckworth, *Pulling* 158). Little wonder that Stuart’s efforts to comprehend her through the perspective of well-known schemas prove futile: “He would like to attach her to some sociological movement, pigeonhole her and put her in place. But she won’t be put” (Duckworth, *Pulling* 32).

It is justified to claim, however, that Gwyn’s rebellion against externally imposed rules does not bring her in any way closer to existential authenticity than the blind obedience to patriarchal prescriptions exhibited by Duckworth’s earlier heroines. Her unflagging fixation on remaining at a remove from other people and their expectations becomes an ideal in its own right, but, as

opined by Sartre, "[i]f you seek authenticity for authenticity's sake, you are no longer authentic" (*Notebooks* 4).

> The idea of her own strangeness obsesses her. It pleases her. . . . 'I had a test done once, one of those psych tests. The woman said I was the most egocentric person she'd ever tested!' She laughs with delight. 'Poor woman—she was quite amazed.' Stuart sees her pleasure in this memory and hears her laugh, but can't quite believe in it. Why should anyone be proud of egocentricity? (Duckworth, *Pulling* 57)

Violating widely accepted norms just for the sake of sowing consternation, attracting attention and advancing her own interests without the slightest consideration for any external factors is a thoroughly self-deceptive strategy with which the heroine deludes herself as to her own absolute self-sufficiency and control over the world. By using it, she commits the same error as the despotic male characters in the novels discussed previously: she denies her own ambiguity as a human being, aspiring to pure subjectivity. The same fallacy may be identified also in her conspicuous reluctance to express emotions. Frigidity serves her as a shield against exposure of vulnerability: "Her mouth snaps shut after this admission. Her eyes slide away from him, embarrassed at even such a small confession of feeling" (Duckworth, *Pulling* 83). It is also suggested that it masks the scars of traumatic childhood: "Eight was the age she reached when her father died. When she was put into a home for children with problems. She must have put aside a lot of her real feelings at that point in her life. Buried herself inside dark eyes, dull like old spoons. Deciding that love was dangerous, fatal even" (Duckworth, *Pulling* 191).

By the same token, the heroine perverts the freedom of self-creation. The pulling faces of the title symbolises not only her indisputable ability to take command of her own identity but also her determination to exploit it for entirely ill-advised purposes, a characteristic that only aggravates her engulfment in inauthenticity:

> He finds her in the living room, pulling faces at herself in his gilt-framed mirror. Extraordinary faces. Elongated and pop-eyed. Squashed and oriental looking. . . . Pulling faces. Seeing how different I can make myself. Don't you do that?' . . . 'When I was a little girl I used to have dreams that I needed to disguise myself. And there was nothing to do it with except willpower and pulling faces to change the way I looked. It put the pursuer of the scent. Facial expressions can fool a lot of people.' (Duckworth, *Pulling* 62)

Similar to Clare, Gwyn does not benefit from self-fashioning to retain fidelity to her private values but, as aptly observed by Stuart, to sustain the soothing illusion of being impervious to the dangers inherent in engagements with the external world: "Perhaps the pursuer finally

caught up with you and you can't face up to the fact. . . . So you spend you waking hours pulling faces and putting on disguises to kid yourself you're still intact" (Duckworth, *Pulling* 63). By masking herself, she falls into the delusory belief, integral to the attitude of indifference as understood by Sartre, that "the Other [does not] have a perspective on [her] that actually gets a grip on who [she is]" (Reynolds 104).

The heroine does not yet stop at protecting herself but goes as far as to distort the art of self-creation and re-creation into a weapon of malicious deception. Disguising her manipulative proclivities, she ingratiates herself with people and wins their trust only to hypnotise them and connect them to her mental images machine, which extracts and records their thoughts and dreams. Having access to their innermost secrets, sometimes guilty ones, such as Stuart's brother's paedophilic fantasies, she is able to blackmail them to extort money. Once again, however, Duckworth decides to punish her character for incurable persistence in inauthenticity with a death sentence. The woman dies from a stroke, but the description of her dead body found by Stuart bestows a clearly symbolic dimension on her demise: "He puts a hand on her shoulder. It is warm with life, and he gasps with relief. In any case, people don't die sitting bolt upright. But she appears transfixed by her own image, as if she has managed to hypnotise herself with her own teasing eyes" (Duckworth, *Pulling* 203). Always cautious not to fall victim to other people's machinations, Gwyn ironically becomes the architect of her own destruction through the glaring misuse of freedom.

With such a portrayal of the heroine, Duckworth thus appears to sound a warning about the naïve optimism that emancipation from the shackles of patriarchal ideology automatically opens women to authenticity. The writer emphasises that greater opportunities for self-determination may always be exploited for the wanton assertion of power due to the human inveterate tendency to deny their existential ambiguity as subjects and objects at the same time. In the era of obsession with self-mastery, women may be tempted to fall from the extreme of blind submission to external authorities to the opposite extreme of unbridled egotism, instead of taking pains to steer a course between the two vices.

4.6 IDEALS OF AUTHENTICITY

All the works discussed up to this point have provided mostly negative examples of characters who relinquish their existential freedom or err in its exercise through bad faith or surrender to external influences, thereby falling into the trap of inauthenticity. Now it is appropriate to scrutinise the positive examples of personal authenticity provided by Duckworth. Even if impeccable paragons of existential virtue are hard to find in her fiction, which is not surprising,

considering that the writer consistently refrains from representing reality in a simplistic black-and-white manner, there are characters who design their own solutions to existential quandaries to achieve a sense of subjectivity and agency. The best cases in point are two novels separated by a span of over twenty-five years: *A Barbarous Tongue* and *A Message from Harpo*.

In the former one, the voice of wisdom may be heard in the admonishment addressed to the submissive and helpless female protagonist by her second lover. Early in the novel, nineteen-year-old Frieda, a part-time student who once hoped to "live and learn and be [her]self" (*Barbarous* 17), is losing her individuality and autonomy in a relationship with selfish and dominating John, whom she reveres as "a sovereign, with whom equality is not permitted" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 774), as will be discussed in the following chapter. When she falls pregnant and the man proves to be entirely unreliable, the heroine finds herself at a loss to tackle the arduous reality of single motherhood. Incapable of independent action, she looks for protection in an affair with much older Austin.

The approach to existence that the man advocates is by no means facilely optimistic. Quite the contrary, it may appear rather bleak, being premised on the assumption that a sense of incompleteness is inevitable. His belief that life always thwarts our aspirations is yet indicative not of resignation but of the lucid recognition of the human condition:

> 'You've no idea of compromise, have you? I wish you had. Don't you know that's what life is? It's a matter of nursing yourself along on small distractions. You make up your mind to live from here to here without getting too involved, and then from here to here, and so on, inch by inch, until you discover you're in some kind of control—you're driving this thing all by yourself! And then you're satisfied—up to a point. Didn't you know that?' (Duckworth, *Barbarous* 121)

Compared by Benson to Sisyphus (215), the man strives to defy external circumstances, having the awareness that his ultimate goals are not fully achievable. He persuades Frieda that it is only self-determined action that may constitute her as a subject. Even minor projects, which fail to fully satisfy her ambitions, contribute to building a sense of personal ownership.

As for Frieda herself, despite all her submissiveness and passivity in steering her own life, she is not entirely devoid of sound existential discernment, as evinced by the following short exchange with Austin: "'Nobody ever promised you'd be happy, did they? Only children expect to be happy.' 'I don't expect happiness but I can *want* it, can't I? I flared up in a sudden rage. 'Why should I agree to be lonely and miserable just because I *am* lonely and miserable'" (Duckworth, *Barbarous* 112). While the heroine exhibits a keen sense of her own existential

misery, she refuses to reconcile herself to the force of circumstances, committed, as she is, to pursue her own dreams, thereby striking a balance between her facticity and transcendence. The novel's ending shows Frieda both rebelling against her precarious situation and implementing Austin's precepts to a good effect. The heroine's first small project emerges when she must drive her injured son to hospital. Her success in facing this seemingly minor challenge definitely gives her an unprecedented sense of being an individual with the power of agency: "All at once I felt exhilarated and proud and confident. I could. . . . This is me pulling on the brake. I am a person" (Duckworth, *Barbarous* 189).

In *A Message from Harpo*, a matrilineal narrative[41] shifting between the perspectives and stories of three generations of women: Lena, Jess and Hittie—a grandmother, mother and daughter—the ideal of authenticity is founded on the repudiation of patterns that constrain the lives of women to narrowly defined and repetitive paths. The novel indicates that prevailing ideologies, in concert with mass media and popular culture, essentialise women's experience, often inspiring the feelings of frustration and disappointment. Hittie remarks in very harsh terms that women in her times fall victim to the beauty industry, which works to thrust them into an inauthentic model of femininity: "That's what they feed you in the ads—all this crap about skinny and beautiful. I'm not going to let myself get sucked in by all that" (Duckworth, *Message* 14). Jess, on her part, confesses how her idea of love and sex used to be erroneously shaped by popular literature:

> What was there to ask? Sex, in Jess's sixteen-year-old mind, was inextricably mixed up with romantic love. . . . The notion was culled not so much from life around her as from the old-fashioned books she read. Dickens, *Anne of Green Gables*. (Duckworth, *Message* 129)
>
> But the books also told her—or told Gerry—she wouldn't enjoy losing her virginity, and she had. So? (Duckworth, *Message* 64)

Years later, her daughter is similarly awakened to the deceitfulness of fiction when it comes to matters of the heart: "It was my first kiss on the mouth, incredible as that may sound. It didn't seem to mean anything, not like it does in the books. Just two dry ripples of flesh pressing on my mouth, against my teeth" (Duckworth, *Message* 94). Ironically, she blames her mother for not warning her about the pain of losing virginity: "Why didn't Ma tell me it would hurt? Really hurt? It must have hurt her, she can't have forgotten. Why didn't she warn me?" (Duckworth,

[41] The reference here is made to Tess Cosslett's definition of the matrilineal narrative as "one which either tells the stories of several generations of women at once, or which shows how the identity of the central character is crucially formed by her female ancestors" (7).

Message 95). The contrast between the feelings that accompanied Jess and Hittie during their first sexual intercourse underlines how every woman is a unique individual whose experience always elude fixed categorisation although women themselves often search for universal formulas to guide them through life. The novel thus extols, through Hittie's friend, the necessity of women's independent quest for self-definition and awareness raising: "That's what I believe in—women educating men instead of the other way around.' . . . 'Ah but women who have been educated by the patriarchal society—husbands and bosses and so forth. You have to break out of all that and find your real voice, not your father's voice'" (Duckworth, *Message* 210).

In this context, the portrayal of three generations of women enables Duckworth to bring to the fore the changes in female empowerment across several decades of the twentieth century. Lena, who gave birth to Jess during the Second World War, represents the generation of women whose entire energy was absorbed in serving male interests through the obligatory roles of docile and self-sacrificing housewives and mothers. It is striking how she viewed herself and her body as the property of her husband, a means of satisfying his needs and a spectacle exposed to his judging gaze. When George was away from home on war service, the pregnant woman was "[s]ecretly . . . glad he wasn't there to see her deformed belly and her undignified groaning" (Duckworth, *Message* 19). When the man came home three weeks after her labour, Lena willingly decided to make love to him, even despite his own concerns about her post-partum condition, because "that was the way a woman lost her man, by saying no" (Duckworth, *Message* 79). Later in life, she meekly withstood George's marital infidelity and physical violence, believing that there could be no justification for her existence other than wifehood: "'You don't have to put up with that sort of thing, Mother.' But the trouble was she did have to put up with it, because there was nothing else. And she liked to feel useful. In use. Well every woman likes to feel useful" (Duckworth, *Message* 135). In her Alzheimer's disease, in turn, Duckworth appears to see an apt metaphor for Lena's overall incapacity for authoring a life story of her own: "Lately she is given to repeating what people say to her, like an infant learning speech. . . . She repeats because it feels the safe thing to do. It gives her something to hold on . . ." (Duckworth, *Message* 213). Her compulsive repetition appears to parallel her immurement in "repeated patterns of behavior" prescribed for her by patriarchal society (N. Holland 136). Just as mimicry now supports her in illness, so throughout her life she has been readily accepting these patriarchal prescriptions, knowing that they promised her effortless security.

Her granddaughter, by startling contrast, figures in the novel as a champion of authenticity in her striving to live by the feminist and deeply existentialist values of self-constitution and self-responsibility. Hittie's heartfelt opposition to inauthentic identity performance comes into

sight in the aforementioned rejection of the modern ideal of female beauty, eagerly espoused by numerous women, as an artificial construct that does not correspond to her own self-perception. Further, the girl is sensitive to various other manifestations of falsity pervasive in the world, be it unreflective reproduction of meaningless patterns or female subordination to male authority: "It's just the way life goes on—all these people acting out roles until they die of their heart attack or lung cancer. . . . She [Hittie's friend] always follows his act. She's a typical dependent woman" (Duckworth, *Message* 12). It is yet the following declaration that compresses the very quintessence of Hittie's idea of authenticity: "I'm not emotional because of my family. I'm because I'm me. . . . I don't believe in genetics" (Duckworth, *Message* 98). Resolved to take full ownership of her life, the girl does not believe in determinism, granting primacy to self-creation.

Her words are echoed later in the novel in her mother's bold declaration: "'Jess I call myself Jess. I'm not a thing. I'm me'" (Duckworth, *Message* 280). Similar to Hittie, Jess seeks independence from socially imposed stereotypes in pursuit of self-determination: "They've been taught to like penises and penetration and serving a man's needs. Maybe they like it. Maybe quite a lot of women like it—I can't see how. But what if they don't? What I've done is work it out for myself" (Duckworth, *Message* 271). The emphasis is yet shifted to the process of the woman's learning how to exercise her capacity for agency in the face of various tribulations in her life. Apart from struggling with the inability to communicate with her Alzheimer's-suffering mother and her daughter's tumultuous entry into adulthood, the woman discovers, amid the passage of the Homosexual Law Reform Bill, that her husband is bisexual and has been secretly engaged in an affair with her friend's son. The shock of the discovery does not plunge the woman into useless rage against fate but inspires her to identify the root causes of what has befallen her also in herself: "Anger at his deception—at her own willingness to be deceived" (Duckworth, *Message* 290). As opposed to the heroines in Duckworth's earlier novels, she is determined to rise to the challenge posed by this inexorable instability of life in an inventive way, displacing unproductive despair with resolute action: "I feel as if I've been living some sort of lie. I've suddenly got to rewrite my whole life" (Duckworth, *Message* 293).

The novel's conclusion, which is one of the most distinctly existentially flavoured passages in Duckworth's entire fiction, gives expression to Jess's belief in the ultimate indeterminacy of human existence:

> So what is the message delivered here tonight? A non-message? Like the telegram from Harpo Marx which read—'No message – Harpo?' . . . Jess will go home in turn and examine

> her own message for the future. It looks rather like Harpo's telegram. At least that had a legible signature. The signature of Fate, Nemesis, God, if you prefer—is unreadable. No matter how long she studies the events of the past few days for a signal, for guidance, for a division of blame, she can read nothing at all. So perhaps that's the point. A clean slate. Well more or less clean. A beginning. Insert the future in this space. (*Message* 311)

Jess accepts this condition as an invitation to assume personal responsibility for self-making. She rejects reliance on any omnipotent powers in search of reassurance that life has a pre-assigned meaning in favour of projecting herself onto the future and the unlimited possibilities that it promises.

4.7 CONCLUSION

In all the works of fiction discussed throughout this chapter, both earlier and later ones, Duckworth remains focused on how the heroines engage with their own existential freedom. While she affirms that patriarchy certainly operates to compromise women's authenticity by propelling them into disempowering schemas, as best illustrated by *Rest for the Wicked,* it is women themselves who usually choose not to move beyond immanence, subordination and ultimately inauthenticity, becoming wilful accomplices of the patriarchal system. Apart from Jean Dobie and Sylvia, whose existential immobility is complete and irremediable, most of them long for a measure of autonomy. Still, they often prefer to view themselves as objects without agency and capacity for transcending the given because this position disencumbers them from the anxiety of choice and incessant forging of their own identity. By the same token, their enchainment to patriarchally-defined patterns, even if they are stultifying and oppressive, brings them comfort by mystifying the nauseating reality of existential indefiniteness. "Imprisonment," as articulated most powerfully by Jane, "has an enticement all its own" (Duckworth, *Rest* 84). Consistent in her emphasis on women's fundamental freedom, Duckworth demonstrates, however, that submission to external factors and authorities is not the only possible mode of female inauthenticity. Most importantly, empowerment may be divested of its authenticating potential when employed as a vehicle of domination and deception, as evidenced by Clare and Gwyn. The two visions of authenticity identified in the last section of this chapter thus foreground the imperative significance of recognising the ambiguity of human existence: susceptibility to the force of circumstances and ability to mould one's life through meaningful and self-chosen projects.

CHAPTER FIVE: INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS IN DUCKWORTH'S FICTION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The two preceding chapters have concentrated primarily on the existential situation of the heroines in Duckworth's fiction, with occasional examples of male characters, as individual human beings. First, the thrust of attention has been placed on their disorientation in a world that has lost its intelligibility and the resultant confrontation with the bare reality of human existence. Second, extensive consideration has been accorded to their difficulties in attaining authenticity through resolute meaning-creating choices and actions. Despite the focus on the personal condition of the characters, the latter problem has been inevitably approached also in the context of interpersonal engagements, be it of a romantic or any other nature. They have been shown as either incapable of shaping their lives in an independent and meaningful manner under external, usually social, pressures, or as exercising their existential freedom with blatant disregard for the dignity and autonomy of the people around them. The present chapter examines specifically how Duckworth's heroines, as well as their male lovers and husbands, meander through the complexities of interpersonal relationships, thereby elaborating on Duckworth's declaration that the thematic texture of her fiction has been permeated by "the tension between needing love and needing independence" (*Camping* 291).

The first section explores the dynamics of human relationships, arguing that they are represented in Duckworth's writing as a locus of conflict and ongoing menace to one's personal integrity and freedom. As a precaution against this threat, some of the characters display the tendency to desist from forming stable bonds. Those who do otherwise, irrespective of the threat, usually step into relationships founded on a structure of domination and subordination, where one lover—the male one in most cases—wields control over the other. Further, it is noticed that in some of the novels analysed the writer goes against the grain of prevailing beliefs and posits conflict also as the central organising principle of the relationships between mothers and their children. After providing such an essentially bleak picture of the problem, the chapter demonstrates that in two of her novels Duckworth discerns a way out of mutual animosity in the idea of a relationship based on what roughly corresponds to the Beauvoirian ideal of reciprocal recognition. The last section analyses the recurring theme of desire for knowledge and meaningful communication in relationships, which combines the problems of domination-subordination dynamics and reciprocal recognition scrutinised previously.

5.2 DYNAMICS OF INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

5.2.1 THREATENING RELATIONSHIPS AND THE IMPULSE FOR ISOLATION

In Duckworth's novels, interpersonal relationships—not only between strangers but also and more importantly between people loved and close—almost unalterably constitute a hotbed of tension, where mutual animosity is the order of the day, as underlined by the newscast in *A Message from Harpo*: "*The family is the most violent institution an average citizen will ever encounter apart from the police or army in wartime, a Queensland psychiatrist said yesterday. Dr Joan Lawrence told the Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists' Congress the family was potentially lethal"* (Duckworth 82). The idea that hostility between people constitutes a prevailing, albeit often veiled, reality rather than a rarity finds its most explicit expression in *Seeing Red*, where the physical and psychological violence between Jennet and Jack is described as "a small part of their lives, repetitive and unexceptional" (Duckworth 109). The same message reverberates in the novel's dramatic finale, accompanied by a much telling comment of the narrator: "But we don't need to spell the whole thing out. That is for television violence. This is ordinary life violence" (Duckworth, *Seeing* 171). Not necessarily spectacular enough to attract wider attention, violence is apparently viewed as a staple element of interpersonal engagements—a threat that always looms on the horizon. As will be demonstrated, with the situation being as it is, the characters often tend to choose isolation over connection, a strategy that is supposed to reinforce their sense of full autonomy and subjectivity.

Probably no other novel in Duckworth's entire career brings this vision to such a poignant articulation, at the same time striking an unmistakable chord with existentialism, as *Married Alive.* The motif of a mysterious epidemic that takes a heavy toll on New Zealanders offers the writer ample room to explore the strained dynamics of human relationships. Their conflictual nature comes to the fore, assuming a very literal dimension, with the characters' struggle for survival in the face of the threat posed by infected people, given to unpredictably and uncontrollably aggressive behaviour. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the pervasiveness and ordinariness of interpersonal violence is foregrounded in the very opening scene, in which Francie recounts the possibly heavily consequential accident as if it were a casual event like any other, in a manner remotely reminiscent of the famous opener of Camus's *The Stranger*: "Maman died today. Or yesterday maybe, I don't know" (3). What strikes one as at least surprising is the heroine's blatant lack of empathy for the customer to whom she might have done irreparable harm. Equally shocking appear the trivial reasons indicated by her as the potential motives for the would-be crime.

Most crucially, Duckworth takes pains to make it clear that this threat is actually not a short-term effect of the epidemic, one likely to subside as soon as the spread of the disease is curbed, but the inherent condition of human existence. It is emphasised that the situation does not so much produce mutual hostility as lay bare and exacerbate deeply hidden tensions: "Only in some Polynesian circles does the family system continue rebelliously, resulting in deaths from violence, bizarre injuries to every part of the body. This is the price of love today. Was it ever different?" (Duckworth, *Married* 14). What changes depending on the circumstances is only the intensity and form of violence: "The injuries of love until now have remained decently internal. On the whole. Now they blossom on cheek and brow, in scars and bruises" (Duckworth, *Married* 14). The heroine thus dismisses her initial impulse to hanker nostalgically after the good old times as naïve, once she realises that her childhood was also tainted by an undercurrent of hatred and destruction, symbolised by the bombing of Hiroshima: "If it [reality] could only travel back into the past—to the innocence of childhood, to some pre-nuclear period before the horrors took over. Her childhood hasn't of course been pre-nuclear. She was conceived after Hiroshima" (Duckworth, *Married* 10).

The first response of the New Zealanders to the ubiquitous danger is to seek isolation to the greatest extent possible, focusing on their personal welfare: "We live in a society now of every man for himself. All men are islands" (Duckworth, *Married* 34). The strategy of evasion, as observed by Beauvoir, constitutes a common self-defence mechanism against the threats bound up with interpersonal relationships: "One can understand that men who are aware of the risks and the inevitable element of failure involved in any engagement in the world attempt to fulfil themselves outside of the world" (*Ethics* 67-68). It is yet not only the fear of coming to physical harm that deters one from associating with other people but also the reluctance to confront one's own existential ambiguity. Accordingly, Francie aches to repress her persisting longing for intimacy as a sign of vulnerability, mindful as she is that every contact with another person exposes her to the risk of victimisation, curtailing her powers of self-control and reducing her to the position of a mere object: "She despises herself for feeling so abjectly in need. She thought she had done away with those obsolete responses in herself. She can, of course, hide them. With practice" (Duckworth, *Married* 35). While the idea of depending on anyone else for survival and self-fulfilment diminishes her sense of subjectivity, isolation allows her to foster the illusion of being a fully self-sufficient subject with capacity for complete mastery over herself and her surroundings. When assessed from an existentialist point of view, her approach must be denounced as a manifestation of inauthenticity and, for that matter, only a superficial solution to her dilemmas. The fact is that, despite offering a degree of protection,

it simultaneously barricades the way to the worthwhile exercise of existential freedom because "no existence can be validly fulfilled if it is limited to itself" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 67). True to this dictum, the sense of nagging anxiety does not disappear but only afflicts Francie with magnified force.

Isolation also serves as a device of self-deception and defence against the awareness of existential ambiguity in *Studmuffin*, where the problem becomes even more apparent in the absence of the tangible menace depicted in *Married Alive*. When the novel opens, the heroine, dispirited by the experience of a failed marriage and the death of her only child, regards interpersonal relationships as the locus of the most insidious threat to her freedom, taking pride in her hard-won self-reliance: "She is well now, fully recovered and single. The penthouse shrieks singleness. Singleness of purpose. Singleness of mind and body" (Duckworth, *Studmuffin* 8). By rejecting profound and lasting emotional attachments, she endeavours to preserve unbounded personal autonomy, proving John Donne's famous dictum about human interconnectedness and interdependence wrong:

> She had gone on with her private project to be Alice All Alone. "No man is an island," her mother intoned—"And no woman either." "Watch me," Alice had said, sticking her breasts forward in her olive green suit. . . . It is a challenge she has set herself, a clear-eyed career move; she knows she can do it and keep her integrity, her emotional independence. She is in no danger. (Duckworth, *Studmuffin* 21-22)

It is important to pay attention to the emphasis in both passages placed on the notions of "singleness" and "integrity." Clearly enough, what Alice fears most is the loss of an idea of herself as an ordered and fully self-sufficient subject. She looks at relationships through the prism of the concomitant necessity to forego the illusion of holding sway over the external world, one in which other people function as mere accompaniments to her projects. By maintaining a safe emotional distance, the heroine obviates the risk of confrontation with herself as an object dependent on and restricted by other people.

The vision of human relationships as a threat to personal freedom and subjectivity is developed by Duckworth also in her novella *Fooling* through the metaphors of addiction and gambling, with Ros, a twenty-eight-year old female protagonist, described as "romantically addicted to falling in love" (Duckworth, *Fooling* 5) and a "gambler . . . in the emotional rather than the dollar stakes" (Duckworth, *Fooling* 6). Together they combine to depict love as inextricably related with risk and a loss of self-control, simultaneously implying a tendency to

form only fleeting ties, oriented on the immediate gratification of one's needs, without undertaking any lasting responsibilities.

For all her addiction to falling in love, Ros is a heroine who by no means willingly surrenders to men, having, as she does, a definite idea of the powerful role she wishes to play in life: "She doesn't like being a pawn. She is a queen" (Duckworth, *Fooling* 14). The declaration testifies to her determination to retain an undivided subjectivity, without letting herself be fixed in the position of a mere object in a performance directed by someone else. It is this determination, coupled with the discouraging examples of the people around her, that incite Ros to recoil from entering into stable liaisons:

> Ros is much the same age as her neighbour but she is not about to rush in and out of marriages, like Josephine and her own mother—nor get herself pregnant. She is aware of the traps. Scraps of unbelievable dialogue fry over the next-door fence on fine days; you would think the variegated members of the family hated each other bitterly. Promises of murder and inventive tortures. (Duckworth, *Fooling* 9)

The parallel she draws between commitment and asylums—"[c]ommit sounds too much like mental hospitals" (Duckworth, *Fooling* 36)—gives a striking illustration of her understanding of relationships in terms of entrapment and encroachment upon her personal freedom. Still, craving for an emotional connection, the heroine tries to establish an opposition between marriage, which goes hand in hand with restrictive schemas, and love itself, which gives her pleasure and self-fulfilment: "She has never lost her faith in true love, despite disillusionment, but marriage she learned about early, at her mother's knees, and her mother gave it a bad press" (Duckworth, *Fooling* 49). Nevertheless, she has the awareness that the distinction is ultimately an entirely false one, for any emotional attachment, irrespective of whether experienced within institutionalised structures or not, entails the risk of being invaded by a foreign consciousness and the necessity to sacrifice at least a portion of her autonomy. "Two things anger and disturb Ros equally—one, that Josie might be right and Neil is just another disposable container for her feelings—two, that Josie might be wrong and Ros might be going to fall inconveniently, painfully in love," comments the narrator on the heroine's predicament (Duckworth, *Fooling* 38-39). She apparently prefers the former option, where love serves as a means of achieving her private goals, a preference that leads to the subject of the next sub-section.

5.2.2 ENTANGLEMENT IN THE DYNAMICS OF DOMINATION AND SUBORDINATION

Despite the extraordinary threats implicated in relationships, connecting with other people, is at the same time depicted by Duckworth as an integral element of human existence, as condensed in the paradox of breathing and suffocation referred to in her memoir. In *Married Alive,* New Zealanders may try to isolate themselves in a bid to protect their security, but the desire for closeness, even if only fleeting and purely physical, always takes supremacy: "Danger, whether physical, medical or emotional—has never been a real deterrent to the sexual act" (Duckworth, *Married* 36). Consequently, as Beauvoir would have it, "unable to accomplish [themselves] in solitude," they are "ceaselessly in jeopardy in [their] relations with [their] peers" (*Second Sex* 194). As will be shown further, in order to reconcile the two impulses—to retain their self-integrity and freedom while simultaneously fulfilling their emotional needs—the characters in Duckworth's novels tend to establish relationships predicated on the dynamics of domination and subordination. They strive to assert their own power over the lover or meekly succumb to the latter's demands, thereby contradicting the idea of authentic love as understood by Beauvoir.

The issue is given the most dramatic portrayal in *Over the Fence is Out*. "There's always a war. Cheerio" (Duckworth 93), quips Gregory's friend in considering his abusive conduct towards Janfrey, "[recalling] Sartre's belief that the only relationship possible between two free individuals is one of conflict," as remarked by Benson (219). The discussion of the novel in the context of authenticity has, as a matter of fact, already provided a fair picture of the domination-subordination relation between Gregory and Janfrey, emphasising the sadistic greediness of the man for complete control over his wife and the heroine's wilful abdication of her independence and subjectivity. At this point, it is expedient to complement this picture with two further remarks. Importantly, Gregory exhibits a very conscious understanding of love as a win-lose battle in which all ethical considerations must be sidestepped. Early in the plot, as the couple talk about Janfrey's plans to undergo an abortion, the woman is astounded by his cynical approach to the problem of such gravity: "'But you sound so casual about it, as if it was a game.' 'It is a game.' He laughed. 'Oh, Baby, it's a game, all right'" (Duckworth, *Over the Fence* 19). For the man, human liaisons and their consequences fall beyond the sphere of morality and personal responsibility; he sees them in terms of shrewd manoeuvring intended to advance his private interests. He openly admits that ordinary human emotions are quite foreign to him,

professing his own inability to work towards reciprocal recognition in love: "'I don't know what it is—a tenderness . . .'" (Duckworth, *Over the Fence* 31).

Further, as rightly observed by Benson, while he demeans and oppresses his wife, he "[despises] her ever more as she grows weaker" (219). He may seek to overpower the woman but, at the same time, her easy submissiveness diminishes his sense of victory, a dynamic that aligns neatly with the Sartrean framework of the self-other relation. As elucidated by Gardner, "[t]he for-itself . . . has to continually *resurrect* the Other as a subject in order to repeat its original self-affirmation" (180). Accordingly, Gregory tends to cruelly tease Janfrey just to elicit her resistance:

> He pursed his lips and then shout out: 'Who told you to wear green?'
> 'A woman in a shop? Why?'
> 'Then she did you a disservice.' . . .
> 'Oh no she didn't. D'you imagine I started wearing green just because some woman told me to? I wore it already and I'll go on wearing it. I like it.'
> He grinned at her annoyance, biting his bottom lip and widening his eye gleefully. All he said was: 'Ah you begin to exist, all right. Yes.' (Duckworth, *Over the Fence* 35)

For him, the courage to oppose domination and join the power struggle constitutes the very foundation of subjectivity, as evidenced by his last words. Janfrey's unexpected self-assertiveness visibly arouses him in a perverted manner, only whetting his appetite for domination.

In *Married Alive,* the conflictual nature of human relationships is captured in the metaphor of hunting, combining associations with both risk and survival: "Some prefer not to take the risk. Others erupt from their single dwellings suddenly and unexpectedly, like trapdoor spiders, looking for their ration of love. Snatch and retreat" (Duckworth, *Married* 14). The type of risk to which the narrator refers does not have the ethical dimension of the risk celebrated by Beauvoir as the foundation of authentic love; it is taken not to achieve reciprocal recognition but to perpetuate inequality. With one party positioned as a victorious predator and the other one entrapped in the role of a helpless prey, the logic of hunting irrevocably excludes the mechanism of giving and receiving. Although during the epidemic people still crave for love, the manner in which they satisfy this craving is purely instrumental. They approach one another solely in terms of serviceability for their private ends:

> It has become a habit generally for people to stand back in relationships. Lovers, friends, family, are put in closed-off compartments to be referred to only when necessary. The days

> of communes, encounter groups and extended families are becoming as exotic as passenger line. The nuclear family itself survives only in fractioned bits. It is referred to by its dismembered parts, as if it exists. And it does, of course in the collective unconscious. Family feeling, trust and loyalty—even love perhaps—are all running around in society like chickens with their heads cut off. (Duckworth, *Married* 13-14)

The paralysing fear of infection and violence that holds New Zealanders in a firm grip leads to the destruction of social institutions built on interpersonal ties. Fundamental human feelings lose their original meaning, becoming either empty signifiers or, even more strikingly, harbingers of threat, as symbolised by the image of maimed chickens, implicating violence, disfigurement and horror. As such, they remain a troublesome presence haunting the characters.

Francie, on her part, wavers between the extremes of isolation and addictive attachment. On the one hand, she decides to shield herself against danger by escaping from Wellington; on the other hand, unable to eradicate the unflagging yearning for connection, she leaves the city with Sidney even if she does not have much faith in his assurances about having spat out his dose of the contaminated vaccine (Duckworth, *Married* 33). It soon proves that, instead of offering protection, her departure from the city not only exposes her to the same risks but also brings them to much greater immediacy. From the very outset, her relations with Sidney are marked by blatant asymmetry. While the heroine initially interprets his frosty indifference to her affectionate gestures as a sign of mere caution, she soon grows aware that the man is a tyrant seeking to retain his own sense of undivided subjectivity by transforming her into an object without essential reality: "The feeling he gives her of not being there, of having no physical presence for him. She is a spirit without substance or identity. . . . Only her father has made her feel as bad" (Duckworth, *Married* 38). Most crucially, the heroine allows herself to be thrust into the position of subordination. Despite being awake to the destructiveness of this arrangement, she deludes herself that attempting to oppose the man would be ultimately counterproductive: "It makes practical good sense to follow his lead obediently" (Duckworth, *Married* 31).

As predicted by Beauvoir, Francie's meekness plunges her into a trap of inauthenticity, where neither self-fulfilment nor salvation can be found: "It is to find herself, to save herself, that she began by losing herself in him" (*Second Sex* 782). The conflict continues when the couple settle down in the man's cottage, which appears to be a perfect location for a typical Gothic novel, featuring the imprisonment of a damsel in distress by a villain. Situated off the beaten track, it gives the impression of being haunted by ghosts and replete with secrets whose

sole depositary is Sidney as the master of the house: “The house feels very empty. Upstairs the ghost sits at the piano keys. Downstairs the two external doors are no way out. One leads into a clay bank, the other is deadlocked and Sidney has the key. Behind her rises the cloying smell of decay. She hugs her elbows in her hands and shivers” (Duckworth, *Married* 45). Indeed, the man persists in asserting his power over the heroine, not only in their day-to-day dealings but also in their intimate relations. As discussed in Chapter One, Beauvoir privileges eroticism as the sphere that provides the most fruitful ground for lovers to assuage existential anxiety by experiencing their own existential ambiguity in a pleasurable way; she holds that “physical love draws its strength and dignity from the joy lovers give each other and take in the reciprocal consciousness of their freedom (*Second Sex* 530). The couple’s sexual intercourse, by contrast, is depicted as a hunting, where Sidney-the predator turns the heroine “into object, into prey” (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 677): “Sidney rolls off her and pats his large stomach, as if he had just devoured her” (Duckworth, *Married* 49). Despite Francie’s efforts to render their lovemaking an expression of mutual respect, he uses it selfishly to mark his domination over the woman, an approach that shatters the ideal of generosity advocated by Beauvoir: “an individual should never seek the triumph of pride or the exaltation of his self in erotic relations; . . . it is essential to break the barriers of the ego, transcend the very limits of consciousness, and renounce all personal sovereignty” (*Second Sex* 272). The man demonstrates his worst inclinations for possessiveness, objectifying the heroine and leaving her with a feeling of painful humiliation. After they have finished making love, Francie can only helplessly reproach her lover for the lack of true intimacy and meaningful communication, reminding him about her own craving for companionship: “But you said we could talk” (Duckworth, *Married* 49).

Sidney’s tyrannical and egoistic disposition manifests itself in a more violent and dangerous form when the heroine discovers to her utter horror that the man keeps a corpse of a woman in the garden. After initial pleadings of innocence, he finally admits to having killed his first wife, allegedly in self-defence. The way the man accounts for the murder, however, reveals his determination to annihilate anyone whose presence undermines his sense of absolute subjectivity: “She was a witch. A psychic vampire. She drained me, so that I couldn’t think” (Duckworth, *Married* 72). While he tries to convince Francie that the woman was a domineering and aggressive lunatic, responsible for the failure of their marriage, it is strongly suggested that it was the man who curbed Lois’s freedom of self-determination. When Francie asks about his children, he responds that he knows nothing about their lot since “the children were always her [Lois’s] province, not mine” (Duckworth, *Married* 44), thereby giving a hint of his strongly patriarchal vision of distribution of roles within the family.

The disturbing discovery incites Francie to reassess her approach to their relationship. Initially intent on establishing a profound bond rooted in partnership, the heroine now realises that her lover has little intention of contributing to this project: "She sighs a gust of loneliness. She never felt like this, living on her own" (Duckworth *Married* 57). Her view of the man becomes increasingly bleak: "That's no friend, that's my lover" (Duckworth *Married* 63). The declaration is highly insignificant insofar as friendship, along with generosity, lays at the foundation of authentic love according to Beauvoir (*Second Sex* 193); when absent, there can be no room for "each one positing both itself and the other as object and as subject in a reciprocal movement" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 193). Francie thus voices her utter disillusionment as to the possibility of achieving reciprocal recognition with Sidney. His unwillingness to sacrifice at least a portion of his own self-pride exposes the woman to an ongoing threat of being reduced to an object that may be eliminated at his will, a peril of which she becomes increasingly cognizant.

Consequently, her posture of submissiveness and tentative endeavours to build mutual communion give way to aloofness, if not open hostility. The heroine gradually transforms from conciliatory to potentially capable of aggression, an inclination that she yet manages to temper: "She restrains an urge to whack him away from her. It is the second time she has felt this tendency to violence and it begins to worry her" (Duckworth, *Married* 61). It is now the woman who deliberately maintains distance instead of eliciting Sidney's attention and affection. When the man awkwardly attempts to confess love, she does not give him any encouragement, let alone make any commitment herself, but only teases him:

> But when he has turned away from her, breathing through his nose with futile rage, she feels alone. Perhaps it wasn't all an act? Has she destroyed anything of value? Never mind. Better to destroy than to be destroyed. She recognizes in this cat-and-mouse conversation the typical unease of the times. Even flesh aches with nostalgia for the perfect love she has never known. A suspect ache. She looks at it with cold self-loathing. (Duckworth, *Married* 80)

Although Francie still yearns for a reciprocal bond open to the autonomous subjectivity of the other, she takes this yearning as a sign of weakness, exposing her to grave risk. Bergoffen observes that"[p]atriarchy privileges the risks of recognition. Further, it associates the risks of recognition with violence. . . . The only recognition worth having is the recognition won in combat or competition" ("Simone de Beauvoir" 259). Following this logic, the heroine comes to perceive her relationship with Sidney literally as a struggle for survival whose demands must take absolute primacy over any ethical considerations. It is precisely a zero-sum game, one that

does not allow for any compromises since the victory of one party can be secured only through the failure of the other one: "Win or lose. Is it a game, or a battle?" (Duckworth, *Married* 108). In order to retain her own subjectivity, she is forced to reverse the existing power structure within their relationship by engaging in the same practices as the man.

Surprisingly, an opportunity to alleviate this vicious tension arises along with Sidney's proposal of marriage. In a world where institutionalised relationships are falling into disuse, marriage initially appears to Francie to be an act of defiance and possibly a form of "expansion of existence" (Beauvoir, *Ethics* 79) rather than a restrictive obligation: "Certainly it would be an adventure to be married. Something she has never done before" (Duckworth, *Married* 91). Duckworth, however, decides not to follow this cue; quite the contrary, as the plot unfolds, marriage emerges as a seedbed of mutual hostility, which only reinforces the relations of domination and subordination between the couple. The wedding ceremony is in itself a moment of an uneasy revelation for Francie and Sidney. Accustomed to taking the presence of each other for granted, they are suddenly confronted as two opposing consciousnesses, each opaque to the other: "Neither of them are prepared to use the word—'wedding'—to a stranger" (Duckworth, *Married* 92). The sinister undercurrent of threat escalates, as mentioned in Chapter Three, when the insane clerk grotesquely, yet meaningfully, mistakes the words of the marital oath, pronouncing them "dust to dust" (Duckworth, *Married* 96), a clear parallel between marriage and death—another one after the pun on the phrase "buried alive" in the novel's title—bringing to mind Hegel's famous dictum and simultaneously the crowning tenet of the master-slave dialectic: "each [consciousness] seeks the death of the other" (113).

In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir avers that marriage "incites man to a capricious imperialism" (566) and it is indeed the case that Sidney quickly re-asserts his claim to absolute mastery over Francie, forcing her back into the role of an obedient housewife, contrasting with her entrepreneurial career in Wellington. The heroine thus experiences their new arrangement as slippage into immanence. For her, it is a stricture that forecloses any possibility of creative change, involving, as it does, the automatic enactment of pre-defined scenarios, which deprive her of agency: "What is marriage? People serving each other, belonging to each other in the crudest kind of way, like cash in a wallet. Mine. His. Fixed moves, as in a chess game. Rules and expectations. . . . Marriage is self-imposed limits on freedom" (Duckworth, *Married* 100-101). The demands of her husband are an onslaught on her freedom as a self-constituting subject, hindering her from "expansion toward an indefinitely open future" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 37): "How dare he try to fix her into a person of regular habits, a recognisable shape" (Duckworth, *Married* 61). They constrain her to a commonplace existence trapped in the

predictable patterns of the same menial and uncreative activities, where the feminist aspirations she used to harbour in the pre-epidemic times must fall into oblivion: "She, Francie, the strong one, buttering his toast, quaking at his step, submitting to his whims. Worst of all, wife. Ludicrous. Shameful. She has become a traitor to her sex" (Duckworth, *Married* 114). It is not only Sidney, however, who must be blamed for Francie's oppression but also the heroine herself; she becomes complicit in her own victimisation through a lack of perseverance in opposing the man, a flaw of which she is perfectly aware: "How surprised Ellen would be to see her now. Francie, the tough emancipated one, should let herself be bullied into this position by an old-fashioned male chauvinist" (Duckworth, *Married* 114).

Another illustration of a bond predicated on abusive power relations, where "generosity is . . . hampered in man by his vanity and in woman by her timidity" (*Second Sex* 476), can be found in *A Barbarous Tongue*, whose very title, referencing W. B. Yeats' "To a Child Dancing in the Wind," introduces the theme of discord and inability to communicate.[42] In stark contrast to Francie, its heroine neither makes any attempts to open up space for reciprocal recognition nor strives to gain the upper hand of her lover but from the very beginning "allows him [John] to possess her" (Benson 215). The manner in which Frieda recounts her first meeting with John exhibits the "idolatrous" character of her love, which "confers an absolute value" on the man (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 785): "Was there some function he felt I could perform which was more valuable and unusual than the function of giving him pleasure and admiration? It was the first time I had been made to feel so important as this and I supposed I was flattered" (Duckworth, *Barbarous* 11). Frieda is apparently only too grateful for performing the role of a mere pawn in John's game, deriving satisfaction from the ability to serve as a vehicle through which the man can bring his own plans to fruition rather than realising her own goals. She relishes in acting as an object in a scheme in which he is the absolute master— in partaking in "an alliance with the person having the power and possibility to transcend" (Pettersen 162)—instead of seeking recognition as an independent subject with capacity for self-constitution. Just as Beauvoir's woman in love, she grounds her own identity in the dream of uniting body and soul with the man in the hope that through this union "she will be integrated into his existence, she will be a part of his value, she will be justified" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 782). By doing so, the heroine yet "gives up her transcendence: she subordinates it to that of the essential other whose vassal and slave she makes herself" (*Second Sex* 782).

[42] The verses "But I am old and you are young, /And I speak a barbarous tongue" form the epigraph to the novel.

Frieda's lover, on his part, consistently refuses to acknowledge the woman's freedom to shape her own life, assuming that she must be fully dependent on his will: "Wouldn't it be ideal if we could die the first time we made love seriously? . . . 'Not the first time, the second. The first time I want to be there with you afterwards.' Even he didn't look at me, the coward" (Duckworth, *Barbarous* 22). Although the heroine passively defers to the man's whims, she simultaneously does suffer from an acute sense of oppression, perceiving his conduct as a form of violence: "I felt as if he'd taken me by the throat and was squeezing it" (Duckworth, *Barbarous* 23). The feelings that accompany her during their lovemaking bring to mind the description of the intercourse between Sidney and Francie. Likewise, John overpowers his lover through the sexual act: "I felt him laughing in his chest. Waves of laughter came out from him, rolling over my face in tobacco breath and that new breath in which I caught my own animal scent. I felt that if he didn't stop, I would drown" (Duckworth, *Barbarous* 24). In Beauvoir's ethics of eroticism, "to use one's sex as a tool of one's will," as John ostensibly does, "is the irreparable error" (*Second Sex* 272). Indeed, the image of drowning graphically conveys the loss of autonomy that threatens the heroine in intimate contact with the man, her subjectivity being both literally and symbolically subsumed into his robust self. More than that, not only does the act diminish Frieda's freedom, but it also aggravates the disconcerting sense of her own material facticity as an animal-like object.

While in *Married Alive* and *A Barbarous Tongue* it is the male characters who assume the position of power through the subjugation of the female protagonists, it is crucial to note that Duckworth does not represent all women as innately impervious to the penchant for domination and objectification of other people. In *Seeing Red,* patriarchal schemas are reversed with Jennet playing the role of a quintessential patriarchal tyrant, who is "used to an uncluttered passage" (Duckworth 170) in pursuit of her own interests, having no scruples to eliminate those who obstruct her plans, as evinced by the attack on Vivienne and Isla in the novel's finale. Her violence towards Jake, an outcome of her pathological possessiveness, has both a physical and psychological dimension. First, Jennet attempts to gain full control over his life, constraining his freedom to enter in relationships with other women. She subjects her brother-lover to close surveillance, turning the man into an object of her judging gaze: "Jennet always said she was a voyeur" (Duckworth, *Seeing* 119). Second, she is accustomed to beating the man so as to force him into obedience, thereby inspiring his sense of inferiority and humiliation: "It's not exactly something you boast about, is it? A battered husband? A man likes to think he can control his woman better than that" (Duckworth, *Seeing* 115).

Vivienne's attitude towards Jake, in turn, is a tense mixture of the desire to succumb to the man's domination and an urge to use their relationship in a thoroughly instrumental way so as to protect herself against any vulnerability. Her infatuation with the man clearly transforms her from an independent woman into one who looks up to her lover as an authority figure: "She hangs, as they say, on Jake's every word, twirling like a trapeze artist whose partner has swung perplexingly out of sight" (Duckworth, *Seeing* 44). At the same time, however, the heroine believes that any intimacy going beyond the satisfaction of a sheer sexual drive would stand at variance with her ambitions to live fully on her own terms. As a result, she seeks to prevent their relationship from developing into a more profound attachment that would make her somehow beholden to the man: "She doesn't need a human vibrator to switch on and off, she needs something real, not so much flesh as mind. She needs tenderness. And winces at the sentimental twang of the word. Bugger it, needs are a handicap in today's woman. She will do better to settle for a cock" (Duckworth, *Seeing* 51). Before their first sex, she "undresses him in her mind as men are said to undress women, and feels faint, not at the revelation of his nakedness—a bobbing penis is a comical sight—but at the thought of where it wants to go and what it could do to her" (Duckworth, *Seeing* 73). The woman makes Jake a target of her critical judgment, approaching him with a condescending mixture of denigration and objectification, seeing him only in his facticity, through the prism of the serviceability of his maleness for her needs.

In *Studmuffin*, it is also the male character who displays a predisposition to submissiveness in contrast to the strong-willed female protagonist. Shilling's attitude is characterised by the wilful abdication of his own individuality to avoid conflicts with other people, not in the spirit of reciprocal recognition but rather out of mere complacency: "Shilling has spent most of his life fitting in, adjusting his speech patterns, adjusting his tie or removing it altogether, in order—he tells himself—to put other people at ease. . . . Shilling fits in to put himself at ease" (Duckworth, *Studmuffin* 33). It is this trait that entices Alice, who, despite her firm commitment to self-sufficiency, does not succeed in suppressing an appetite for emotional connection. The heroine's resolution "to be alone, but not lonely" (Duckworth, *Studmuffin* 50) may at first glance appear to evidence a resolution to combine personal autonomy with companionship. By no means, however, does she abandon the initial yearning for power. What urges her to enter into an affair with Shilling is rather the lack of risk of losing it, considering the man's docility: "Is Shilling a habit she can afford? . . . Could he threaten her singleness of mind and body? Not really" (Duckworth, *Studmuffin* 45).

Another strategy employed by Duckworth's characters in a bid to shield themselves against the risks of bonding, an equally inauthentic one when assessed from the standpoint of Beauvoir's ethics of love , is "the tendency toward the unification of the self-consciousness of lovers" (E. Anderson 382). The desire for such a total merger with the lover, whereby alterity would be comfortably annihilated, is expressed powerfully by Frieda in *A Barbarous Tongue.* What makes her fall in love with John is not just his flattering attention but also his somewhat uncanny similarity to herself: "But the sudden vertigo and confusion in his eyes had been so familiar to me I might have been looking in a mirror. . . . When you're attracted to a person because of what they resemble in yourself you are quick to forgive them all kinds of weaknesses" (Duckworth, *Barbarous* 11). As a matter of fact, both she and her lover fail to understand that "[a]s the one who transcends me, the other is forever a stranger" (Bergoffen, *Philosophy* 50). In viewing otherness as a threat rather than a promise, each of them takes pains not to face it by striving to reduce the lover to a reflection of himself or herself: "Anything which isn't myself in him or himself in me shocks us into silence" (Duckworth, *Barbarous* 8-9). Their strange union is characterised as "almost incestuous" (Duckworth, *Barbarous* 8), a description that implies its morbid and deeply unethical character. Instead of allowing the couple for self-expansion and self-enrichment, it restricts their freedom and deprives them of individuality: "'We're pretty fatal for each other'? It's true. The more we love, the less pleasure. The more we need each other, the less help we are for each other, because we're the same person" (Duckworth, *Barbarous* 9). The inability to avoid confrontation with mutual alterity, in turn, incites them to resolve the tension through a power struggle.

A still more glaring illustration of this tendency is furnished obviously in *Seeing Red.* Even before the truth of incest between Jennet and Jake is revealed, their bond bewilders Vivienne with its "pervading sense of oneness" (Duckworth, *Seeing* 61), their unity appearing strangely unnatural: "The Burberries eat hungrily, with an eagerness which reminds her of two cats feeding at adjacent bowls. . . . Both have tackled the vegetables first and are now onto the cubes of veal; identical timing, it is uncanny" (Duckworth, *Seeing* 31). Jake confesses to Vivienne that in childhood, when they could not rely on the assistance and care of adults, mutual closeness helped them to withstand the dangers of the hostile world: "We've had to be together, it's how we've survived" (Duckworth, *Seeing* 132). Ever since, the extreme and, for that matter, also warped togetherness has served the couple as a form of self-protection, allowing them to build as if one consciousness to oppose all external threats. As hinted earlier, however, with Jennet's violence, the balance of powers between the siblings is actually far from equal. A mixture of "unusual closeness and unusual distance" (Duckworth, *Seeing* 133), their

relationship only exacerbates possessiveness and limits their possibilities of interpersonal bonding. More than that, their bizarre oneness places also other people at risk, as demonstrated by the final confrontation between all four characters.

5.2.3 DECONSTRUCTING MOTHERHOOD

Whereas all the previous sections have analysed how Duckworth envisions bonds between women and men, attention will now be turned to her portrayal of mother-child relationships. It has been already demonstrated at various points in this dissertation, and in particular depth in the discussion of *Rest for the Wicked*, that the experience of motherhood in Duckworth's fiction gives rise to an array of ambivalent emotions, as best summarised by the frank confession of Vivienne in *Seeing Red*: "She thinks of her own children when they were small and the strange passions of motherhood which had buffeted her between irritation and tenderness. And sometimes fear—of failing, of doing it wrong, of losing" (66). Now it will be added that they may be fuelled by conflict and animosity to the same extent as romantic liaisons, a vision that once again consorts well with Beauvoir's subversive approach to the problem. Alice Stone comments that "[w]hereas mother-love is often cast as the height of altruism, Beauvoir exposes how . . . mothers' relations to their children are riddled with self-deception, resentment, hostility, disappointment, and a host of other emotions" and continues that "[t]hey are always mixed—never the pure love, joy, and happiness that prospective mothers are falsely promised" (128). Similarly, in her fiction, Duckworth explodes the myth of the bond between a mother and her child being inherently built on unconditional love, generosity and loyalty, portraying mothers who are unreliable or hostile towards their children and those who find their maternal relationship limiting and deleterious to their own autonomy and subjectivity.

When the plot of *Seeing Red* opens, neither Vivienne nor Isla maintains any close ties with their mother, except for some perfunctory communication. Both sisters treat the woman in a distinctly instrumental manner, as an object that may be discarded when no longer useful: "She [Isla] has pulled threads out of her mother and abandoned her, like the silks, while Vivienne has stored them away, neatly folded out of sight in Wisconsin but available as a touchstone to go back if necessary" (Duckworth, *Seeing* 22). It soon transpires that this frigidity results from recriminations going back to their childhood and adolescence. Vivienne recounts that Isla and their mother were always "at daggers drawn" (Duckworth, *Seeing* 38) although she does not indicate any specific source of their mutual hostility. She herself thinks about her mother not as a fount of love and understanding but as a harsh critic who has persistently undermined her self-esteem, recalling how their relationship became marred by her

morbid jealousy once Vivienne entered adolescence. In *The Second* Sex, Beauvoir observes that a pubescent daughter may be a painful reminder for her mother of the irrevocably lost potential for self-growth and self-fulfilment, hence antagonism: "This new woman is offered still-indefinite possibilities in contrast to the repetition and routine that are the lot of the older woman: these chances are what the mother envies and detests" (*Second Sex* 641). Indeed, Vivienne's mother saw her daughter as another woman vying for the attention of men and more likely to win this competition, envious of her youth and beauty: "At what point had she noticed Vivienne was going to be a woman, like herself, a rival in other words, and had erected fences, munitions? Fourteen? Fifteen?" (Duckworth, *Seeing* 38). The heroine concedes in hindsight, echoing Duckworth's own filial disillusionment recounted in *Camping on the Faultline* (62), that the belief in her mother's unconditional supportiveness that she used to hold in the past was a mere childish illusion, protecting her against the bitter reality: "Vivienne could be mistaken of course, what she had seen as immutable, unshakeable maternal love might only have been due to her naïveté, her continuing tendency to see what she wants to see. Needs to see" (Duckworth, *Seeing* 38).

Painful recollections of the mother's emotional distance and abandonment insinuate themselves also into other novels by Duckworth. In *Rest for the Wicked,* they flood back upon Jane as she grapples with her own remorse over leaving her children to join the experimental programme, mirroring the conflict between maternal duty and the right to self-determination that drives a significant part of the plot: "What was it like for her mother—dying? . . . She might have felt guilt at abandoning her family, something like Jane's own guilt now. Could that be possible? Surely not. Jane can only believe—as she has believed all her life—that her mother died out of selfishness, taking an easy way out" (127). In *Married Alive,* Francie's childhood is described as suffused by an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty not only on a global scale but also, and even more poignantly, on a personal plane, following her mother's suicide: "Yes, once she was a loved child, incredible to believe. Oh, not for long. And perhaps even in that she was mistaken. For why did her mother swallow down her life with a handful of pills? . . . Could it have been because of Francie? Post-natal depression six years after the event?" (Duckworth 11). The portrayal of the mother figure in the novel shifts the emphasis from the mythologised maternal love, tenderness, and care to the woman's emotional instability, untrustworthiness, and even indifference. Francie's mother neither offered her daughter any protection nor strove to strengthen her sense of self-worth. Quite the contrary, her unexplained suicide unsettled Francie's sense of self-esteem and self-confidence, as well as undermining her faith in the very possibility of love. Later in the novel, when the heroine tries to excavate some heart-warming

memories from her childhood, the only one left is that of her mother "leading her by the hand into big, scary buildings—her school—the dancing class—the hospital for vaccinations" (Duckworth, *Married* 84), acting as a cog in the state machine, which put Francie's life in lethal peril. Crucially, clearly scarred by the experience of abandonment, Francie herself became an abandoning mother with the decision to place her child for adoption after her boyfriend had left her, unable, as she was, to reconcile her caretaking responsibilities with personal ambitions. While reminiscing about this step, Francie characterises motherhood as a violent invasion upon her subjectivity and freedom of self-definition, a burden that she decided to reject: "She recognized even then that motherhood was a lethal condition—lethal to relationships, career, self." (Duckworth, *Married* 15).

The association between motherhood and entrapment in immanence emerges also in the portrayal of Jean's relationship with her child in *The Matchbox House*. Whereas in the past the female protagonist was stereotypically perceived by her friends as destined for motherhood—"Celia had always said what a good mother she'd make being a little fat and so fond of dolls" (Duckworth, *Matchbox* 23)—at the age of thirty-six, she finds herself overwhelmed by her motherly duties and unsuccessfully struggling to develop an attachment to her only baby son. Quite surprisingly, however, the opportunity to take care of her neighbours' children breathes new energy into her everyday dreariness: "It was surprising how the thought of them immediately cleared her head, like a dose of aspirin. They'd be home soon. Someone to talk to—to listen to. Again, that jerk of pleasure. I think of them as people, she noticed" (Duckworth, *Matchbox* 38). This contrast in the heroine's experience may be fruitfully explained from the perspective of Beauvoir's insights on the roots of ambiguous feelings that some mothers harbour towards their babies:

> What is nonetheless remarkable and distinguishes this relationship from all other human relationships is that in the beginning the child himself does not play a part: his smiles, his babbling, have no meaning other than the one his mother gives them; . . . This is why cold, unsatisfied, melancholic women who expect a child to be a companion, or to provide warmth and excitement that draw them out of themselves, are always deeply disappointed. (*Second Sex* 627)

On the philosopher's account, as elucidated by Pettersen, "[a]s the mother-child relationship is asymmetrical, a full-blown reciprocity cannot take place" (166), hence the sense of non-fulfilment. Indeed, elsewhere in the novel, the down-to-earth nature of motherhood is opposed to the element of creativity involved in Jean's responsibilities as a foster carer:

> They aroused maternal feelings in her which Bruce had failed to arouse. Not that she didn't love her baby—but he was a negative little creature at the moment, and her feelings for him were more basic, necessarily less interesting. With the children, intellect entered into it. Not only their bodies, but their minds were to be protected. It was a challenge." (Duckworth, *Matchbox* 69-70)

Whereas the repetitive performance of the same menial activities in which her bond with Bruce consists is stultifying and inimical to her self-development, her relationship with the older children is experienced as a project that wrenches her out of stagnation, requiring much more than the unreflective replication of ready-made patterns. Jean is able to approach them as unique individuals capable of meaningful communication and reciprocity, as underlined by the reference to talking and listening. Both she and they act as independent subjects who may enrich each other in their own unique ways.

5.2.4 ENTANGLEMENT IN A NETWORK OF RELATIONSHIPS

While the chapter has concentrated so far on the conflictual dynamics of dyadic bonds, Duckworth tends to look closely also at how any individual relationship always takes shape in confrontation with the lovers' other interpersonal ties. Duckworth's characters often find themselves implicated in complex networks of relationships which generate conflicting responsibilities, requiring them to perform different roles at the same time, best illustrated by *A Barbarous Tongue* and *Seeing Red*. In the former novel, the dynamic of John and Frieda's affair is much more complicated than may appear on the surface. Chapter One indicated that the insecurity and turbulence of love as understood by Sartre derives in part from the inevitable presence of third parties, "who look at the lovers and disrupt the harmony and illusion they had with making each other the foundation of their existence" (Cleary 109). Indeed, "the entire lover-beloved framework" (Reynolds 102) between Duckworth's characters is destabilised by the intrusion of other people into their lives. Clearly in the position of power over the heroine, John himself is imbricated in a toxic, possibly incestuous, relationship with his sister Barbara.[43] Similar to Jennet and Jake, the two became bound by a "strong tie" (*Barbarous* 16) in childhood, after being orphaned by their mother. Now, while it is the woman, suffering from cancer, who depends heavily on John's assistance, her vulnerability paradoxically holds the man captive. Striving to ease his sister's morbid jealousy of Frieda and provide her with the

[43] The sexual relationship between the siblings is suggested to Frieda by Barbara (*Barbarous* 142), but, in contrast to *Seeing Red*, the novel does not provide any unequivocal confirmation, leaving the reader uncertain as to whether the woman has told the truth or has lied to arouse Frieda's jealousy.

best care possible, John neglects his pregnant lover. Frieda, on her part, cannot come to terms with the deep and unspoken understanding between Barbara and John, especially knowing that it is the quality missing from her own bond with the man: "They seemed not to need the usual channels of conversations to reach each other, and these short cuts filled me with a direct, sickening envy. They were rude to each other, calmly lifted food from each other's plates and made childish, selfish jokes which only they found amusing" (Duckworth, *Barbarous* 24). What she appears to crave for is reciprocity—highlighted by the repetitive use of the pronoun "each other"—that is the linchpin of their mutual relations, even when they are seemingly hostile. Frieda's affair with Austin, in turn, serves as a form of compensation for all her disappointments with John, an outlet in which she is able to give vent to her egoism. The woman expects her older lover to offer her support and guidance without giving him anything in exchange: "You're completely geared to yourself—completely!" (Duckworth, *Barbarous* 160). The three characters are thus entangled in a mesh of relationships exerting a deleterious influence on one another. What they all lack is the ability to negotiate between the demands of each bond so as to satisfy their own need for connection, without either abdicating their autonomy or oppressing and restricting people whom they love. The ending of the novel, however, brings a promise of at least Frieda finding a dose of this equilibrium between personal independence and emotional attachment. She clearly reclaims herself as a self-sufficient subject without falling into the pitfall of seeking isolation: "I was all right on my own, like he said. . . . I have intentions—to move, dream, serve, demand, love—and find those other people beside myself. I won't be lonely (Duckworth, *Barbarous* 189).

In *Seeing Red*, the relationship between Isla and Vivienne is from the very beginning overshadowed by their ties with other people. The latter has not yet managed to reconcile herself to the death of her female lover. The tragedy has profoundly changed both her everyday life and her personality—from a strong-minded woman to one who strives to hide her own vulnerability under the guise of brusqueness: "Grief, her widowhood as you might say, has stripped the tougher pelt off her until what remains is a false strutting naked bravado" (Duckworth, *Seeing* 120). The loss has been a blow that has not only made her lonely and miserable but has also undermined her sense of subjectivity. It seems that Mimi validated the meaning of her existence, acting as a source of recognition without which the woman perceives herself as a useless object: "Isla had lived alone since then, rattling around grievously in the old house like a hammer in an empty tool box" (Duckworth, *Seeing* 2). It is suggested that Isla's inability to relinquish her hold on the past is one of the factors that hampers communication between the sisters. A "vibration of the dead Mimi" (Duckworth, *Seeing* 7) lingering in the

woman's house evidently disconcerts Vivienne, whose bond with Isla is not as close. The women cannot reach mutual understanding due to their contrasting personalities and age difference as well as unspoken rivalry whose roots go back to their adolescence. In conflict with their mother, the sisters engaged in competition for the love of their father, a "race" (Duckworth, *Seeing* 60) in which Vivienne always held a privileged position, not so much thanks to her heterosexuality, contrary to what she believes, but rather due the fact that Isla was not the man's biological daughter, as transpires later in the novel.

The accidental arrival of the Burberries in the life of the sisters proves to exert a substantial impact on their feelings for each other, aggravating the mutual tensions to an even larger extent: "The sea delivers the 'Burberries' into their lives like messages in a bottle. Vivienne and Isla will uncork the Burberries on that ferry outing, not knowing how reactive their chemistry will be upon their lives" (Duckworth, *Seeing* 10). It is now the couple for whose attention they are surreptitiously competing. Moreover, Vivienne finds herself at a loss, being forced to meander between her attachment to Isla and the blooming infatuation with Jake: "Vivienne notices she has changed gear again so that now she is Isla's sister—even if only half—sister and loyal friend, looking out from this position at Jake. . . . Tomorrow, possibly sooner, she will have reversed the mechanism and become Jake's lover and conspirator looking askance at Isla, the bossy unwanted presence. Three's a crowd" (Duckworth, *Seeing* 136). Both relationships represent a moral obligation imposing upon her certain responsibilities. On the one hand, she feels obligated to support her sister in the time of her utmost vulnerability—"something of the protectiveness she felt as her boys grew and their voices changed" (Duckworth, *Seeing* 120); on the other hand, she is "overcome by an urge to protect him [Jake] from Isla's hostility and possible derision" (Duckworth, *Seeing* 121) and decides not to tell her sister about Jake's abuse by Jennet. As such, love implies for her not a boon but a "curse" (Duckworth, *Seeing* 120), a description carrying an implication of an inevitable external threat, which cannot be either fully controlled or resisted.

Disorderly Conduct takes the problem of conflicting loyalties to another plane. Whereas in all the other novels Duckworth limits her interest to the private sphere, in this one she broadens her perspective to include a specific social and political background. The main line of conflict runs between the heroine's commitment to her family and desire for personal happiness and her moral obligation as a member of a broader community, corresponding, as a matter of fact, to one of the fundamental dimensions of human ambiguity indicated by Beauvoir: "in his surpassing toward others, each one exists absolutely as for himself; each is interested in the liberation of all, but as a separate existence engaged in his own projects" (*Ethics* 112). Although

the anti-apartheid protests of 1981 exerted a disintegrating impact on New Zealand, splitting the nation into two opposing camps, the novel focuses rather on their social awareness-raising dimension for Sophie. Amid the turmoil, the heroine begins to "experience [her] existential world as a surrounding environment which [*she*] shares[s] *with others*" (Schrag 39) with an extraordinary immediacy, developing solidarity with her compatriots fighting for their cause. No longer distant and abstract, the happenings of the external world encroach upon her life in a very palpable manner, impelling her to address the clash between the personal and the communal:

> Demonstrators. Protesting against her sordid pleasure. And quite right too. What right has she to pleasure when some have none? When people are dying for their vision of freedom? (Duckworth, *Disorderly* 40)

> What right has she to leisure, a satisfactory sex life and a sense of personal fulfilment? Does she know anyone who can boast of these? . . . And this is New Zealand. God's own country. In other countries bellies are distending with malnutrition. Prisons are filling with political victims, alongside other victims of society. While she expects happiness, no less." (Duckworth, *Disorderly* 96)

Grasping herself as a part of a greater whole, Sophie is convinced that she must partake in the experience of other people instead of selfishly divorcing her own aspirations and dreams from their situation.

The tension culminates when she decides that her sense of empathy should be converted into participation in the potentially dangerous demonstrations. Throughout the rally, her sense of communal responsibility collides with the awareness of her duties towards her children:

> She feels morally bound to join the demonstration. But she does owe it to her children to stay at home and keep herself alive, at least unmaimed? (Duckworth, *Disorderly* 66)

> She looks nervously at the garden of suburban houses they are passing. Would she be coward enough to take refuge in one of these if there is a baton charge? If she is bonked on the head and becomes a vegetable the children will not forgive her. (Duckworth, *Disorderly* 68)

Her quandary appears to bear affinity to the moral dilemma faced by Sartre's student between enlisting to fight against the Nazis or staying at home to take care of his mother (Sartre, *Existentialism* 30) and, most importantly, is equally irresolvable. The novel does not place a premium on any of the two types of obligation but rather shows the inevitability of risk.

Inspired by the atmosphere of camaraderie, Sophie finally decides to face this risk and join other people in an enterprise that holds mutual significance for all of them:

> She can't be the only solo parent in this group of thousands, after all. Looking down now on the procession she recognises the faces of old friends, and others as familiar whom she has never met but knows, as one knows the features of a city. They are Wellington, her place, her people. . . . Demonstrators are attaching ropes to the iron stakes which support the barbed wire. . . . Sophie takes her hold on the rope and shares the triumph when the stakes pull free. (Duckworth, *Disorderly* 69)

The decision to do so apparently empowers the heroine, boosting not only her sense of belonging but also that of personal achievement.

5.3 IDEAL OF RECIPROCAL RECOGNITION

The central dilemma arising in the face of all the threats, restrictions and obligations involved in interpersonal relationships appears to be one with an ethical nature, as best illustrated by the question posed by the narrator in *Fooling*, echoing Beauvoir's understanding of "the social as the collectivity of interconnecting, individually confronting, competing consciousnesses, each of which places a moral responsibility on the other" (Deutscher 70). "How happy are Ros and Neil and Sylvia? How much responsibility do they owe each other? Is there a connection between happiness and responsibility? . . . Is love the culprit?" (Duckworth 66). Seen predominantly as a commitment, love constitutes a major onus for Duckworth's characters. If personal autonomy is treasured as one of the most precious values, it is only logical to wonder whether love may offer any authentic self-fulfilment at all. The author recoils from formulating any categorical and straightforward answers either in *Fooling* or in any other of her novels; still, it is suggested that what limits existential freedom is not love itself but rather the lovers' reluctance to forego their egoistic inclinations and desire for retaining an undivided subjectivity. In *Married Alive*, Duckworth emphasises that the relations of domination and subordination are deleterious to all involved. The hunting metaphor, whereby lovers are compared to "trapdoor spiders" (Duckworth, *Married* 14), makes it plain that where love is treated as a mere means to the end of satisfying one's most basic needs, both parties are ultimately reduced to objects with no capacity for self-surpassing. The pathway out of this debilitating stalemate envisaged by the writer leads through what appears to converge with Beauvoir's "ideal of living with vulnerability" (Deutscher 169). In order to establish a harmonious bond, the lovers have to affirm themselves mutually as objects and subjects at the same time and embrace the inevitable

risk of bonding in the spirit of reciprocal recognition, a venture that requires their concerted effort to be successful.

This approach is embodied by Adam, a man whom the heroine meets accidentally at a doctor's office and with whom she decides to start a new life at the close of the novel. In contrast to Francie and Sidney, who fall into the extremes of submissiveness and hostile competition, the man represents a paragon of reciprocal recognition. Adam's prime accomplishment, as compared to the other characters, lies in his ability to strike a rewarding balance between personal freedom and attachment to other people. He does not renounce his belonging to a larger community while maintaining his individuality: "'Oh I live alone—naturally. But I'm one of a group of people who think the same way I do. It gives us a feeling of being connected" (Duckworth, *Married* 134). As noted by Benson, "Adam's vision implies that managing in a changed world requires more than the resolution to become self-sufficient" (226). As opposed to Sidney, for whom the other unalterably constitutes a threat to his subjectivity and never a source of self-enrichment, Adam is keen to welcome alterity: "Adam's absorbing interests are in people other than himself. The wrongly hospitalised, the street kids who need a future. . . . And herself—he seemed interested in her feelings and situation" (Duckworth, *Married* 144). By acknowledging other people as unique subjects, neither inferior nor superior to himself, who deserve his attention and interest, he succeeds in embracing two, only seemingly conflicting, principles that, according to Pettersen, are the pivots upon which the Beauvoirian concept of authentic love revolves: "First there is mutual recognition of each other's *differences*; second there is the mutual recognition of each other's *equality*" (165).

It should be emphasised that the man's approach essentially coincides with the ideal of love cherished by Francie. The heroine rejects the instrumental model of relationships oriented on reproduction that gains prevalence in the wake of the epidemic as thoroughly unethical: "Bonding between healthy individuals to produce healthy kids—without love—that's supposed to be OK. I call that sin" (Duckworth, *Married* 58). As already mentioned, she views love in terms of a "free exchange" excluding "ideas of victory and defeat" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 825), where each lover plays the double role of subject and object involved in giving and receiving: "The perfect relationship. Love and be loved. Give and be understood" (Duckworth, *Married* 10). Her escape from Wellington with Sidney testifies to her readiness to take risks so as to bring this ideal to life. Importantly, the risk that she assumes overturns the logic of hunting, where the gratification of one's own needs requires the complete destruction of the other party. As early as during the journey away from the city, Francie struggles to build an atmosphere of communion, mutual respect and understanding with her lover: "If what Sidney claims is true,

then he is taking more of a risk joining forces with Francie than she is in joining up with him. She feels a surge of gratitude and puts her hand on the seat between them, hoping he will grasp it for a moment" (Duckworth, *Married* 34). The woman aspires precisely to a relationship in which receiving implies giving and the other way around.

Nevertheless, "[a]n ethic of generosity," as underscored by Bergoffen, "cannot find a place among those who prefer the securities of inequality to the risks of mutual vulnerability" ("Between" 203). Duckworth also appears to emphasise that the ideal cannot be attained if commitment to generosity is one-sided, as is the case with the relationship between Francie and Sidney, who does not acknowledge, let alone reciprocate, the heroine's good-faith efforts. According to Ellie Anderson, Beauvoir "affirms that the struggle for recognition is a stage that self-consciousness must go through before reaching a more ethical bond of recognition and reciprocity with other subjects" (382) rather than harshly denouncing the struggle in itself. Ann V. Murphy also comments that the author of *The Second Sex* "entertains the possibility of violence in certain concrete circumstances . . . situations in which violence appears as the only recourse against the oppressor" ("Between Generosity" 264). In a quite similar vein, the novel intimates that at times the only way for a woman to liberate herself from predatory masculinity is to resort to violence. Francie's final decision to lock the man in a suntan cubicle, just as he previously did to her, is depicted not as wanton revenge but as a necessary act of liberation, which allows the heroine to start a new life together with Adam. It is Sidney's abuse that has prompted her to engage in the power struggle, not out of sheer desire for domination but out of willingness to reclaim her own subjectivity and freedom.

The heroine confesses: "And give (sic) is so difficult. She wants to give to Adam" (Duckworth, *Married* 158). In contrast to Sidney, Adam is capable of accepting and reciprocating her gift, thereby paving the way towards the experience of reciprocal recognition for which Francie has been yearning. The man not only has the same understanding of love but also exhibits a more mature and profound awareness of its implications and requirements. While the heroine tends to look upon her idea of perfect love with nostalgia as a relic of the past—the irrevocably lost state of innocence, when the epidemic had yet not taken its toll—Adam sees it as a viable option, which may be achieved through their mutual commitment. Most crucially, he grasps precariousness and uncertainty as inherent in the human condition, irrespective of the epidemic: "You can be crazy without the vaccine" (Duckworth, *Married* 166). Although it is impossible to eradicate all threats, Adam wishes to be with Francie against the odds and tries to convince the heroine that, for their hopes to be realised, a tremendous leap of courage is necessary.

His final challenge—"We could both go mad. But I'll risk you, if you'll risk me" (Duckworth, *Married* 166)—essentially encapsulates the Beauvoirian notion of authentic love. Adam regards himself and Francie as equal: prospective aggressors and victims at the same time. For him, reciprocal recognition is an inherently joint project of two lovers who are willing to "renounce all forms of direction or possession" ("Between" 191), lucidly facing their own existential ambiguity and "[taking] on the other's contingence, that is, his lacks, limitations, and originary gratuitousness" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 785). As Francie reflects upon the strained history of New Zealand, she comes to comprehend that animosity has coexisted with love and bonding from time immemorial, or, to use Beauvoir's phrase, that "the human reality is at once *Mitsein* and separation" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 81): "On this beach in earlier times the blood of warring Maori and European has been shed. Lovers from happier days have held hands and made children" (Duckworth, *Married* 119). In order to be able to achieve harmony, it is necessary to negotiate between the desire to have unrestricted control over the world at the expense of other people and the equally strong need for emotional attachment, a task that she may face together with Adam. Both of them appear prepared to "assume/accept the tension of [their] ambiguity" and not to "violate the other's vulnerability" so as to "create the opening for a meeting between [them]—an opening that we might call the space of generous intersubjectivity" (Bergoffen, "Between" 202). The novel thus concludes on a positive note as "[t]he wind is blowing in Francie's mouth, taking heart breath away" (Duckworth, *Married* 166), stressing that the future will interlace inevitable hazards with opportunities for the couple to transcend conflict and enrich their respective selves: "Two separate beings, . . . confronting each other in their freedom, and seeking the justification of existence through each other, will always live an adventure full of risks and promises" (Beauvoir, *Second Sex* 305).

The ideal of reciprocal recognition is celebrated also in *Studmuffin*, which, in certain respects, reproduces the pattern established in *Married Alive*. Just as in the latter novel, Duckworth places her characters in a crisis situation that incites them to rethink their inauthentic approaches to relationships. Alice and Shilling find themselves stranded in unexplained circumstances on a mysterious island governed by Powell, a brooding tyrant who intends to transform all the inhabitants into his docile minions. He forbids them to speak, thereby preventing mutual communication and, as a result, forcing them to live in hiding. In the face of his tyranny, which also endangers their own autonomy, both the heroine and her lover mature in their understanding of love. The more they become familiar with the disturbed relations between the people living in the strange land, the more they value their mutual closeness and intimacy: "Where has sex gone to on the island? Has it gone the way of words? Is it enjoyed

exclusively by Alice and Shilling, just as dialogue is enjoyed only by them?" (Duckworth, *Studmuffin* 111). Most importantly, they begin to treat the presence of each other no longer exclusively as a threat but as also as "the promise of newness, enrichment, foreignness, surprise, the gift of the unexpected" (Deutscher 45), and, most crucially, a deliverance: "All very well being a strong, self-sufficient woman in nineties Auckland; here on the island no-one is self sufficient (sic), everyone s dependent for survival on everyone else—or on Powell? . . . She and Shilling were different from everyone else, but they had needed each other. How will he survive without Alice?" (Duckworth, *Studmuffin* 139); "Alice had at once convulsed with giggles, embarrassing herself, and then she had cried with disappointment because Shilling wasn't there" (Duckworth, *Studmuffin* 142). What Alice perceives as the source of peril at this moment is rather the forced lack of communication and separation: "They are running away from violence. But what sort of violence? . . . Can silence be called a kind of violence?" (Duckworth, *Studmuffin* 169).

When the novel ends with the couple's departure from the island, Alice, now pregnant, shares a new sense of communion with her lover, apparently capable of attaining reciprocal recognition:

> She remembers how pleased he is about the baby. How he had looked at her as if she'd announced first prize in a Lotto win. As if they have done something really extraordinary together, picking the correct numbers ahead of everybody else. She puts her fingers in his and hold on tight, tight, watching her hand resume its normal colour and shape. . . . So long as they hold on tightly to each other there is no danger of vanishing. I love, therefore I am. (Duckworth, *Studmuffin* 171)

At this point, love appears the exact opposite of what the heroine used to understand it to be: its destructive quality is juxtaposed against its creative potential. It no longer poses an irremediable threat to the subjectivity of the lovers but, on the contrary, enables them to preserve it. Most crucially, it becomes the very foundation of their identity, as underlined by the rephrasing of Descartes's famous dictum. The indispensability of love is thus again brought to the fore, this time with emphasis on its significance for the meaningful fulfilment of one's existential freedom. If both parties are willing to experience it in the spirit of generosity, without asserting their supremacy over the lover, it may validate the existence of each of them.

A moment of reciprocal recognition is shared also by Isla and Vivienne in *Seeing Red.* Throughout the novel, as already discussed, their relationship is tainted by mutual recriminations and conflicting feelings for other people. On the one hand, Isla and Vivienne

exhibit a tendency for passing judgments on each other, assuming a position of power over the other. While Isla, as the elder sister, is inclined to reprimand Vivienne, the latter takes revenge by "deliberately upsetting her sister" (Duckworth, *Seeing* 22). Furthermore, the heroine is also by no means free of the proclivity for criticising Isla, as evidenced by a scene early in the novel where she furtively watches her sister and denigrates her for her sloppy manner of dressing, which contrasts with her own attention to detail (Duckworth, *Seeing* 6). On the other hand, they both seek their mutual "approval" (Duckworth, *Seeing* 60), afraid of humiliation, such as when Vivienne worries that her failed affair with Jake will make her an object of ridicule in the eyes of her sister: "But Isla would sneer at her for getting herself into the role of vimp, victim, old-fashioned suffering heroine" (Duckworth, *Seeing* 155). Although they desist from acknowledging their own existential fragility, their resistance is broken, if only for a while, towards the end of the novel, when they unwillingly catch each other at their most vulnerable: "Vivienne would like to be private about her retching, but this time it isn't allowed. The time a smile crawls onto Isla's bloated face and an answering smile claws at Vivienne's top lip. Linked by messiness, like pedestrians caught in the same downpour, they have the sense to laugh at each other" (Duckworth, *Seeing* 166). Given to a fit of vomiting and crying, the sisters find themselves in a situation where their bodies take over control, reminding them painfully of their facticity. Each of them loses a part of their self-dignity: first by being confronted as a mere object at the whim of uncontainable forces and second by unwittingly exposing this vulnerability to the other. While acknowledging their common infirmity as human beings, they share a moment of reciprocal recognition.

5.4 DESIRE FOR KNOWLEDGE AND MEANINGFUL COMMUNICATION

To end this chapter, it is worthwhile taking note of a leitmotif that recurs meaningfully through Duckworth's fiction, underlining both the theme of power struggles and the significance of reciprocal recognition: the characters' urge to eliminate all ambiguities and uncertainties from their relationships by gaining an unequivocal knowledge of their lovers. In her article "The Other (Woman): Limits of Knowledge in Beauvoir's Ethics of Reciprocity," E. Anderson analyses the yearning for full familiarity with the loved one from the perspective of the Beauvoirian ideal of authentic love. Considering that reciprocity is "essentially predicated upon a recognition of others in their alterity, rather than on symmetry, similarity or sameness" (380-381), the scholar notes that any attempts to obtain full insight into the lover's interiority to achieve what she describes as "epistemic unity" are indicative of "the desire to *kill* the other . . . *as other*" (383), thereby obviating the risks implicated in the encounter with a foreign

consciousness. Such attempts, however, are futile according to Beauvoir: since no one can be an open book even to oneself, it is all the more impossible to fully know the other, a predicament named by E. Anderson as "epistemic opacity" (386).

This predicament marks its presence with particular intensity, on both the individual and the interpersonal level, in *Married Alive*. The curious disease prompts people to acts that they would never commit otherwise, making them alien to themselves, partially ignorant of their own intensions and capabilities—witness Francie's uncertainty as to whether she actually planned to kill her customer. As the plot unfolds, the reader is introduced to the vision of New Zealand fraught with an atmosphere of mutual mistrust. With the situation being as it is, "the country has become a nation of watchers" (Duckworth, *Married* 35), where people spy on one another to obtain at least some scraps of information that would come useful in forestalling lethal danger. The knowledge of another person, however, can be only highly uncertain, volatile, and never complete. First, people are wont to display "radical character changes" (Duckworth *Married* 9). Second, there are "kinds of madness . . . which can lie hidden in closets like sexual perversions for years" (Duckworth, *Married* 73), the result being that even close ones may suddenly prove to be completely alien.

This awareness is strikingly illustrated by the already discussed wedding scene, when Sidney and Francie are suddenly confronted as mutual strangers. For Francie, their extremely flimsy grasp of each other despite their everyday familiarity constitutes a source of nagging anxiety. She is bothered by Sidney's inscrutability and her own failures to predict his behaviour and feelings: "She lives in a state of uncertainty, not knowing which mood will claim him next" (Duckworth, *Married* 111). The secrets and uncertainties surrounding the man's past and present hamper her from engaging wholeheartedly in their relationship or experiencing real intimacy with the man: "Her feelings are ambivalent. She wants—no. Not that. She can't want sex while there is so much unexplained" (Duckworth, *Married* 49). Sidney, on his part, fears the prospect of becoming known through and through by his lover. Significantly, he explains that one of his main motives in murdering Lois was to prevent her from "[sucking] thoughts out of [his] mind" (Duckworth, *Married* 73), a confession that reveals his understanding of knowledge as a device of manipulation and control rather than a facilitator of communication—a weapon that threatens him with destruction.

While reversing the gender roles, *Pulling Faces* represents the theme of knowledge in a similar way. As with Sidney, Gwyn's persistent and ostentatious secrecy about herself is intended to protect her against vulnerability in her affair with Stuart. At the same time, with her mind-reading machine, she avails herself of secret knowledge about the man and other people

as an asset allowing her to pursue her personal interests. Knowledge empowers her with a position of superiority over Stuart and a guarantee that she holds their liaison in check: "And he had thought he was in control this time. . . . In control of his relationship with Gwyn, reining back his feelings, containing his impulses. God only knows what she might know about him. Things he doesn't know himself" (Duckworth, *Pulling* 164-165).

Nonetheless, it would be wrong to claim that the novel invariably associates the desire to know the lover with a propensity for domination or inability to confront one's own existential ambiguity. Beauvoir herself expresses utmost appreciation for "truthfulness" between people, castigating the "pretending" and "impersonations" into which women are usually forced in relationships with men (*Second Sex* 664) and so does Stuart in *Pulling Faces,* as quoted in the previous chapter: "I can't stand faking.' Faking. The word sends his thoughts off at a tangent" (Duckworth, *Pulling* 16). His inquisitiveness about Gwyn is also more nuanced than may appear at first sight. Perturbed by the woman's elusiveness, the man "is forced into the role of detective" (Duckworth, *Pulling* 151). "Why is love so greedy for knowledge?," asks the narrator just to answer: "But how, without intimate knowledge of her, can Stuart be the supportive sensitive lover he is determined to become?" (Duckworth, *Pulling* 151). Although the reference to greediness resonates with E. Anderson's interpretation of curiosity as possessiveness, Stuart regards knowledge as a necessary tool for surpassing his own self-centredness and gaining a better understanding of the woman's needs so as to be able to satisfy them in the spirit of generosity. For him, intimate familiarity opens each lover to the being of the other:

> And besides, he wants something more than just sex. He wants to talk. Or at least he wants Gwyn to talk. To reveal more of herself to him. He feels he has been making love to a fully clothed woman. . . . It is her psyche—her soul—that he wants to know, and she keeps that well wrapped up. One can't expect to know a woman's soul through her body. Can one? (Duckworth, *Pulling* 98)

His approach poses a stark contrast to John's lack of interest in Frieda's personal story in *A Barbarous Tongue*, an indifference that reinforces the asymmetry of their relationship: "We made love before he asked me any questions. I felt faintly affronted that he'd barely stopped to see who I was and how I'd come to be there. In the act of love, I suddenly knew how unhappy I was and a sob of self-pity escaped me, which I instantly disguised" (Duckworth 69).

Similar to *Pulling Faces*, *Fooling* also demonstrates that a situation where one person protects his or her robust sense of self with a shield of secrets and lies only reinforces the imbalance of power. The metaphor of gambling, used to convey the riskiness of human

relationships, also exposes their volatility, one of the novel's central problems. Inevitable mortality—"[one] thing you can rely on is time passing" (Duckworth, *Fooling* 9)—is juxtaposed against human unreliability and changeability, embodied by Widow Casey, a New Zealand authority figure, an owner of a "therapeutic salon for the spouses of gamblers and reformed gamblers" (Duckworth, *Fooling* 6) and, as revealed in the novel's finale, a transvestite with whom Ros's lover is cheating on her. The deceit of people to whom the heroine has felt attached strikes a tremendously severe blow to her sense of subjectivity. Having striven to make interpersonal ties a predictable and stable linchpin of her identity, she experiences their newly revealed fragility and artifice as an impediment to her self-development: "'How am I expected to grow up when everyone keeps lying to me? How?'" (Duckworth, *Fooling* 94). For her, knowledge represents the very condition of reciprocal recognition; being excluded from the truth, Ros sees herself in the position of a disposable object that may be discarded when no longer necessary: "So this is what it is to be real, no fooling. She links her hands across her stomach and rocks; she feels like the 'wrong doll' with her hair shorn off one side, lopsided, unloved" (Duckworth, *Fooling* 94).

The impulse towards knowing the loved one is represented as an urge to establish meaningful and reciprocal communication most notably in *A Message from Harpo*, particularly with the portrayal of Jess and her Alzheimer's suffering mother. The heroine's continuing endeavours to connect with Lena, all doomed to failure considering the nature of the disease, express her desperate yet good faith craving for an authentic bond going beyond the mechanical tedium of nursing care: "Why does it continue to matter that she is recognised and loved by this stranger in her mother's body?" (Duckworth, *Message* 29). It becomes clear that the elderly woman's debilitating condition serves as a powerful metaphor of the impossibility to communicate when Jess compares it to her husband's resistance to openness. Sam's disconcerting tendency to lock himself in his private world, to which the heroine is denied access, serves as a "defence mechanism" (Duckworth, *Message* 24). By impairing Jess from knowing him better, he protects his own robust subjectivity, at the same time destroying the potential for the reciprocal recognition for which Jess longs: "He can be reached if she persists. But it's hard work. More and more she doesn't want to be bothered" (Duckworth, *Message* 25).

The heroine juxtaposes her current marital problems with mutual understanding against the perfect rapport with her first husband at the early stages of their relationship. Most importantly, in this context, the lovers' yearning to become fully knowledgeable about each other is represented in a thoroughly positive light as a manifestation of genuine willingness to eradicate any note of egoism and a penchant for domination rather than as a sign of possessiveness:

> It was as if they wanted to turn each other inside out, pluck at every hair thought and examine it. Tell all the truth—as if there could be such a thing. Promise you'll never lie to me, promise. Promise you won't ever let us misunderstand and quarrel and be too proud. Promise. I promise. And later the same searching devouring of each other's bodies. (Duckworth, *Message* 84)

Their desire seemed ethical because it was based on their respect for each other "as free and creative, not as things or objects to own" (Gothlin, "Beauvoir and Sartre" 133). Gerry and Jess considered knowledge to be a mutual gift that they could bring as a joint contribution to their tie so as to make it gratifying for both of them. They had the courage to take the risk inherent in any interpersonal engagement without imposing their own will on the lover or desperately shielding themselves against vulnerability, an attitude reminiscent of the final challenge that Adam and Francie decide to accept in *Married Alive*: "She and Gerry forged their relationship with guards down, unarmoured, like children, like Adam and Eve. Two virgins as unwise as each other, as naked. It is this intimacy, this knowing, which fatally attracts her" (Duckworth, *Message* 227).

As the plot unfolds, Jess casts her mind back upon those times and bemoans her current inability to comprehend those whom she loves: "She hates being mystified by the inexplicable behaviour of people close to her. It seems to threaten her. . . . She likes being given 'the truth'. Confessions make her feel safe—drawn in rather than shut out" (Duckworth, *Message* 69-70). Nevertheless, much as her thirst for knowledge coincides with the need for meaningful ties, it also appears to stem from Jess's reluctance to acknowledge ambiguity as the organising principle of human existence. The heroine strives to obtain one fixed truth about the loved ones without realising that, first, "[i]n love, friendship, and all affections, each person remains a mysterious stranger for the other" (Beauvoir, "Existentialism" 208) and, second, that this kind of truth, conceived of as an unequivocal meaning or core essence, does not exist. This awareness comes only at the end of the novel with the message of "no message" (Duckworth, *Message* 311), as already quoted. Just as external reality is volatile and unfathomable—"the ever-whirling wheel of change" from Edmund Spenser's poem referred to at one point (Duckworth, *Message* 8)—so too are people always in a state of flux and never fully transparent to one another; "there is an insurmountable abyss between people, which means that lovers can never . . . definitively capture the secrets of their being lost to the other," as remarked by Cleary (111). Consequently, there is just no other possibility than to accept, to use E. Anderson's phrase, this

"epistemic opacity" (86): "So perhaps that's the point. A clean slate" (Duckworth, *Message* 312).

It can be observed that Duckworth posits a distinction between the desire for knowledge in good faith, which conditions reciprocal recognition, and that in bad faith, which contributes to perpetuating the dynamics of domination and subordination. Arising from the need for meaningful communication, the former is aligned, in a Beauvoirian spirit, with the awareness that "[t]o love another, as opposed to possessing or wanting to possess that other, is to recognize that person as a free subject in her own right, and therefore as strange, forbidden, and always capable of escaping all attempts to possess her" (Mahon 56-57). It opens space for a relationship based on respect for the other person's autonomy, making it possible to win transcendence. Most importantly, this desire is always shared by both parties, who seek to know the other to a fuller extent and simultaneously allow themselves to be known, thereby surrendering a part of their self-pride and willingly assuming the concomitant risk instead of positioning themselves as the unyielding defenders of their own subjectivity. The latter, by stark contrast, always goes hand in hand with an intention to gain advantage over the other person through manipulation and deceit so as to gain the position of power. At the same time, Duckworth emphasises that inscrutability and uncertainty are inextricable ingredients of interpersonal relationships due to the very character of human existence. It is thus crucial to have the courage to confront the ambiguity and lack of fixedness of both oneself and the other.

5.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter has demonstrated that ambiguity, which is brought to the fore in Duckworth's fiction as the fundamental principle of human existence, permeates and structures human relationships as well. The writer consistently imagines them as an arena where clashes occur between conflicting desires and impulses. As vividly signalled by the metaphor of breathing and suffocation employed in *Camping on the Faultline,* they both constitute the *sine qua non* condition of meaningful existence and pose a grave risk to one's personal freedom. Most importantly, she represents this threat as universal, fuelling bonds not only between lovers but also between mothers and their children.

Despite attempts to dispel the threat through isolation, Duckworth's characters form various ties so as to satisfy their need for emotional connection. Nevertheless, unable to forego the craving for undivided subjectivity, fixed identity, and complete self-mastery, they find themselves entrapped in the conflictual dynamics of domination and subordination, which hinder both parties—even the victorious one—from attaining a genuine sense of self-fulfilment.

In most cases, it is the female protagonists who are victimised by their male lovers, an oppression to which some of them, most conspicuously Frieda in *A Barbarous Tongue* and, to a lesser extent, Francie in *Married Alive*, succumb out of the belief that their self-value lies in union with the man or out of fear of losing a sense of stability. Nevertheless, with *Pulling Faces* and *Seeing Red*, Duckworth makes it clear that a predilection for oppression is by no means the exclusive preserve of men. Although patriarchal trappings conspire to make them submissive, women are by no means innately free of the pull to boost their own sense of self at the expense of other people and, given felicitous circumstances—be it the weakness of particular men in their lives or emancipatory social transformations—resort to various forms of violence so as to achieve their private ends.

Akin to Beauvoir, Duckworth appears to imagine human relationships as "always . . . permeated with tensions as individuals cannot conceive of themselves as self-enclosed and self-sufficient" (Daigle, "Unweaving" 263) but not irreversibly doomed to conflict. Mutual hostility may be surmounted if both parties strive to face the risk in the spirit of reciprocal recognition. At the same time, however, she is far from drawing an airbrushed picture of reality in which lovers would easily forego their selfishness. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir underscores that "friendship and generosity, which accomplish this recognition of freedoms concretely, are not easy virtues; they are undoubtedly man's highest accomplishment" (193-194). Similarly, in Duckworth's novels, reciprocal recognition requires considerable maturity and an incessant commitment to self-amelioration. In some cases, most notably in *Married Alive* and *Studmuffin*, it is suggested that that the embrace of the ideal may prove to be long-standing and truly fruitful. In *A Message from Harpo*, by contrast, she shows that even good-faith efforts may be stunted by external factors.

Duckworth's heroines are thus forced to constantly meander and oscillate between their conflicting needs. Their dilemma finds its most telling and explicit articulation in Ros's musings in *Fooling*: "A woman of the nineties is expected to want control of her life − but not necessarily self-control—to be centred and self-sufficient, but not, of course, self-centred. It isn't easy" (Duckworth 34). She may refer to a specific period of time, but her remark appears to hold true, to a lesser of greater extent, for most of the heroines in Duckworth's novels. They all face the formidable task of forging a middle way between the extremes of egoism and submission to the will of the people they love—a never-perfected and never-concluded process.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has been driven by a gynocritical desire to lift Marilyn Duckworth's writing out of its unduly neglected position as an object of literary study and unearth the writer's distinctive vision of women's existential experience, with the hope of making a modest contribution to research into women's literature. The theoretical viewpoint adopted for this enterprise has been derived from the thought of Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Simone de Beauvoir. Although several critics have noticed that Duckworth's fiction is threaded with existentialist overtones, existentialist philosophy has never been properly exploited as a repository of useful conceptual tools to cast an informative light on the message conveyed by these overtones. The present study has attempted to rectify this oversight by referencing the concepts of anxiety, ambiguity, and authenticity as understood by the philosophers so as to open up a coherent perspective on Duckworth's imaginative engagements with the vagaries of women's lives within predominantly patriarchal but most crucially constantly shifting and unpredictable reality. "What she suffers from is the human condition, no less" (160)—such is the categorical diagnosis of Sophie's predicament in Duckworth's *Disorderly Conduct*. This diagnosis has been extended to all the other heroines portrayed by Duckworth, all weighted by the feelings of uncanny dislocation from the external world, self-alienation intertwined with entrapment in stultifying social roles, incapacity to be the authors of their own lives, a futile desire for fixity or frustration in dissatisfying and oppressive interpersonal relationships. It has been argued that the human condition referred to in this dictum may be fruitfully described in terms of anxiety, which confronts the women with their indefiniteness as human beings and unmitigated responsibility for freedom of self-constitution; ambiguity, which throws them into tension between self-defining subjectivity and objectivity vulnerable to external injunctions; and authenticity, which requires the lucid acceptance of existence as a personal project, resistance to social constructions as well as respect for the freedom of other people.

The first step in the argument was to lay the theoretical groundwork for the textual analysis of Duckworth's fiction. Chapter One began by outlining how Heidegger, Sartre, and Beauvoir conceive of the human being both as an individual existent and as a participant in a shared world. The emphasis fell on the belief, common to them all, in the indeterminateness, changeability, and incompleteness of human existence, which, devoid of any pre-assigned or fixed substance, is filled with meaning on an ongoing basis through ever new ventures. Much as this unceasing process of self-creation is an expression of one's personal freedom, at the same time it is also subject to external factors, including positioning within the given historical,

social, and cultural space, in which the members of a community confront each other with their own interests, goals, and values. These introductory remarks segued into a detailed discussion of the three concepts guiding this dissertation. First, anxiety was described from Heidegger's perspective as a total breakdown of habitual meanings and tranquilised settlement in the world, disclosing the nothingness at the core of existence; next, it was examined from the points of view of Sartre and Beauvoir as a sense of overwhelming unease at the extent of human freedom and its implications. Second, the spotlight was applied to the Beauvoirian notion of ambiguity, which refigures the understanding of human existence to show that it is not absurd but indeterminate and poised between opposing states: subjectivity and objectivity, freedom and facticity, transcendence and immanence, living and dying. Third, attention was given to authenticity, posited by Heidegger, Sartre, and Beauvoir as an ever-elusive goal of living in the awareness of one's fragile existential condition and pursuing the ongoing project of self-formation against the temptation to rest in the tranquilising comfort of ready-made scripts, captured by the author of *Being and Time* in the notion of the they-self. The question of authenticity was discussed also in the context of interpersonal relationships, focusing on their conflictual nature, accentuated most prominently by Sartre with the dynamics of the objectifying look, and then on the possibilities of surpassing the conflict through Beauvoir's ideal of reciprocal recognition.

Chapter Two concerned itself with Duckworth's memoir, having as its objective to reveal how the writer, even if not consciously inspired by the philosophy of existentialism, has remained acutely attuned to existential quandaries in her own life and how this distinctive sensibility has had bearing on her writing. The chapter demonstrated that her self-narrative addresses the same problems that constitute the primary foci of her fiction as examined in this dissertation. The title of *Camping on the Faultline* gives a taste of the writer's unflagging preoccupation about how insecure and unpredictable human existence is, an intuition that has accompanied her starting from childhood, which is recounted as a time of a burgeoning awareness of human ambiguity and mortality. While reminiscing about her adult life, in turn, Duckworth revisits her own propensity for falling into inauthenticity through subordination to external pressures and expectations. In this context, she concentrates on her relationships with other people, exhibiting an understanding of love that resonates with the ideas of Sartre and Beauvoir. For her, it represents, also as far as the mother-child relationship is concerned, a locus of threat and conflict. The risk that it involves must be yet accepted in good faith as a challenge.

The textual analysis of the writer's fiction opened by tracing the themes of anxiety and ambiguity. Chapter Three undertook to explicate the underlying existential dimension of the

crises afflicting many of Duckworth's heroines by referencing Heidegger's idea of anxiety as a collapse of tranquillity and usual familiarity with the world, exposing the truth of the human condition, Sartre's and Beauvoir's insights into anxiety of freedom and the distinctly Beauvoirian concept of human ambiguity. The point of departure for this task was to illustrate how Duckworth tends to reconstruct seemingly well-known reality as an uncanny and unstable existential space, in which the heroines grow anxiously estranged from their surroundings, other people, and themselves. While analysing such novels as *A Gap in the Spectrum*, *Married Alive,* and *Rest for the Wicked,* which exemplify this thematic focus in the most explicit ways, it was noticed that the writer blends realist with non-realist conventions so as to give prominence to the proximity between the commonplace and the bizarre in human existence. Next, it was argued that anxiety in which the heroines are thrown brings them face to face with instabilities within their condition as human beings. The women come to an awakening of the groundlessness and volatility of their existence, such as Diana after having been mysteriously catapulted into London, or Francie amid the turmoil of the epidemic; their freedom of self-creation in the absence of any fixed guideposts, as evidenced most conspicuously by Jane; and their mortality, one of the central preoccupations of thoroughly realist *Disorderly Conduct,* which weaves the sense of existential strangeness into the portrayal of social unrest in New Zealand. Further, it was shown that *Unlawful Entry*, *Seeing Red* and *Studmuffin* expand the list of existential concerns troubling the heroines with an awareness that their individual existence is ridiculously schematic and miserly insignificant when considered from a broader perspective. Special attention was accorded also to the prominent role of the body, which becomes a conspicuous presence when the women lose their habitual orientation in the world, signalling anxiety as well as responding to it. The final section framed the problems discussed previously within the concept of ambiguity, contending that the heroines' experience may be understood in terms of a confrontation with the tensions animating their existence: between subjectivity and objectivity, freedom and facticity, autonomy and interconnection with other people, living and approaching death.

After having sketched the troubled process of the heroines arriving at an understanding of their existential fragility, freedom, and ambiguity, the dissertation shifted the discussion to the ways in which they respond to this reality. Chapter Four employed the concept of (in)authenticity to explain how and why women in Duckworth's fiction usually either fail to assume responsibility for self-determination or exercise their agency in a flawed manner, with the task of negotiating the tension between being autonomous subjects and vulnerable objects overwhelming them to the point of exasperation. First, the analysis focused on the experience

of Diana in *A Gap in the Spectrum* to claim that the novel represents authenticity, in a manner consistent with existentialist thought, as a never-completed enterprise, in which the potential for authoring one's life collides time and again with the temptation to succumb to ready-made patterns so as to evade the anxiety of choice. Next, the motives behind women's propensity for renouncing this struggle and clinging to social schemas despite their oppressiveness were examined with reference to *Rest for the Wicked* and *The Matchbox House*, both featuring a motif of escape. In the former, Jane, despite profound dissatisfaction with her life as a housewife and mother, is unable to abandon or at least reconfigure the patriarchally-scripted boundaries of her roles primarily because they protect her against the challenges of freedom. Likewise, in the latter, Jean lingers stubbornly in her malaise, substituting action with fantasy, afraid, as she is, of undertaking the toils of ongoing self-modelling. These insights were followed by inquiry into another form of inauthenticity, manifested most conspicuously by the heroines in "Among Strangers" and *Rest for the Wicked*, as well as the male character in *Over the Fence Is Out*: entertaining the illusion of a fixed identity and seeking a sense of solidity and completeness in role playing. The subsequent section claimed that Duckworth is at the same time well aware that autonomous self-creation, resisting the pressure of social conventions, may paradoxically be misused as a palliative against human ambiguity and a tool of domination over other people, as evinced by the portrayal of Gwyn in *Pulling Faces*. The chapter ended with a reconstruction of the ideals of authenticity championed in *A Barbarous Tongue* and *A Message from Harpo*: acknowledging weaknesses inherent in human existence while simultaneously striving to counteract them with meaningful projects and engaging in self-constitution without reliance on externally imposed arrangements.

Chapter Five transposed the question of authenticity onto the plane of interpersonal engagements, exploring whether the heroines, as well as their male partners, are able to successfully handle "the tension between needing love and needing independence" (Duckworth *Camping* 291). First, it was observed that, akin to Sartre and Beauvoir, Duckworth imagines human relationships as a site of unremitting threat to one's autonomy. The characters strive to disarm this threat using various strategies. One of them involves isolation and preference for fleeting ties over lasting connections to preserve the sense of having undivided subjectivity. The most persuasive illustration of this foible appears in *Married Alive*, where the epidemic of madness is compressed into a powerful metaphor of the strained nature of human relationships. The problem figures prominently also in two novels published in the 1990s: *Studmuffin* and *Fooling*, with the latter employing the trope of addiction and gambling to convey the risks attendant to love and the tendency to treat relationships instrumentally as a non-committal

means of satisfying's one's own needs. Next, careful attention was given to the dynamics of domination and subordination, whereby the heroines usually surrender to oppression by their domineering male partners, idolising the men, such as Frieda, or prioritising the value of the bond over their own claim to subjectivity, such as Francie. With *Seeing Red*, however, Duckworth proves that at the same time she is far from seeing women as innately free of the appetite for control over other people and an inclination for violence. Finally, in order to protect themselves against the hazards of love, the characters sometimes seek to abolish the threatening alterity through a total merger with the lover, a tendency which emerges most clearly in *A Barbarous Tongue* and *Seeing Red.* In Duckworth's fictional world, tension is yet integral not only to romantic relationship but also to the mother-child bond. The writer gives proof of her determination to deconstruct conventional representations by depicting mothers as unreliable, distant, envious of their daughters and exasperated by their motherly duties. Last but not least, the discussion shifted to the complex networks of relationships in which Duckworth's characters find themselves embroiled, facing competing loyalties, a challenge foregrounded most compellingly in *Disorderly Conduct,* with Sophie caught between love for her children and a sense of duty as a member of a community. At the next stage, it was argued that *Married Alive* and *Studmuffin* present a reassuring vision, striking a chord with Beauvoir's concept of reciprocal recognition, where conflict may be assuaged if two people acknowledge their own existential ambiguity, embrace their mutual freedoms and accept risk as inevitable. The chapter closed by probing into the recurring theme of desire for the knowledge of the lover, noting that the writer distinguishes between situations where it may open the door to reciprocity and those where it reinforces the code of violence and domination.

The line of the argument developed throughout this dissertation has validated and hopefully reinforced Duckworth's credentials as a writer with "a good-humoured and compassionate understanding of the vagaries of the human condition" (qtd. in "Marilyn Duckworth"). It has made it clear, step by step, how she carefully weighs different perspectives, being always alert to the complex nuances of women's experience and hence reluctant to place unquestioned faith in taken-for-granted explanations. Her writing involves balancing between the mundane and the uncanny or between the predictable and the unexpected, and bringing them into collision, whereby the conventional themes of women's fiction, such as identity issues, dissatisfaction with social roles or the workings of romantic relationships, are dissected in the light of their hidden existential dimension. Convinced about the impermanence, changeability, and ambiguity of human existence, Duckworth exhibits a continuing awareness that women's roles, motives and desires are rarely clear-cut and fixed. She populates her fiction with heroines who

are buffeted by, to use Beauvoir's phrase, "contradictory aspirations to both life and rest, existence and being" (*Second Sex* 194). On the one hand, they are victimised by patriarchal structures and conventions, experience their stultifying restrictiveness in a very palpable manner and often seek avenues of escape, even if not necessarily the most felicitous ones; on the other hand, they clutch to them willingly, afraid of the uncertainty concomitant with the enterprise of forging new pathways for themselves. Furthermore, they may be just as violent, cunning, and greed for power and control as the quintessential patriarchal despot. Contrary to the accusations levelled against her, however, by no means does she express any anti-feminist sentiments at this point. In *Literature After Feminism,* Rita Felski states: "We cannot have female agency without the possibility of female error and cruelty. . . . To see women only as blameless victims, hapless pawns pushed around the chessboard by the hand of patriarchy, is to diminish them in literature as in life" (125-126). This is a message of which Duckworth appears fully cognizant. Without condemning her heroines, she portrays them as imperfect human beings who often err in their everyday struggles with existence. All these elements make her writing a truly compelling and perceptive exploration of the existential experience of women, as varied and as similar as it is.

WORKS CITED

Primary Sources

Duckworth, Marilyn. *A Barbarous Tongue.* Hutchinson, 1963.

---. *A Gap in the Spectrum.* Oxford UP, 1959.

---. *A Message from Harpo.* Hodder & Stoughton, 1989.

---. "Among Strangers." *Explosions on the Sun,* Hodder & Stoughton, 1989, pp. 38-42.

---. *Camping on the Faultline: A Memoir*. Vintage. 2000.

---. *Disorderly Conduct.* Hodder & Stoughton, 1984.

---. *Fooling.* Hazard Press, 1994.

---. *Married Alive.* Hodder & Stoughton, 1985.

---. *Over the Fence Is Out.* Hutchinson, 1969.

---. *Pulling Faces.* Hodder & Stoughton, 1987.

---. *Rest for the Wicked.* Hodder & Stoughton, 1986

---. *Seeing Red.* Vintage, 1993.

---. *Studmuffin*. Vintage, 1997.

---. *The Matchbox House.* Hutchinson, 1960.

---. *Unlawful Entry.* Vintage, 1992.

Secondary Sources

Aho, Kevin. *Existentialism: An Introduction.* John Wiley & Sons, 2014. *Google Books,* https://books.google.pl/books?id=gEhZAwAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=pl#v=onepage&q&f=false. Accessed 11 May 2021.

---. *Heidegger's Neglect of the Body.* State University of New York Press, 2009.

Alcock, Peter. "The Writing of Women in New Zealand." *World Literature Written in English,* vol. 17, no. 1, 1978, pp. 241-251. *Taylor&Francis,* doi: 10.1080/17449857808588530.

Anderson, Ellie. "The Other (Woman): Limits of Knowledge in Beauvoir's Ethics of Reciprocity." *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2014, pp. 380-388. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325.

Anderson, Thomas C. "Sartre's Early Ethics and the Ontology of *Being and Nothingness*." *The Existentialists*: *Critical Essays on Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Sartre*, edited by Charles Guignon, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003, pp. 135-152.

Andrew, Barbara S. "Beauvoir's Place in Philosophical Thought." *The Cambridge Companion to Simone de Beauvoir*, edited by Claudia Card, Cambridge UP, 2003, pp. 24-44.

Antonaccio, Maria. *Picturing the Human: The Moral Thought of Iris Murdoch.* Oxford UP, 2000;

Arp, Kristana. "Beauvoir's Concept of Bodily Alienation." *Feminist Interpretations of Simone de Beauvoir*, edited by Margaret A. Simons, Penn State Press, 2010, pp. 161-178.

---. *The Bonds of Freedom: Simone de Beauvoir's Existentialist Ethics.* Open Court Publishing, 2001.

Barnes, Hazel E. "Sartre and Feminism: Aside from *The Second Sex* and All That." *Feminist Interpretations of Jean-Paul Sartre*, edited by Julien S. Murphy, Penn State Press, 1999, pp. 22-44.

---. Translator's Introduction. *Being and Nothingness.* Translated by Hazel E. Barnes, Washington Square Press, 2003, pp. viii-xliii.

Barrett, William. *Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy*. Doubleday Anchor Books, 1962.

Bartky, Sandra Lee. *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*. Routledge, 1990.

Bauer, Nancy. "Simone de Beauvoir on Motherhood and Destiny." *A Companion to Simone de Beauvoir,* edited by Laura Hengehold and Nancy Bauer, Wiley Blackwell, 2017, pp. 146-159.

---. *Simone de Beauvoir, Philosophy, and Feminism.* Columbia UP, 2001.

Beauvoir, Simone de. "Existentialism and Popular Wisdom." Translated by Marybeth Timmerman, *Simone de Beauvoir: Philosophical Writings*, edited by Margaret A. Simons, University of Illinois Press, 2004, pp. 203-220.

---. *Force of Circumstance.* Translated by Richard Howard, Penguin Books, 1987.

---."Jean-Paul Sartre." Translated by Marybeth Timmerman, *Simone de Beauvoir: Philosophical Writings*, edited by Margaret A. Simons, University of Illinois Press, 2004, pp. 229-235.

---. "Literature and Metaphysics." Translated by Veronique Zaytzeff and Frederick M. Morrison, *Simone de Beauvoir: Philosophical Writings*, edited by Margaret A. Simons, University of Illinois Press, 2004, pp. 269-277.

---."Pyrrhus and Cineas." Translated by Marybeth Timmerman, *Simone de Beauvoir: Philosophical Writings*, edited by Margaret A. Simons, University of Illinois Press, 2004, pp. 89-149.

---. *The Coming of Age.* Translated by Patrick O'Brian, Warner Book, 1975.

---. *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. Translated by Bernard Frechtman, Philosophical Library, 1948.

---. *The Second Sex.* Translated by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany Chevallier, Vintage Books, 2011.

Behnke, Elizabeth A. "Husserl's Phenomenology of Embodiment." *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* edited by James Fieser & Bradley Dowden, 2011, https://www.iep.utm.edu/husspemb/. Accessed 11 May 2020.

Bell, Linda A. "Different Oppressions. A Feminist Exploration of Sartre's *Anti-Semite and Jew.*" *Feminist Interpretations of Jean-Paul Sartre*, edited by Julien S. Murphy, Penn State Press, 2010, pp. 123-148.

Benson, Dale Christine. *A World like This: Existentialism in New Zealand Literature.* 2000. University of Otago, PhD dissertation.

Bergoffen, Debra. "Between the Ethical and the Political: The Difference of Ambiguity." *The Existential Phenomenology of Simone de Beauvoir*, edited by Wendy O'Brien, Springer, 2001, pp. 187-203.

---. "Existentialism and Ethics." *The Bloomsbury Companion to Existentialism,* edited by Felicity Joseph, Jack Reynolds and Ashley Woodward, Bloomsbury, 2011, pp. 98-116.

---. Introduction. "Pyrrhus and Cineas," by Simone de Beauvoir, translated by Marybeth Timmerman, *Simone de Beauvoir: Philosophical Writings*, edited by Margaret A. Simons, University of Illinois Press, 2004, pp. 89-149.

---. "Marriage, Autonomy and the Feminine Protest." *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Critical Essays,* edited by Margaret A. Simons, Indiana UP, 2006, pp. 92-112.

---. "Simone de Beauvoir: (Re)counting the Sexual Difference." *The Cambridge Companion to Simone de Beauvoir,* edited by Claudia Card, Cambridge UP, 2003, pp. 248-265.

---. *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Gendered Phenomenologies, Erotic Generosities*. State University of New York Press, 1997.

Bergson, Henri. *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic.* Translated by Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell, The Macmillan Company, 1914.

Bessedik, Fatima Zahra. "A Heideggerian Reading of Jack's Homelessness in Marilynne Robinson's *Home*." *Critical Surve*y, vol. 30, no. 4, 2018, pp. 81-94.

Blattner, William. *Heidegger's Being and Time*. Continuum, 2006.

Butler, Judith. "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*." *Simone de Beauvoir: A Critical Reader,* edited by Elizabeth Fallaize, Psychology Press, 1998, pp.29-42.

Camus, Albert. *The Stranger.* Translated by Gilbert Stuart, Vintage Books. 1958.

Card, Claudia. “Beauvoir and the Ambiguity of ‘Ambiguity’ in Ethics.” Introduction. *The Cambridge Companion to Simone de Beauvoir*, edited by Claudia Card, Cambridge UP, 2003, pp. 1-23.

Catalano, Joseph S. *A Commentary on Jean-Paul Sartre's Being and Nothingness*. University of Chicago Press, 1985.

Chanter, Tina. “The Problematic Normative Assumptions of Heidegger’s Ontology.” *Feminist Interpretations of Martin Heidegger*, edited by Nancy J. Holland and Patricia Huntington, The Pennsylvania State UP, 2001, pp. 73-108.

Cleary, Skye. *Existentialism and Romantic Love.* Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Cohen Shabot, Sara. “Laboring with Beauvoir: In Search of the Embodied Subject in Childbirth.” *A Companion to Simone de Beauvoir*, edited by Laura Hengehold and Nancy Bauer, Wiley Blackwell, 2017, pp. 134-145.

Cooper, David E. *Existentialism: A Reconstruction.* 2nd ed., Blackwell, 1999.

---.“Existentialism as a Philosophical Movement.” *The Cambridge Companion to Existentialism*, edited by Stephen Crowell, Cambridge UP, 2012, pp. 27-49.

Cosslett, Tess. “Feminism, Matrilinealism, and the ‘House of Women’ in Contemporary Women’s Fiction” *Journal of Gender Studies,* vol. 5, no. 1, 1996, *Taylor&Francis*, doi: 10.1080/09589236.1996.9960625

Cox, Gary. *The Existentialist's Guide to Death, the Universe and Nothingness*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011. Digital.

Crowell, Stephen. “Sartre’s Existentialism and the Nature of Consciousness.” *The Cambridge Companion to Existentialism*, edited by Stephen Crowell, Cambridge UP, 2012, pp. 199-226.

Daigle, Christine. *Beauvoir and Sartre*: *The Riddle of Influence*. Indiana UP, 2009.

---. “The Problem of Ethics for Existentialism.” Introduction. *Existentialist Thinkers and Ethics,* edited by Christine Daigle, McGill-Queen’s UP, 2006, pp. 3-22.

---. “Unweaving the Threads of Influence: Beauvoir and Sartre.” *A Companion to Simone de Beauvoir*, edited by Laura Hengehold and Nancy Bauer, Wiley Blackwell, 2017, pp. 260-270

Dally, Anne. *Inventing Motherhood: The Consequences of an Ideal.* Schocken Books, 1983.

Deutscher, Penelope. *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Ambiguity, Conversion, Resistance.* Cambridge UP, 2008.

Drabble, Margaret. Introduction. *Owls Do Cry*, by Janet Frame, Hachette UK, 2016.

Dreyfus, Hubert L. *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I.* The MIT Press, 1991.

D'Cruz, Doreen. "Anderson, Barbara." *Contemporary Novelists*. 7th ed., edited by Neil Schlager and Josh Lauer, St. James Press, 2001, pp. 30-31.

"Duckworth, Marilyn (Rose Adcock) 1935-." *Contemporary Authors, New Revision Series, Encyclopedia.com,* www.encyclopedia.com/arts/educational-magazines/duckworth-marilyn-rose-adcock-1935. Accessed 11 May 2021.

Evans, Patrick. *The Penguin History of New Zealand Literature.* Penguin Books, 1990.

Fell, Joseph P. *Heidegger and Sartre: An Essay on Being and Place.* Columbia UP, 1979.

Felski, Rita. *Literature After Feminism*. The University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Fielding, Hellen A. "The Poetry of Habit: Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty on Aging Embodiment." *Simone de Beauvoir's Philosophy of Age: Gender, Ethics, and Time*, edited by Silvia Stoller, Walter de Gruyter, 2014, pp. 69-82.

Forsberg, Niklas. *On Iris Murdoch and the Limits of Philosophical Discourse*. Bloomsbury, 2013.

Freeman, Lauren. "Love is Not Blind: In/visibility and Recognition in the Thinking of Martin Heidegger," *IWM – Institute for Human Sciences of Wien, Junior Visiting Fellow Conferences 26,* www.iwm.at/publications/5-junior-visiting-fellows-conferences/vol-xxvi/love-is-not-blind. Accessed 11 May 2021.

---. "Reconsidering Relational Autonomy: A Feminist Approach to Selfhood and the Other in the Thinking of Martin Heidegger." *Inquiry: An International Journal of Philosophy,* vol. 54, no. 4, 2011, pp. 361-383. *PhilPapers,* doi: 10.1080/0020174X.2011.592342.

Freud, Sigmund. *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis.* Translated by Joan Riviere, Pocket Books, 1953.

---. *The Interpretation of Dreams*: *The Complete and Definitive Text.* Translated by A. A. Brill, Wordsworth Editions, 1997.

Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. Dell Publishing, 1974.

Fullbrook, Edward, and Kate Fullbrook. "Beauvoir and Plato: The Clinic and the Cave." *The Existential Phenomenology of Simone de Beauvoir*, edited by Wendy O'Brien, Springer, 2001, pp. 53-65.

---. *Sex and Philosophy: Rethinking de Beauvoir and Sartre,* Continuum, 2009.

Gardner, Sebastian. *Being and Nothingness*: *A Reader's Guide*. Continuum, 2009.

Gatens, Moira. "Beauvoir and Biology: A Second Look." *The Cambridge Companion to Simone de Beauvoir*, edited by Claudia Card, Cambridge UP, 2003, pp. 266-285.

Gibbons, Peter. “Life Writing (New Zealand).” *Encyclopedia of Post-Colonial Literatures in English*, 2nd ed., edited by Eugene Benson and L.W. Conolly, Routledge, 2004, pp. 871-874.

---. “Non-Fiction.” *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English*, edited by Terry Sturm, Oxford UP, 1991, pp. 25-104.

Golomb, Jacob. *In Search of Authenticity. From Kierkegaard to Camus.* Routledge, 2005.

Gorner, Paul. *Heidegger’s Being and Time*: *An Introduction.* Cambridge UP, 2007.

Gothlin, Eva (*see also* Lundgren-Gothlin, Eva). “Beauvoir and Sartre on Appeal, Desire, and Ambiguity.” *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Critical Essays*, edited by Margaret A. Simons, Indiana UP, 2006, pp. 132-145.

---. “Reading Simone de Beauvoir with Martin Heidegger.” *The Cambridge Companion to Simone de Beauvoir*, edited by Claudia Card, Cambridge UP, 2003, pp. 45-65.

---.“Simone de Beauvoir’s Existential Phenomenology and Philosophy of History in *Le Deuxième Sexe*.” *The Existential Phenomenology of Simone de Beauvoir*, edited by Wendy O’Brien, Springer, 2001, pp. 41-52.

Grene, Marjorie. “Authenticity: An Existential Virtue.” *Ethics*, vol. 62, no. 4, 1952, pp. 266-274. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/2378633.

---. *Dreadful Freedom: A Critique of Existentialism*. The University of Chicago Press, 1948.

Groenhout, Ruth. “Beauvoir and the Biological Body.” *A Companion to Simone de Beauvoir*, edited by Laura Hengehold and Nancy Bauer, Wiley Blackwell, 2017, pp. 73-86.

Guignon, Charles. “Authenticity, Moral Values and Psychotherapy.” *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, edited by Charles Guignon, Cambridge UP, 1993, pp. 215-239.

---. “Becoming a Self: The Role of Authenticity in *Being and Time*.” *The Existentialists*: *Critical Essays on Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Sartre*, edited by Charles Guignon, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003, pp. 119-132.

---. Introduction. *The Existentialists*: *Critical Essays on Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Sartre*, edited by Charles Guignon, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003, pp. 1-15.

---. *On Being Authentic.* Routledge, 2004.

Haugeland, John. “Reading Brandom Reading Heidegger.” *Dasein Disclosed*: *John Haugeland's Heidegger*, edited by Joseph Rouse, Harvard UP, 2013, pp. 157-166.

Hayim, Gila J. *Existentialism and Sociology: Contribution of Jean-Paul Sartre*. Routledge, 2017.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by Michael Inwood, Oxford UP, 2018.

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time.* Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, Blackwell Publishers, 1962.

---. "Letter on Humanism." Translated by Frank A. Capuzzi and J. Glenn Gray, *Basic Writings by Martin Heidegger*, edited by David Farrell Krell, HarperCollins, 1993, pp. 213-265.

---. *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology.* Indiana UP, 1988.

Heter, T. Storm. *Sartre's Ethics of Engagement.* A&C Black. 2009.

Holland, Allison. *Excess and Transgression in Simone de Beauvoir's Fiction: The Discourse of Madness.* Routledge, 2009.

---."Identity in Crisis: The Gothic Textual Space in Beauvoir's *L'Invitée*." *The Modern Language Review*, vol. 98, no. 2, 2003, p. 327-334. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable3737814.

Holland, Nancy J. "'The Universe Is Made of Stories, Not of Atoms': Heidegger and the Feminine They-Self." *Feminist Interpretations of Martin Heidegger*, edited by Nancy J. Holland and Patricia Huntington, The Pennsylvania State UP, 2001, pp. 128-145.

Iser, Wolfgang. "The Art of Failure: The Stifled Laughter in Beckett's Theatre." *Theories of Reading, Looking and Listening*, edited by Harry R. Garvin. Lewisburg, Bucknell UP, 1981, pp. 139–81.

Jensen, Kai. *Whole Men: The Masculine Tradition in New Zealand Literature*. Auckland UP, 1996.

Joannou, Maroula. "The *Grandes Dames*: Writers of Longevity." *The History of British Women's Writing, 1970-Present*, edited by Marry Eagleton and Emma Parker, vol. 10, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, pp. 99-113.

Jones, Lawrence. "Doing Things with Realism: The Novels of 1989." *Journal of New Zealand Literature*, no. 9, 1991, pp. 102-125. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/20112198.

---. "New Zealand Novel." *Encyclopedia of the Novel*, edited by Paul Schellinger, vol. 2, Routledge, 2014, pp. 929-933.

---. "Novel (New Zealand)." *Encyclopedia of Post-Colonial Literatures in English*, 2nd ed., edited by Eugene Benson and L.W. Conolly, Routledge, 2004, pp. 1136-1140.

---. "The Novel." *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English*, edited by Terry Sturm, Oxford UP, 1991, pp. 105-199.

Joseph, Felicity, et al. Introduction. *The Bloomsbury Companion to Existentialism*, edited by Felicity Joseph et al., Bloomsbury, 2011, pp. 1-14.

Kauffmann, Walter. "Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre." *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, edited by Walter Kauffmann, Meridian Books, 1956, pp. 11-51.

Keltner, Stacy. "Beauvoir's Idea of Ambiguity." *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Critical Essays,* edited by Margaret A. Simons, Indiana UP, 2006, pp. 201-213.

Khawaja, Noreen. *The Religion of Existence: Asceticism in Philosophy from Kierkegaard to Sartre*, University of Chicago Press, 2016.

Kruks, Sonia. *Simone de Beauvoir and the Politics of Ambiguity*. Oxford UP, 2012.

---. *Situation and Human Existence: Freedom, Subjectivity, and Society*. Routledge, 1990.

Kuhn, Helmut. *Encounter with Nothingness: An Essay on Existentialism*. Routledge, 2019. *Google Books*, https://books.google.pl/books?id=0M6SDwAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&vq=philosophy+of+crisis&hl=pl#v=onepage&q=philosophy%20of%20crisis&f=false, Accessed 11 May 2021.

Langer, Monika. "Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty on Ambiguity." *The Cambridge Companion to Simone de Beauvoir*, edited by Claudia Card, Cambridge UP, 2003, pp. 87-106.

Le Doeuff, Michèle. *Hipparchia's Choice: An Essay Concerning Women, Philosophy, Etc.* Columbia UP, 2007.

Leeson, Miles. *Iris Murdoch: Philosophical Novelist.* A&C Black, 2011.

Leland, Dorothy. "Conflictual Culture and Authenticity: Deepening Heidegger's Account of the Social." *Feminist Interpretations of Martin Heidegger,* edited by Nancy J. Holland and Patricia Huntington, The Pennsylvania State UP, 2001, pp. 109-127.

Le Marquand, Jane Nicole. *'I'm not a woman writer, but . . . ': Gender Matters in New Zealand Women's Short Fiction 1975-1995.* 2006. Massey University. PhD dissertation.

Lundgren-Gothlin, Eva (*see also* Gothlin, Eva). "Gender and Ethics in the Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir." *Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, vol. 3, no. 1, 1995, pp. 3-13. *Taylor&Francis,* doi: 10.1080/08038740.1995.9959669.

---. *Sex and Existence: Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex.* Athlone, 1996.

Macann, Christopher. *Four Phenomenological Philosophers: Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty*. Routledge, 2005.

Macquarrie, John. *Existentialism.* Penguin Books, 1973.

Magrini, James. "'Anxiety' in Heidegger's *Being and Time*: The Harbinger of Authenticity." *Philosophy Scholarship,* vol. 15, 2006, pp. 77-86.

Mahon, Joseph. *Existentialism, Feminism and Simone de Beauvoir.* Palgrave Macmillan, 1997.

Marino, Gordon. Introduction. *Basic Writings of Existentialism*, edited by Gordon Marino, Random House Publishing Group, 2007, pp. ix-xvi.

Martin, Graham. “Iris Murdoch and the Symbolist Novel.” *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 5, no. 3, 1965, pp. 296-300. *PhilPapers*, doi: 10.1093/bjaesthetics/5.3.296.

“Marilyn Duckworth.” *Academy of New Zealand Literature*, 9 Apr. 2020, www.anzliterature.com/member/marilyn-duckworth.

McBride, William. Introduction. *Existentialist Background: Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, Jaspers, Heidegger*, edited by William L. McBride, Garland Publishing, 1997, pp. xi-xviii.

McCormick, E.H. *New Zealand Literature: A Survey*. Oxford UP, 1959.

McEldowney, Dennis. “Sargeson, Frank (1903-82).” *Encyclopedia of Post-Colonial Literatures in English*, 2nd ed., edited by Eugene Benson and L.W. Conolly, Routledge, 2004, pp. 1396-1397.

Mercer, Erin Siobhan. “Sylvia Ashton-Warner’s ‘Strange Cadences’: Rereading *Spinster* and *Incense to Idols*.” *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, vol. 51, no. 3, 2016, pp. 446-464, *SAGE*, doi: 10.1177/0021989415573034.

Michelman, Stephen. *The A to Z of Existentialism.* Rowman & Littlefield, 2010.

Moi, Toril. *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman*. Oxford UP, 2008.

Mulhall, Stephen. *Heidegger and Being and Time*, 2nd ed., Routledge, 2005.

Murdoch, Iris. “The Existentialist Political Myth.” *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, edited by Peter J. Conradi, Allen Lane, 1998, pp. 130-145

Murphy, Ann V. “Ambiguity and Precarious Life: Tracing Beauvoir’s Legacy in the Work of Judith Butler.” *Beauvoir and Western Thought from Plato to Butler*, edited by Shannon M. Mussett and William S. Wilkerson, State University of New York Press, 2012, pp. 211-226.

---. “Between Generosity and Violence: Toward a Revolutionary Politics in the Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir.” *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Critical Essays*, edited by Margaret A. Simons, Indiana UP, 2006, pp. 262-275.

Murray, Heather. “Duckworth, Marilyn.” *Contemporary Novelists*, 7th ed., edited by Neil Schlager and Josh Lauer, St. James Press, 2001, pp. 270-272.

---.“Woman among the Puritans.” *New Zealand Review of Books Pukapuka Aotearoa*, vol. 4, no. 4, 1994, https://nzbooks.org.nz/1994/literature/women-among-the-puritans-heather-murray. Accessed 11 May 2021.

Mussett, Shannon M. “Conditions of Servitude: Woman’s Peculiar Role in the Master-Slave Dialectic in Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*.” *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Critical Essays*, edited by Margaret A. Simons, Indiana UP, 2006, pp. 276-293.

Mussett, Shannon M., and William S. Wilkerson. Introduction. *Beauvoir and Western Thought from Plato to Butler*, edited by Shannon M. Mussett and William S. Wilkerson, State University of New York Press, 2012, pp. 1-13.

Nagel, Mechthild. "Thrownness, Playing-in-the-World, and the Question of Authenticity." *Feminist Interpretations of Martin Heidegger*, edited by Nancy J. Holland and Patricia Huntington, The Pennsylvania State UP, 2001, pp. 289-306.

New, W.H. "Frame, Janet (Paterson)." *Contemporary Novelists*, 7th ed., edited by Neil Schlager and Josh Lauer, St. James Press, 2001, pp. 332-334.

O'Brien, Gregory. *Moments of Invention: Portraits of 21 New Zealand Writers*. Heinemann Reed, 1988.

O'Brien, Mahon. "Leaping Ahead of Heidegger: Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity in *Being and Time." International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, vol. 22, no. 4, 2014, pp. 534-55, *Taylor&Francis*, doi: 10.1080/09672559.2014.948719.

O'Leary, Michael John. *Social and Literary Constraints on Women Writers in New Zealand 1945-1970*. 2011. Victoria University of Wellington, PhD dissertation.

Olafson, Frederick A. *Heidegger and the Ground of Ethics: A Study of Mitsein.* Cambridge UP, 1998.

Onof, Chrisitian. "Existentialism, Metaphysics and Ontology." *The Bloomsbury Companion to Existentialism*, edited by Felicity Joseph, Jack Reynolds and Ashley Woodward, Bloomsbury, 2011, pp. 39-61.

O'Reilly, Andrea. Introduction. *Feminist Mothering*, edited by Andrea O'Reilly, State University of New York Press, 2008, pp. 1-22.

Orzechowska, Anna. "Existential Laughter in the Fiction of Marilyn Duckworth." *Polish Journal of English Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2019, pp. 18-34.

---. "'I'll risk you, if you'll risk me': The Ambiguity of Human Existence and Relationships in Marilyn Duckworth's *Married Alive*." *Anglica. An International Journal of English Studies*, vol. 27, no. 1, 2018, pp. 135-147.

---. "The Double Bind of Patriarchy: (Im)possibility of Escape, Motherhood and Female Identity in Marilyn Duckworth's *Rest for the Wicked*." *Explorations: A Journal of Language and Literature*, vol. 5, 2017, pp. 61-72.

Pettersen, Tove. "Love—According to Simone de Beauvoir." *A Companion to Simone de Beauvoir*, edited by Laura Hengehold and Nancy Bauer, Wiley Blackwell, 2017, pp. 160-173.

Pittaway, Gail. "Inscapes and Escapes Novels by New Zealand, 1986-1987." *Journal of New Zealand Literature,* vol. 6, 1988, pp. 49-57. *JSTOR,* www.jstor.org/stable/20764052.

Prentice, Chris. "The Resistance to Closure: Sargeson, Hyde and the Beginnings of New Zealand Fiction." *Journal of New Zealand Literature,* no. 16, 1988, pp. 11-21, *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/20112291.

Ratcliffe, Matthew. *Feelings of Being: Phenomenology, Psychiatry and the Sense of Reality*. Oxford UP. 2013.

Reynolds, Jack. *Understanding Existentialism*. Acumen, 2006.

Rich, Adrianne. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution.* W.W. Norton. 1995.

Sandbrook, Patrick. Introduction. *The Godwits Fly*, by Robin Hyde, Auckland UP, 2013, pp. ix-xxxii.

Sandford, Stella. *How to Read Beauvoir*. Grant Books, 2006.

Santoni, Ronald E. *Bad Faith, Good Faith, and Authenticity in Sartre's Early Philosophy*. Temple UP, 1995.

Sarti, Antonella. *Spiritcarvers: Interviews with Eighteen Writers from New Zealand*. Rodopi, 1998.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Anti-Semite and Jew.* Translated by George J. Becker, Schocken Books, 1948.

---. *Being and Nothingness.* Translated by Hazel E. Barnes, Washington Square Press, 2003.

---. *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. Translated by Carol Macomber, Yale UP, 2007.

---. *Notebooks for an Ethics*. Translated by David Pellauer, The University of Chicago Press, 1992.

---. *The Transcendence of the Ego: An Existentialist Theory of Consciousness*. Translated by Forrest Williams and Robert Kirkpatrick, Octagon Books, 1972.

---. *War Diaries: Notebooks from a Phoney War, November 1939-March 1940*. Translated by Quintin Hoare, Verso, 1999.

Schafer, William J. *Mapping the Godzone: A Primer on New Zealand Literature and Culture*. University of Hawaii Press, 1998.

Schrag, Calvin O. *Existence and Freedom: Towards an Ontology of Human Finitude.* Northwestern UP, 1983.

Sembera, Richard. *Rephrasing Heidegger: A Companion to Being and Time.* The University of Ottawa Press, 2007.

Simone, Emma. *Virginia Woolf and Being-in-the-world: A Heideggerian Study.* Edinburgh UP, 2018.

Simons, Margaret A. “Beginnings of Beauvoir’s Existential Phenomenology.” *The Existential Phenomenology of Simone de Beauvoir*, edited by Wendy O’Brien, Springer, 2001, pp. 17-39.

---.“Bergson’s Influence on Beauvoir’s Philosophical Methodology." *The Cambridge Companion to Simone de Beauvoir*, edited by Claudia Card, Cambridge UP, 2003, pp. 107-128.

Singh, Anita. *Existential Dimensions in the Novels of Anita Desai.* Sarup & Sons, 2007.

Smith, Philippa Mein. *A Concise History of New Zealand*. Cambridge UP, 2005.

Solomon-Godeau, Abigail. *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practices.* University of Minnesota Press, 1991.

Solomon, Robert C. Preface. *Existentialism,* 2nd ed., edited by Robert C. Solomon, Oxford UP, 2005, pp. ix-x.

Stachurski, Christina. “Anderson, Barbara (1926-).” *Encyclopedia of Post-Colonial Literatures in English*, 2nd ed., edited by Eugene Benson and L.W. Conolly, Routledge, 2004, p. 39.

---. *Reading Pakeha?: Fiction and Identity in Aotearoa New Zealand*. Rodopi, 2009.

Stanley, Liz. “Rejecting the Legend, Rereading de Beauvoir, Reworking Existentialism: The Case for Ontological Ethics.” *European Journal of Women's Studies*, vol. 3, no. 4, 1996, pp. 423-449. *PhilPapers*, 10.1177/135050689600300406.

Stevens, Joan. *The New Zealand Novel 1860-1965*. Reed Publishing (NZ), 1966.

Stone, Alison. “Beauvoir and the Ambiguities of Motherhood.” *A Companion to Simone de Beauvoir,* edited by Laura Hengehold and Nancy Bauer, Wiley Blackwell, 2017, pp. 122-133.

Stratford, Stephen. “Elizabeth Knox on Marilyn Duckworth.” *Quote Unquote,* www.quoteunquotenz.blogspot.com/2011/12/elizabeth-knox-on-marilyn-duckworth.html. Accessed 11 May 2021.

Tidd, Ursula. *Simone de Beauvoir*. Routledge, 2004.

---. “The Self-Other Relation in Beauvoir’s Ethics and Autobiography.” *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Critical Essays,* edited by Margaret A. Simons, Indiana UP, 2006, pp. 228-240.

Tonner, Philip. *Heidegger, Metaphysics and the Univocity of Being.* A&C Black, 2011.

Ujvari St. Jean, Amy. "'Blind Strivings of the Human Heart': Existential Feminism in *Sister Carrie*." *Simone de Beauvoir Studies*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2000, pp. 135-144. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/45170542.

Veltman, Andrea. "The Concept of Transcendence in Beauvoir and Sartre." *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Critical Essays*, edited by Margaret A. Simons, Indiana UP, 2006, pp. 113-131.

Vogel, Lawrence. *The Fragile "We": Ethical Implications of Heidegger's Being and Time.* Northwestern UP, 1994.

Warnock, Mary. *Existentialist Ethics*. Palgrave Macmillan, 1967.

---. *The Philosophy of Sartre.* Hutchinson University Library, 1965.

Watson, John. "From Mansfield to Svensson: The Female Hero in Recent Short Story Fiction by Women Writers." *Journal of New Zealand Literature*, vol. 7, 1989, pp. 44-64. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/20112165.

Webber, Jonathan. *The Existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre*. Routledge, 2009.

Weiss, Gail. "Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty: Philosophers of Ambiguity." *Beauvoir and Western Thought from Plato to Butler*, edited by Shannon M. Mussett and William S. Wilkerson, State University of New York Press, 2012, pp. 171-189.

Wevers, Lydia. "The Novel, the Short Story, and the Rise of a New Reading Public, 1972–1990." *A History of New Zealand Literature*, edited by Mark Williams, Cambridge UP, 2016, pp. 246-261.

Wilkerson, William. "A Different Kind of Universality: Beauvoir and Kant on Universal Ethics." *Beauvoir and Western Thought from Plato to Butler*, edited by Shannon M. Mussett and William S. Wilkerson, State University of New York Press, 2012, pp. 55-73.

---. "Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty on Freedom and Authenticity." *A Companion to Simone de Beauvoir*, edited by Laura Hengehold and Nancy Bauer, Wiley Blackwell, 2017, pp. 224-235.

Williams, Mark. *Leaving the Highway: Six Contemporary New Zealand Novelists.* Auckland UP, 1990.

---. "Literary Recession: New Zealand Fiction, 1985: Mid 1986." *Journal of New Zealand Literature*, no. 5, 1987, pp. 14-28. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/20112150.

Wilson, Janet. "Contemporary Women's Writing in New Zealand," *Kunapipi*, vol. 16, no. 1, 1994, pp. 603-604.

---."Kidman, Fiona." *Contemporary Novelists*, 7th ed., edited by Neil Schlager and Josh Lauer, St. James Press, 2001, pp. 565-567.

---.“The Art of the Odd.” Review of *Swallowing Diamonds* by Marilyn Duckworth. *New Zealand Review of Books Pukapuka Aotearoa*, vol. 13, no. 3, 2003, https://nzbooks.org.nz/2002/literature/the-art-of-the-odd-janet-wilson. Accessed 11 May 2021.

Withy, Katherine. *Heidegger on Being Uncanny.* Harvard UP, 2015.

Wrathall, Mark A., and Max Murphey. “An Overview of *Being and Time*.” *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger’s Being and Time*, edited by Mark A. Wrathall, Cambridge UP, 2013, pp. 1-53.

Yalom, Irvin D. *Existential Psychotherapy.* BasicBooks, 1980.

Anxiety, Ambiguity and Authenticity: The Vision of Women's Existential Experience in Marilyn Duckworth's Fiction

Summary

The dissertation is driven by a gynocritical desire to lift the fiction of Marilyn Duckworth, a notable twentieth-century New Zealand writer, out of its unduly neglected position as an object of literary study. Most of Duckworth's heroines usually feel out of place in the external world, grapple with identity issues or become ensnared in destructive interpersonal liaisons. This dissertation enquires about the fundamental source and nature of their predicament. The theoretical viewpoint adopted for this enterprise is derived from the thought of Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Simone de Beauvoir, focusing on three concepts that appear to give the most apposite interpretation of the heroines' existential experience: anxiety, ambiguity, and authenticity. It is argued that the sense of disorientation in life accompanying the women in Duckworth's fiction can be accounted for in terms of anxiety, arising when they grasp themselves as ambiguous human beings—both self-defining subjects and objects limited to a certain extent by an array of internal and external factors. They find themselves at a loss to acknowledge the truth of their existence so as to be able to navigate through the restrictions that it imposes on them and make utmost use of the opportunities that it opens up. Their overriding problem is the inability to live authentically by exercising their existential freedom on an ongoing basis through self-chosen projects, instead of adhering to pre-given social codes of conduct, as well as by respecting the freedom of other people.

The dissertation consists of five chapters, the first two providing a philosophical and an autobiographical background for the textual analysis of Duckworth's fiction. Chapter One begins with an overview of existentialism as a philosophical phenomenon and then proceeds to describe the general idea of the human being in the thought of Heidegger, Sartre, and Beauvoir to facilitate the detailed discussion of the concepts of anxiety, ambiguity, and authenticity as understood by these three philosophers. Chapter Two discusses Duckworth's memoir with a view to illustrating her existential mindset and demonstrating how the dilemmas that form the thematic texture of her fiction have been also part of her private experience.

Chapters Three to Five are concerned strictly with selected works of fiction by Duckworth. Chapter Three concentrates on the crisis situations in which the writer tends to place her heroines, arguing that they shatter their self-comforting illusions about surrounding reality and their own existential condition. The import of their disquietude is explicated with reference to the Heideggerian concept of anxiety as occasioned by a dawning insight into the true structure of existence as well as Sartre's and Beauvoir's ideas about anxiety of freedom and choice. Next,

it is framed in the notion of human ambiguity as expounded by Beauvoir. At the same time, attention is paid to how Duckworth mixes realist and non-realist conventions to lay emphasis on the heroines' encounters with the uncanny underside of being.

Chapter Four uses the concept of authenticity to analyse how and why the heroines usually fail to negotiate the tensions inherent in their existential condition. It shows that most of them relinquish the enterprise of continual self-creation both under external pressures and out of a desire to avoid the anxiety of existential responsibility by clinging to the safe shelter of social roles or entertaining the illusion of having a fixed identity. It is also noted that Duckworth tends to place weight on the process of balancing between conflicting impulses, where even good faith intentions to be a possessor of one's own life may be pursued in an existentially inauthentic fashion.

Chapter Five examines the question of authenticity in the context of the heroines' engagements with other people, predominantly of a romantic nature but not solely. It is observed that the writer represents them as a site of conflict, in which the dynamics of domination and subordination are played out. While female characters are usually those who lose or abdicate their autonomy, they are by no means idealised as innately free of the appetite for power over men. Separate attention is drawn also to the mother-child relationship, depicted as conflictual in the same measure as all other human ties. It is emphasised that the writer does not yet posit mutual hostility as unsurmountable. What is celebrated in some of her novels as the key to establishing a rewarding relationship is the ability to accept one's own existential vulnerability and embrace the freedom of the other, an attitude consonant with the Beauvoirian ideal of reciprocal recognition.

The line of the argument developed throughout this dissertation demonstrates that Duckworth's fiction provides a compelling and perceptive exploration of the existential experience of women, one that is attentive to its nuances. The writer portrays her heroines as imperfect human beings who often err in their everyday struggles with existence, showing the awareness that women's roles, motives and desires are rarely clear-cut and fixed. Her writing balances between the mundane and the unexpected, bringing them into collision, so that the conventional themes of women's fiction are dissected in the light of their hidden existential dimension.

Keywords: Marilyn Duckworth, New Zealand, existentialism, Heidegger, Sartre, Beauvoir, anxiety, ambiguity, authenticity, women's experience, identity, reciprocal recognition

Niepokój, ambiwalencja i autentyczność: egzystencjalna wizja doświadczenia kobiet w twórczości Marilyn Duckworth

Streszczenie

U podstaw niniejszej podstawy leży wpisujące się w nurt gynokrytyki pragnienie zwrócenia uwagi na prozę Marilyn Duckworth, znaczącej dwudziestowiecznej pisarki nowozelandzkiej, która do tej pory nie była przedmiotem szerszych badań literackich. Bohaterki w jej utworach najczęściej czują się wyobcowane, poszukują własnej tożsamości albo wikłają się w destrukcyjne związki. Niniejsza rozprawa zadaje pytanie o fundamentalne źródło i charakter ich rozterek. Jej teoretyczne ramy opierają się na filozofii Martina Heideggera, Jeana-Paula Sartre'a i Simone de Beauvoir, koncentrując się na trzech pojęciach, które wydają się najtrafniej interpretować egzystencjalne doświadczenie bohaterek: niepokoju, ambiwalencji i autentyczności. Stawiana jest teza, że towarzyszące im poczucie dezorientacji można opisać w kategoriach niepokoju pojawiającego się, gdy zaczynają postrzegać siebie jako ambiwalentne istoty ludzkie—zarówno stanowiące o sobie podmioty, jak i przedmioty ograniczone do pewnego stopnia przez czynniki wewnętrzne i zewnętrzne. Bohaterki mają trudności z przyjęciem prawdy o charakterze swojej egzystencji, która pozwoliłaby im znaleźć równowagę pomiędzy związanymi z nią ograniczeniami a możliwościami. Ich głównym problemem jest niezdolność osiągnięcia autentyczności polegającej na korzystaniu z wolności poprzez realizację wybranych przez siebie celów zamiast dopasowywania się do narzuconych społecznie norm postępowania, a także na respektowaniu wolności innych ludzi.

Rozprawa składa się z pięciu rozdziałów, z których dwa pierwsze stanowią filozoficzne i autobiograficzne tło dla analizy prozy Duckworth. Rozdział pierwszy przechodzi od przedstawienia w zarysie egzystencjalizmu jako zjawiska filozoficznego do zreferowania ogólnej wizji istoty ludzkiej w myśli Heideggera, Sartre'a i Beauvoir, aby następnie szczegółowo omówić pojęcia niepokoju, ambiwalencji i autentyczności w ich rozumieniu. Rozdział drugi omawia memuar Duckworth, chcąc zilustrować jej egzystencjalną mentalność i pokazać, jak dylematy przedstawiane w jej prozie stanowią część jej osobistego doświadczenia.

Rozdziały od trzeciego do piątego poświęcone są wybranym utworom prozatorskim Duckworth. Rozdział trzeci skupia się na kryzysach doświadczanych przez bohaterki, dowodząc, że burzą one ich iluzje na temat otaczającej rzeczywistości oraz własnej kondycji egzystencjalnej. Ich znaczenie zostaje wyjaśnione w odniesieniu do Heideggerowskiej koncepcji niepokoju wywołanego konfrontacją z prawdziwą naturą egzystencji, jak również teorii Sartre’a i Beauvoir na temat niepokoju związanego ze świadomością wolności i wyboru,

a następnie ujęte w ramy pojęcia ambiwalencji w rozumieniu Beauvoir. Jednocześnie ukazane jest, jak Duckworth miesza realistyczne i nierealistyczne konwencje, aby uwypuklić spotkanie bohaterek z niesamowitym wymiarem egzystencji.

Rozdział czwarty analizuje z perspektywy pojęcia autentyczności, jak i dlaczego bohaterkom Duckworth zazwyczaj nie udaje się pogodzić napięć wpisanych w ich egzystencję Pokazuje, że większość z nich rezygnuje z ciągłej autokreacji zarówno pod wpływem zewnętrznych nacisków, jak i z chęci uniknięcia niepokoju związanego z odpowiedzialnością za własną egzystencję. Zamiast tego trzymają się ściśle określonych ról społecznych lub ulegają iluzji posiadania niezmiennej tożsamości. Rozdział zwraca również uwagę na to, że Duckworth kładzie nacisk na proces balansowania pomiędzy sprzecznymi pragnieniami, pokazując, że nawet dobre intencje, by sprawować kontrolę nad własnym życiem, mogą być realizowane w nieautentyczny sposób z punktu widzenia egzystencjalizmu.

Rozdział piąty omawia kwestię autentyczności w kontekście związków bohaterek z innymi ludźmi, przeważnie o charakterze romantycznym, choć nie tylko. Pisarka przedstawia je jako arenę konfliktu, charakteryzującą się stosunkami dominacji i podporządkowania. Chociaż postaci kobiece zazwyczaj tracą w nich swoją autonomię i podmiotowość lub same z niej rezygnują, nie są idealizowane jako zawsze pozbawione chęci władzy nad mężczyznami. Osobne miejsce poświęcone jest relacji matka-dziecko, którą Duckworth obrazuje jako opartą na konflikcie w takim samym stopniu jak wszystkie inne więzi międzyludzkie. Stawiana jest jednak teza, że pisarka nie uważa, aby przezwyciężenie wzajemnej wrogości było niemożliwe. W niektórych powieściach ukazuje, że kluczem do satysfakcjonującej relacji jest umiejętność zaakceptowania wolności drugiej osoby i własnej egzystencjalnej podatności na zranienie. Jest to myśl zgodna z ideałem wzajemnego uznania według Beauvoir.

Rozprawa dowodzi, że proza Duckworth stanowi fascynującą i przenikliwą wizję egzystencjalnego doświadczenia kobiet, wrażliwą na jego niuanse. Pisarka przedstawia swoje bohaterki jako niedoskonałe istoty ludzkie, które często błądzą w codziennych zmaganiach z egzystencją, mając przy tym świadomość, że kobiece role, motywy i pragnienia rzadko są jednoznaczne i stałe. Jej pisarstwo konfrontuje ze sobą to, co przyziemne oraz to, co nieoczekiwane, dzięki czemu konwencjonalne tematy prozy kobiecej zostają ukazane w świetle ich ukrytego, egzystencjalnego wymiaru.

Słowa kluczowe: Marilyn Duckworth, Nowa Zelandia, egzystencjalizm, Heidegger, Sartre, Beauvoir, niepokój, ambiwalencja, autentyczność, doświadczenie kobiet, tożsamość, wzajemne uznanie